

Can Critical Theory, and Critical Race Theory, Ground Human Dignity, Justice, and Equality?

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INTRODUCTION

Critical theory (CT), along with one of its “progeny,” critical race theory (CRT), advances the belief that we should be free to become our “true selves.” These are our “identities,” or self-conceptualizations, and we form these by exercising our autonomy in order to be free from oppressive ideologies. Both CT and CRT draw upon some key assumptions to support this view, namely, the ethical principle that the oppressed should be liberated from their oppression; the ontological principles of materialism, nominalism, and a rejection of essences; and the epistemic principle that all our knowledge comes from our particular, historical standpoints (historicism, or standpoint epistemology).

CT and CRT seem to appeal to several moral absolutes, such as the treatment of all humans with dignity, respect, equality, and justice, as well as

the protection of minority groups from oppression and domination by the majority group. Arguably, these positions presuppose that humans are intrinsically valuable. Yet, I will argue that CT and CRT have no basis for that presupposition, nor for its other moral stances, due to their rejection of essences, including that humans are made in God's image. Indeed, our "common humanity," which must be merely material ontologically, and our self-conceptualizations (or, senses of our identities) are inadequate bases for rights, leaving our moral value as just a result of hegemonic power, the very position that CT and CRT reject.

To help show this, first I will provide an overview of CT and then CRT, along with a general survey of their core ethical positions. Next, I will begin my assessment with a survey of some of these theories' strengths. Then I will critically examine these theories' abilities to preserve their key moral positions. Last, I will draw some conclusions particularly for Christians.

AN OVERVIEW OF CT

CT arose in light of influences of at least two of whom Paul Ricoeur called the "masters of suspicion."¹ First, Friedrich Nietzsche vigorously attacked Immanuel Kant's view that morals are universal, categorical imperatives. Instead, according to Nietzsche, they really are just expressions of power, the will to dominate others.² Second, Karl Marx cast suspicion upon structures of society that ostensibly were to protect the interests of everyone, when in actuality they served to protect the interests of the majority group and oppress those of minorities. Moreover, the explanation of historical events is *not* due to ideas, but class struggle.³

Critical theorists followed in the paths of Nietzsche and Marx. For instance, Max Horkheimer believed that a critical theory's goal is "emancipation from slavery," oppression, and domination in order to liberate humans and "create a world which satisfies the[ir] needs and powers."⁴ CT tends to analyze society in terms of *groups* of people who are in opposition, the oppressed and their oppressors, or the minorities and the majority.⁵ Systemically, social structures reinforce the ideology of the dominant group by the means of power they have embedded within them. By exposing such systemic oppression, CT seeks to help the oppressed overcome their alienation from the goods and ideals of society.

Moreover, as a materialist, Theodor Adorno believed that conceiving of reality as objectively real with essential natures leads us “to establish a single order, a single mode of representing and relating to reality.”⁶ This would be because essences, if real, would define something as what *kind* of thing it is.⁷ On such a view, Adorno thought people would tend to fit into the definitions that are provided by the majority’s ideology, when in reality that view was nothing but a construct that preserved the dominant group’s hegemony. That view would inhibit peoples’ freedom to define for themselves their “true” selves by exercising their own autonomy.⁸

Other critical theorists, such as Herbert Marcuse, also endorsed a materialist ontology. For Marcuse, essences do not define reality, and reality is not determined by physical laws. Instead, it is socially conditioned. For him, our “essence” is not some static, transcendent, immaterial reality, but our human potential as free, rational beings to achieve the ideals present in culture. Achieving those ideas involves overcoming oppressive existence:

Materialist theory thus transcends the given state of fact and moves toward a different potentiality, proceeding from immediate appearance to the essence that appears in it. But here appearance and essence become members of a real antithesis arising from the particular historical structure of the social process of life.⁹

Additionally, Horkheimer followed the same ontological path, holding that humans are nothing but material beings embedded holistically in nature.¹⁰

Without an essential nature to define and ground one’s *personal* identity (i.e., what makes someone the same person through time and change), our identity is something that is malleable, subject, it seems, to our own self-definitions or conceptualizations. This freedom to be unrestricted by essences that metaphysically define us, as well as the oppressive ideology’s categories to which people can appeal, lead us to think that we can define our “true selves.”

A further implication of the lack of essences is that there are no universal qualities, including moral principles and virtues. For example, if there was an essence to justice, then there would be an identical quality present in each instance thereof, making them all instances of a universal. However, without any essences, each instance of “justice” would be particular, or nominal. That is, it would be what it is in name only, which we would define.

There is another reason why critical theorists reject a role for essences in their theorizing and practical recommendations. If there are essential natures, they would exist objectively and transcend our own conceptualizations about them. Yet, on CT, all our knowledge is historicized; put differently, critical theorists embrace a kind of standpoint epistemology. On such a view, all our knowledge is gained from our particular, historical standpoints, which also is a strongly nominalist view. We are so shaped by historical location, culture, family upbringing, etc., that we cannot achieve a direct gaze into the real world in itself. Instead, all our access is mediated by the interpretive grid from our given standpoint. As Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo claim, knowledge is not “outside of human interests, perspectives, and values”; instead, it “reflects the social hierarchies of a given society.”¹¹ There is no uninterpreted access to reality; to even have an experience requires interpretation.

AN OVERVIEW OF CRT

Now, CRT is one of CT’s more specifically focused offshoots. CRT clearly places its focus upon racial issues and how the dynamics identified by CT can be at work therein. CRT developed from the combination of several key influences. For example, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic claim that CRT draws upon the idea of *legal indeterminacy* from critical legal studies. Ken Kress describes this view as follows:

Law is indeterminate to the extent that legal questions lack single right answers. In adjudication, law is indeterminate to the extent that authoritative [*sic*] legal materials and methods permit multiple outcomes to lawsuits. If arguments for radical indeterminacy are valid, they may raise serious doubts about the possibility of legitimate, nonarbitrary legal systems and adjudicative procedures.¹²

This view easily fits with views of law as power, which would result in arbitrary exercises of power by the majority to retain its hegemonic power. Before critical legal studies scholars developed this concept, Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes already had regarded law as power: “[W]ise or not, the proximate test of a good government is that the dominant power has its way.”¹³ Michel Foucault helped elaborate on power and its transmission, internalization, and normalization through social institutions which would

socialize people “into compliance with norms that serve controlling group interests.”¹⁴

Furthermore, advocates of CRT, or Crits, found support from Jacques Derrida’s deconstructionism for claiming that there is no intrinsic, definitive meaning in a text (since there are essences, and everything is particular), so everything is interpretation. Finally, from radical feminism, Crits could show how power relates to the construction of social roles, as well as the largely taken-for-granted social patterns and habits that contribute to oppression.

CRT also embraces several other core tenets which I simply will list.¹⁵ First, racism is common, and it is not limited to individuals. Indeed, individuals may not be racist, yet they still can participate, even unknowingly, in systemic racism, upon which CRT focuses. Second is racial disparity; there are differences in outcomes (such as in health and economic considerations) based on race. Third, interest convergence maintains that only if the material interests of the majority group align with those of minoritized groups will the majority group cooperate with minorities. Fourth, races are social constructions which are not fixed, for they are not rooted in biology. Instead, we all share in a common humanity. Roles and expectations are socially constructed. Fifth, the phenomenon of intersectionality holds that we all have many sources for our identities (our self-conceptualizations), and these can overlap in many ways to oppress people (e.g., a black, poor lesbian). Relatedly, Crits embrace antiessentialism, which rejects any essences in favor of the view that no one “has a single, easily stated, unitary identity.”¹⁶ Sixth, hegemony is the view that domination takes place by the ruling class, and the subordinate groups accept that state of affairs unconsciously.¹⁷

Now let us shift to survey the core moral views of CT and CRT.

CORE ETHICAL STANCES OF CT AND CRT

Both critical theorists and Crits argue in such ways that seem to hold certain moral principles and virtues as absolutes, in the sense of their applicability. Consider their chief claim that the oppressed should be liberated from their domination by their oppressors. Their justification for this claim is not in the results of a utilitarian calculus, which conceivably could justify oppression. Nor do they seem to appeal to natural law or ethical egoism per se. Instead, they evidently treat this claim as an obligatory, deontological principle. The

same kind of appeal seems to ground their claims that humans should be treated with justice, dignity, respect, and equality.

Yet, they do not argue that these are simply *their* moral constructs drawn from their particular standpoints. Rather, they advocate for these morals being applicable to all people, even in all times. But, why should these morals apply to all humans?

Two Critics, Delgado and Stefancic, help address this question. While there are genetically-based differences groups of people share, such as hair texture and skin color, these are superficial, biological differences at best. Instead, there are higher-order traits common across races, such as “personality, intelligence, and moral behavior.”¹⁸ Ibram Kendi, an antiracist whose views nonetheless seem to draw deeply from CRT, agrees when he appeals to a “common humanity” that all humans share.¹⁹

While these traits are rooted in biology, and thus fit within materialism, nonetheless they seem to appeal to other kinds of categories, including ethics. Now, one way to accommodate ethics to an evolutionary, naturalistic ontology is given by Michael Ruse, who argues that morals are nothing but a biological adaptation.²⁰ Yet, if that were so, then several core morals for critical theorists, as well as Critics, could have turned (or will turn) out differently. For instance, if we had evolved differently, treating one another with respect to construct our “true selves” could not only hinder survival of the species, but also be morally wrong.

Another way to accommodate ethics to a materialist ontology seems to be by how we talk, or conceive of, the material under an ethical *aspect*. This kind of move is in keeping with some naturalists’ moves, such as James Rachels’s concept of a “biographical life,” and not merely biological life, which gives us value. On his idea, it is the story we tell ourselves of what makes us valuable that does indeed give us value.²¹ Or, consider Christine Korsgaard’s neo-Kantian imposition of what we conceive of as valuable onto matter.²² Though matter itself is not moral, nonetheless, by employing concepts, we can construct from our particular standpoints our own self-conceptualizations and our value.

In summary, CT and CRT both draw upon materialism, antiessentialism, and nominalism ontologically, and historicism epistemologically. In ethics, they apparently embrace several key principles and virtues as obligatory and absolute. Now, I will shift to assess these ethical assumptions, especially the

claims that humans are intrinsically valuable, and that our value is based in our common humanity and our respective senses of our identities.

ASSESSMENT OF CT'S AND CRT'S MORAL CLAIMS

Some Key Strengths

Critical theorists and Crits tap into something humans deeply presuppose, that human persons are intrinsically valuable and should be treated with dignity. This fits with the biblical teaching that we are made in God's image, or likeness (Gen 1:26), and thus are intrinsically valuable. We can see this in that the character qualities God has are essential to his being. In making us like him, his communicable attributes, such as his love, patience, goodness, gentleness, and justice are also normative for us.²³ That is, our essential nature is being image bearers. This is why, for instance, the Lord prohibits the taking of innocent human life (Gen 9:6), for we simply should not be treated merely as a means to someone else's end.

Critical theorists and Crits also recognize the importance of several core moral principles and virtues. For instance, they rightly argue that humans must be treated with justice and dignity, for that not only happens to recognize humans' intrinsic value as image bearers, it also fulfills God's commands (e.g., Micah 6:8; James 1:27). Furthermore, they are right to affirm our fundamental equality. This fits with biblical teaching in that all humans share in a *moral* equality, due to our all being image bearers.

Additionally, I think a core strength of CRT lies in its focus it places on systems and institutions as a root of *possible* perpetuations of racism. It is easy for white Americans, at least, to think that they as individuals are not racist. In this time, being called a racist is one of the worst labels that could be given to someone. Nonetheless, Crits and others have done much research of case studies to show that there still is racism at work in society, and it can be systemic in nature. As one example, the U. S. Federal Housing Administration Loan Program's creation in 1937 was intended to assist working-class people in buying a home at lower interest rates. However, in actual practice, black applicants who wanted to purchase a home in largely white neighborhoods were discriminated against, which thereby helped create "white flight" of people and resources from declining inner cities.²⁴

So, drawing our attention to systems and how racism could be at work

therein is helpful. CRT thus helps correct a problem with a colorblind model for addressing racism. That model holds that we not notice or take race into account, and that has (or will) bring an end to racism.²⁵ Yet, by stressing equal treatment for all, the colorblind model brings to our attention only blatant discrimination. However, as Critics argue, that is far from the only kind of racism at work in society. Instead, CRT can help us pay attention to *particular* peoples' cases of suffering. By focusing on abstract principles like treating people as equals, we might not notice the plights of particular kinds of people, or individuals.

Still, I think this does not mean that we should simply assume that racism is at work in institutions. Rather, CRT can be a useful analytical tool when used in ways to help us discover if racism is at work in a given context. Then, if we find that it is, we can work to correct those systems and their wrongs inflicted on people.

Now I will turn to explore some weaknesses of CT and CRT in regards to morals.

A Critical Evaluation

The Presupposition of Intrinsic Value

Generally speaking, justice is grounded in God's very character. Biblically, it involves "rendering impartially and proportionally to everyone his [or her] due in accord with the righteous standard of God's moral law."²⁶ However, *not* doing that undercuts that person's dignity, for that person should be treated justly. But, that would not be so if their dignity was not intrinsic. Additionally, critical theorists' belief that humans should be free to become their true selves presupposes their intrinsic worth.

For another, Stuart Hackett observes that "in aiming at significant goals, a person implicitly accepts his own intrinsic worth and that of other persons as the *rational* basis of the worth of his choice" of goals to pursue.²⁷ That is, we make value judgments about the worth of pursuing goals such as having a good education, adequate financial resources, good housing, and so on. However, these goals are means to an end, which seems to be the fulfillment of the intrinsic worth of persons.²⁸ If so, humans' worth cannot be given nor abrogated by others, including the State.

So, critical theorists rightly presuppose humans' intrinsic value. However, let us see if their ontology can provide an adequate grounding for this moral

belief. First, if humans are nothing but material beings, then it seems that CT and CRT would face the naturalistic fallacy. That is, they seem unable to derive any moral *oughtness* from what descriptively *is* the case. Why? It seems that, generally, what is material can be exhausted descriptively. So, can their use of humans' self-conceptualizations from a moral standpoint preserve humans' intrinsic value?

Let us begin by noticing that this move presupposes that humans are *not* intrinsically valuable. The respective stories that they tell themselves are what *makes* them valuable. Therefore, contrary to what Kendi claims, merely being a member of a "common humanity" is not sufficient to be valuable, let alone intrinsically so.²⁹ Moreover, humans who do not have such self-concepts, such as the unborn, infants, elderly people suffering from advanced dementia, and people with other severe mental illnesses would not be valuable. If so, then it seems they could be mistreated, perhaps even be killed.

Furthermore, on CT and CRT, people need to construct their true selves according to the concepts and categories, such as race, class, and gender that critical theorists, as well as Crits, have approved. Nevertheless, suppose a group decides to embrace a concept contrary to those views, such as being white supremacists. Clearly, Crits will not approve of that identity. Or, consider cases of people who identify across identity boundaries, such as white women who identify as black, as in the case of Rachel Dolezal, who has been deeply criticized.³⁰ In such cases, where people identify in ways that run counter to CT or CRT, it seems they may not be regarded as valuable. Still, even if that were not the case, their value would be dependent upon human constructs, which can be adjusted or eliminated.

Second, the naturalist philosopher, Daniel Dennett, believes that "if things had real, intrinsic essences, they could have real, intrinsic meanings."³¹ However, without any essences, there are no "deeper facts" beyond interpretation that define something as *what* kind of thing it is, or what someone really meant when that person said or did something. Further, Dennett approves of an observation Samuel Wheeler makes, namely, that Derrida provides "important, if dangerous, supplementary arguments and considerations" to the claims that Dennett and other followers of W. V. O. Quine have made.³² According to Merold Westphal, Derrida held that "Being must always already be conceptualized."³³ That is, there is no access to things as they really are apart from our interpretations thereof. So, like Derrida, Wheeler claims that

for Dennett and Quinians, too, since “speech and thought are brain-writing, [they are] some kind of tokenings which are as much subject to interpretation as any other [text].”³⁴

Like critical theorists and Crits, Dennett rejects any essences, including intrinsically mental features, in reality. Now, one feature that seems intrinsic to almost all mental states is intentionality, i.e., their ofness or aboutness.³⁵ For instance, my present thought is *about* what I will eat for lunch. I also have a belief *about* what tasks I need to complete today. Or, scientists use experiences to make observations that are *of* gases in an experiment. Except for perhaps some feeling states, such as the state of being in pain, it seems all other mental states have this representational quality of intentionality. (Try having a thought or a belief that is not of or about anything.)

Moreover, this quality of intentionality seems to be intrinsic to these mental states. Consider my thought of what I will eat for lunch; that thought could not have turned out to be about something else (say, the World Series) and still have been the same thought. Instead, that would have been a different thought. The same seems to hold for the belief and experiences I discussed above. But, this phenomenon seems to show that these mental states have an essence, namely, their intentional contents.³⁶

Yet, if there are no essences, then there are no thoughts, beliefs, concepts, or other representations that are intrinsically about anything. Nonetheless, Dennett appeals to our making interpretations of behavior from a tactic he calls the “intentional stance,” in which we observe the behavior of things such as chess-playing computers, people, and frogs as “intentional systems,” and we attribute to them intentionality so as to predict behavior. For instance, suppose *Star Trek’s* Mr. Spock and the starship Enterprise’s computer is playing chess. Though for him there are no real mental states with intentionality, nonetheless Dennett thinks we can predict efficiently their behavior (here, movements of certain chess pieces) by *attributing* to them beliefs that are about their desire to put their opponent’s king in checkmate.

Nevertheless, interpretations also seem to be of or about things. Furthermore, without any essences to them, much less any other mental state, it seems that Dennett is left with *only* “takings,” or interpretations, in which we *take* some input *as* something else.³⁷ Since no interpretation can intrinsically be of or about something, then likewise that interpretation also must be an interpretation of something else, and on to infinity, without any way to get

started with these interpretations.

The same problem seems to beset the moral beliefs that critical theorists and Critics assert. Without any essences, they too cannot be intrinsically of something, which leads to an infinite regress of interpretations. So, it becomes impossible to get started and even begin to have the beliefs that humans are intrinsically valuable, and that they should be treated with justice, equality, and dignity. Equally affected would be the conceptualizations people use to construct their “true selves,” as well as any other claim by critical theorists and Critics, including that the real world is material and there are no essences.

At best, then, on CT and CRT we are left with their ethical claims as being just their interpretations drawn from a particular standpoint, yet which cannot be the case universally for all people. If so, why should others who interpret life from a different standpoint embrace CT’s or CRT’s interpretations? At worst, there is no basis for even getting started and making interpretations.³⁸ Yet, we clearly do engage in interpretations of things, and this should be evidence that there are essences.

Furthermore, intrinsically valid morals are necessarily good (or right) in themselves, simply due to what kind of thing they are. That pushes us to the conclusion that *these core morals must have an essential nature to them*. Yet, if there is no essence to justice, equality, dignity, etc., what they are is a matter of a group’s interpretation. However, a particular group then could define these morals in ways that actually undermine them. As we have seen, a group could define any humans without the ability to form self-conceptualizations as unworthy of moral protection. Further, minority groups could define these morals in ways that differ from those of the majority group. Yet, if so, that undermines the cogency of claims of injustice minorities make against the majority, for why should the majority accept the minorities’ definition of a moral when it conflicts with its own?

Ethical Relativism

Obviously, this issue surfaces problems posed by ethical relativism. Kendi asserts that “a racist idea is any idea that suggests one racial group is inferior or superior to another racial group in any way.”³⁹ Moreover, “When we see cultural difference, we are seeing cultural difference – nothing more, nothing less.”⁴⁰ For him, cultural relativity is the core of cultural antiracism.

Now, in terms of people being intrinsically valuable, I think Kendi is right

that a people group never is inferior to another. I would base this in their all sharing in the image of God. Moreover, there are descriptively different ways that cultural groups live out common, core morals, such as that humans should be treated with respect. But, on CT and CRT, there cannot be any intrinsically valid morals. Instead, morals are based in power, the constructs of a group according to how they interpret life from their particular, historically situated aspect. Thus, it seems that even CT's and CRT's core morals themselves would be the products of a group, and thus, ethically, CT and CRT seem to be examples of ethical conventionalism, a form of ethical relativism, with all of its attendant problems, such as ones I discussed above.

Despite its treatment of certain core morals as absolutes, Crits seem to apply them discriminately. For them, discrimination against minorities is wrong, for it harms them. However, when it comes to the white majority group, Crits, such as Kendi, seem to treat this moral on a consequentialist basis. For instance, consider his claim that "the only remedy to racist discrimination [in social policies] is antiracist discrimination."⁴¹ However, to discriminate against whites in education, employment, or other social arenas harms their dignity. This result runs counter to the evident CT and CRT presumption that all humans are intrinsically valuable. Instead, Kendi evidently thinks it is morally permissible to treat whites in discriminatory ways evidently because the end of becoming an antiracist society justifies "the means as long as those ends are benefiting the minority groups ... [however,] human dignity is not group specific."⁴²

The Triad of Justice, Equality, and Freedom

Finally, consider again some of the core morals, equality, freedom (or, autonomy), and justice, that critical theorists and Crits presuppose are valid. A key factor is to look at their interrelationship. Since CT and CRT are materialist in their ontological views, it seems these morals would need to be defined in ways that fit with materialism. In that case, it seems equality needs to be understood in terms of equity, or equal outcomes. Moreover, it seems justice should be reducible to equality so defined, which is how Crits, at least, seem to treat justice.

Yet, there are many respects in which people are not equal, such as in physical abilities, educational interests, and life choices. Moreover, to define justice simply in terms of equality of outcomes is unjust, for it does not treat

individuals according to each person's due. People would reap, for better or worse, what they did not sow. For example, consider someone who earned an engineering degree yet gets the same job and salary as a person who earned a history degree without any engineering experience.⁴³

Let us also explore the interrelationship of freedom (i.e., autonomy) with equality and justice. Clearly, on CT and CRT, we need to be free to be able to define our "true selves." However, if justice is equality of outcome, then our freedom to define ourselves would have to be curtailed, lest there be vast inequalities. This would be so because our self-definitions require different amounts and kinds of resources. For example, becoming a professor requires obtaining the needed graduate degrees, which costs more than what is needed to become an elementary school teacher.

So, it seems justice needs to perform vital regulatory functions. To help preserve freedom, justice needs to regulate equality. On the other hand, to preserve equality, justice needs to regulate our freedom. So, all three principles need to be held together. Yet, on CT and CRT, since morals would need to be defined materially, justice could be reduced to just equality of material outcomes, which would undermine its regulative and preservative function.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

Critical theorists and Critics rightfully presuppose that humans are intrinsically valuable and deserving of treatment with justice, equality, dignity, and respect. Moreover, their use of CT and CRT can provide a very valuable analytical tool, to help us pay attention to institutional systems, to see if and when oppression is indeed occurring. Nonetheless, I think CT and CRT fail when it comes to making normative moral pronouncements. The theory itself lacks the needed grounding to sustain its many such claims.

What then might be some specific conclusions for Christians? I will suggest a few, though I am not attempting to be exhaustive. First, it would be a mistake to endorse *or* dismiss CT and CRT wholesale. That is, usually when a view is garnering much attention, it is tapping into some important, even if painful, truths. In that case, Christians (and others) need to ask and discern to what extent CT and CRT are making important observations and identifying some key areas that need change. One of those is that racism can (and does) take place in systems, even when individuals do not want to be

racist themselves. So, a key is to use CT and CRT as analytical tools, to help us see if such discrimination is taking place in particular institutions. Doing that will require the hard work of conducting empirical investigations, and not assuming a priori that racism is at work therein.

Second, Christians need to be careful with CT's and CRT's ontological assumptions. Arguably, their ontological assumptions are at odds with Scripture in that there is more to creation than just matter. I realize this is contrary to the arguments of Christian physicalists, such as Nancey Murphy or Joel Green, whose views I have assessed elsewhere.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, even those Christian physicalists' views fit with the antiessentialism and nominalism found in CT and CRT, with all their damaging effects. One of those is that humans simply will not have a grounding for their being intrinsically valuable.

Third, Christians also need to be careful with CT's and CRT's epistemological assumptions. It is true that we are shaped significantly by many factors. Yet, if all our knowledge comes from our particular standpoints, and we cannot ever access reality as it is apart from our conceptualizations, then it seems we are left with an infinite regress of interpretations and no way to even get started. But, this is false, for there are many things we do know, including that humans should be treated with dignity, respect, etc. Furthermore, this belief undermines our ability to know what the biblical authors (human and God) meant in the passages they wrote.

So, fourth, to what extent can Christians embrace CT and CRT? At the least, they can rally behind the findings of actual discrimination in systems, realizing that sin affects not just individuals but also all human institutions. They also can strongly support the calls for these core moral principles, including the intrinsic value of all humans, and the goodness of justice, equality, dignity, and respect that we have been surveying. However, the basis on CT and CRT for these morals is inadequate to sustain them and actually will undermine them. Put differently, while Christians can endorse CT's and CRT's limited usefulness as analytical tools, they should not endorse them as normative theories. Due to God's character and how all humans are made in his image, Christians have a far better basis in the Scriptures and good theology than these theories for upholding these morals *and* addressing injustices.

- 1 Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (trans. Denis Savage; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 32-33.
- 2 Friedrich Nietzsche, "Prejudices of Philosophers," selection from *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *Nineteenth-Century Philosophy* (ed. Patrick Gardiner; New York: The Free Press, 1969), 335.
- 3 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (ed. Joseph Katz; trans. Samuel Moore; New York: Pocket Books, 1964), 57.
- 4 Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (Repr.; New York, NY: Continuum, 1982), 246.
- 5 See, e.g., György Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (trans. J. and N. Mander; London: Merlin Press, 1963), 14.
- 6 Andrew Fagan, "Theodor Adorno," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [accessed July 11, 2019]. Online: <https://www.iep.utm.edu/adorno/>.
- 7 J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 218.
- 8 I think this is a reason why I encountered several fellow graduate students at the University of Southern California's School of Religion who had left the Catholic Church. They did not want the Church's hierarchy to define what is "natural," especially sexually, for them by appealing to natural law.
- 9 Herbert Marcuse, "Concept of Essence," in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 67.
- 10 See his *Critical Theory*, 24, where he endorses materialism and its commitment to unify philosophy and science.
- 11 Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?* in Multicultural Education Series (2nd ed.; ed. James A. Banks; New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 31. Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse embraced much the same mindset, too. For Adorno, the shaping influences of our historical, material conditions are so pervasive that we cannot shed them. See Lambert Zuidervaart, "Theodor Adorno," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Oct. 26, 2015, accessed March 9, 2022]. Online: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/adorno/>.
- 12 Ken Kress, "Legal Indeterminacy," *California Law Review* 77:283 (1989): 283.
- 13 Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., *Collected Legal Papers* (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2007), 258.
- 14 Sensoy and DiAngelo, 75-76.
- 15 See Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (3rd ed.; New York: New York University Press, 2017), 8-10.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 175.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 9. Compare Sensoy and DiAngelo, 121.
- 19 Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 54, 198. I would say that the same applies to DiAngelo: though she may prefer the term "antiracist," nonetheless her views seem to depend deeply on CRT.
- 20 Michael Ruse, "Evolution and Ethics: The Sociobiological Approach," in *Ethical Theory: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (4th ed.; ed. Louis Pojman; Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002), 659.
- 21 See James Rachels, *The End of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). See his discussion of Dax Cowart's case.
- 22 See her *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4-5.
- 23 We can see this also in that the fruit the Spirit produces in us reflects the character of Christ, and these are normative for us (Gal 5:22-23). Moreover, as the perfect God-man, Jesus embodied these qualities, thus demonstrating what all humans should be like.
- 24 George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 91. See also Sensoy and DiAngelo, 151. Redlining by mortgage companies also has discriminated against minorities.
- 25 Sensoy and DiAngelo, 130.
- 26 Compare Calvin Beisner's "Social Justice: How Good Intentions Undermine Justice and Gospel" (Washington, D.C.: Family Research Council, 2013), 11 (bracketed insert mine).
- 27 Stuart Hackett, "The Value Dimension of the Cosmos: A Moral Argument," in *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide* (ed. William Lane Craig; New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 150 (emphasis mine).
- 28 *Ibid.* Compare Justice Clarence Thomas's dissenting opinion in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 14-576 U. S. (June

- 26, 2015). See also online: https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf.
- 29 Kendi, 54, 198.
- 30 See the Netflix documentary, "The Rachel Divide" (2018).
- 31 Daniel C. Dennett, *The Intentional Stance* (3rd printing; Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 319, note 8.
- 32 Samuel C. Wheeler III, "Indeterminacy of French Interpretation: Derrida and Davidson," in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (ed. E. Lepore; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 477, quoted in Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 40, note 2.
- 33 Merold Westphal, "Hermeneutics as Epistemology," in *Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (ed. John Greco and Ernest Sosa; Malden: Blackwell, 1999), 430.
- 34 Wheeler, 492, quoted in Dennett, *The Intentional Stance*, 40, note 2 (bracketed inserts mine).
- 35 This seems true regardless of how particular philosophers try to account for intentionality, whether it is something irreducibly mental (e.g., Edmund Husserl) or reducible to token brains states (e.g., Michael Tye), or if it is just an attribution we make while employing a tactic to predict behavior (Dennett's "intentional stance").
- 36 This seems to be true even if their intentional objects do not obtain in reality. I can have a thought about Pegasus, and that thought seems to have an essence to it. It could not have turned out to be about something else and still be the thought that it is. Even so, that thought does not match up with anything, since Pegasus does not obtain in reality.
- 37 Dallas Willard, "Knowledge and naturalism," in *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis* (ed. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig; New York: Routledge, 1999), 40.
- 38 Of course, this finding would apply also to Scripture. We cannot access the intended meaning of the human author or God.
- 39 Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist*, 20.
- 40 Ibid., 91.
- 41 Ibid. (bracketed insert mine).
- 42 Michael Williams, in R. Scott Smith and Michael Williams, *The Ethics of Critical Race Theory* (forthcoming), ch. 6.
- 43 Thanks to Michael Williams for these ideas.
- 44 My thanks to Rick Langer, Biola University, for these ideas.
- 45 E.g., on Murphy, see my *Naturalism and Our Knowledge of Reality* (London: Routledge, 2012), ch. 8. See also my "Could We Know Reality, Given Physicalism? Nancey Murphy's Views as Test Case," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 64:3 (2012): 170-80. On Green, see my *Authentically Emergent: Toward a Truly Progressive Christianity* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018), 113-14. See also my "Joel Green's Anthropological Monism: Biblical, Theological, and Philosophical Considerations," *Criswell Theological Review* 7:2 (2010): 19-36.