

Review essay

Prejudice and its Vicissitudes

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Does prejudice have *a* being? More precisely, does prejudice constitute a single ontology or does it have several? These questions raise profound philosophical quandaries about the meaning of prejudice and the assumptions we make about human nature. Is human nature governed by intrapsychic forces that are in part collective and impersonal, hence universal features of the mind common to all individuals regardless of developmental, social, or cultural conditions; or is there no such thing as human nature, only *natures* that conform to their own unique laws and organizations that are beyond any universal application? This is precisely the issue that Elisabeth Young-Bruehl raises in her recent book, *The Anatomy of Prejudices*.

Young-Bruehl provides an ambitious, comprehensive, and exegetical account of the phenomenology of prejudices that is bound to become one of the leading texts in the field. Her book is original, multi-disciplinary, historically integrative, and broadly psychoanalytic in focus with shared support from postmodernistic social theories. As she undulates through the topography of prejudice examining the prosaic modalities of racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, and sexism, she further provides developmental and social accounts of the plurality of prejudices by revealing their etiological, motivational, and structural constituents peppered with insightful narratives and case histories. Sifting through the deluge of studies on prejudice, she in fact unveils the prejudicial character of research that has infiltrated the social sciences and the humanities which corresponds to particular theoretical ideologies and socio-political movements that have historically informed our conceptualization and study of prejudice. She provides a brilliant critique of the cognitive-social psychology movement spearheaded by Allport and the neo-Marxist critical theory of Adorno and Horkheimer. Young-Bruehl shows that the theoretical assumptions of Allport's (1954) pinnacle thesis set forth in *The Nature of Prejudice* claiming that prejudice is primarily the deposit of rigid cognitive practices engendered by social conditioning, virtually ignores the influence of the socio-politico-economic features of prejudice and the uncon-

scious dynamic motivations indigenous to individual and social development. She further examines the conception of prejudice delineated by the critical theory of the Frankfurt school primarily represented in Adorno's (1950) *The Authoritarian Personality* and concludes that like Allport, prejudice is conceived as a general category with the conviction that all forms of prejudice are in essence one, a claim she vehemently lambastes.

This book is thought provoking for it attempts to provide a genealogy of prejudice that is bound to surpass Allport's work as the pivotal text on prejudice today. With erudition and cross-disciplinary precision, Young-Bruehl attempts to detail the types of theoretical problems that have historically characterized the research literature, offering a typology of prejudices that illuminates the conflicts and needs different forms of prejudice fulfill. Within a broad sociological framework, she centers on the obsessional, hysterical, and narcissistic character types familiar to psychoanalysis and attempts to show that certain forms of prejudice are not universal, rather they appear to flourish in specific contexts despite ideologies of desire that are unlimited, multifarious, and endemic to all prejudicial appearances. She introduces substantial scholarship that offers a spacious and comprehensive historical exegesis of the competing psychological, social, political, and theoretical presuppositions that mold our discussion and inform our understanding of the meaning of prejudice.

The central philosophical claim of her thesis is that prejudice is not one type of entity, rather there are myriad types or species of prejudice with varying ontologies. Young-Bruehl believes that prejudice cannot be reduced to a common genus, instead there are several kinds of prejudice with their own unique natures, not merely modalities or appearances that emanate from a single structural essence. For Young-Bruehl, there is no such thing as human nature, hence no universals, only particulars. As a result, her position devolves into a nominalism and therefore precludes any essentialist explanation of human nature. This is conceptually problematic on many grounds. First and foremost, this position denies that all human beings share universal structural conditions that make consciousness and subjectivity possible.¹ This is tantamount to saying that the mind has no universal foundations that are common to all individuals regardless of gender, race, age, cultural facticity, or historical period. Given the fact that all humans by nature desire and are self-conscious beings, her nominalistic ontological claim succumbs to logical contradiction. While it is true that the unique and idiosyncratic manifestations of human subjectivity radically resist reductionistic explanations, we must remember that the appearances of prejudice in all its modal types are not the same as its essence that underlies its structural ontology.

A major philosophical limitation to her position is simply that she confounds phenomenology with ontology, that is, the world of appearance with the world of being. Her reasoning is cloaked in the assumption that form or modality cannot manifest itself from a single essence, rather forms or kinds of prejudice must have their own natures that stand independent from a unitary underlying foundation. She assumes that kinds or classes of prejudices necessarily preclude a universalism because of the contingent relations that exist between the various forms of prejudice and their etiological correlates. In her effort to resist reductionistic accounts of the phenomenology of prejudice, she treats appearance in the same manner as ontology, thus committing a category mistake. She states, "To avoid essentializing, one should speak of prejudices, not of prejudice, or at least, one should give the various prejudices their due as distinct forms" (p. 22). As a false dichotomy, Young-Bruehl views form and essence as two incompatible categories.² While form is associated with appearance, thus the realm of the phenomenological, this does not mean that it is opposed to essentialism.³ In addition, the domain of appearance does not rule out universalism; in fact, there must be certain universal intrapsychic structures in order for the self and society to even emerge.⁴ Furthermore, the structural predispositions for Being itself prefigure an existential ontology that is already constituted *a priori* as the very social preconditions for worldhood to be disclosed.⁵ Thus the universal structures of subjectivity necessarily require an intrapsychic and social ontology. Even the title of her book suggests structural unification, that is, prejudices are constituted in one anatomy. While the anatomy of prejudices has a single body with many appendages, each form appears with different qualities, features, and degrees of expression, that are each particular disclosures of an essential ontology. While a specific mode or appearance may never reveal the holistic nature of prejudice in-itself, each phenomenon reveals a particular instantiation of being.

While there has been a contemporary trend toward nominalism in postmodernism and social construction theory,⁶ I believe this position is flawed at its very foundation. Nominalism assumes that universal structures of the mind do not exist, hence the notion of the unconscious, which is the sacrosanct trademark of psychoanalytic thought, is rendered nugatory and void. Young-Bruehl introduces a deep theoretical conundrum for she builds a false dichotomy that plurality cannot be accounted for if there is a single underlying essence. If this is indeed the case, then the canonical precepts of the psychoanalytic corpus become jeopardized. Even if we cannot agree upon the *exact* nature, structural organizations, or dynamic operations of the unconscious, psychoanalysis still takes as its fundamental presupposition the existence of unconscious mentation that is at the base of all mental processes, thus ubiquitous to all human beings. This is never so salient than in the presupposition of the existence of

unconscious drive determinants. Freud (1915, 1923) is very clear that drive is beyond personalization or nominalistic accounts. The id does not know and does not say no, it merely covets. This is why instincts and their vicissitudes are not the same. In addition, the dynamics of wish and defense are universal operations, only the organizations and contents vary from person to person. As Freud (1923) emphatically expressed, “the repressed is the prototype of the unconscious” (p. 15). Furthermore, while the nuances of object relations theories vary, the acceptability of the defensive constellation of character development is as pervasive today as it was with Klein. Even Kohut’s structural polarity of the self is a generic template that is the underlying edifice of mental life. Thus the belief in nominalism is tantamount to a denial of human structural similarity. The human psyche is not as fractured nor completely self-governed as this thesis insists. While human appearance is variegated and distinct, thus allowing for diversity, individuality, and contextualism, the modes of appearance may only be made possible from an essential substratum that is the ontological ground of human subjectivity.

Perhaps the trend toward non-essentialism reflects a fear of loss of freedom. This was certainly a concern for Sartre and French phenomenology, but as psychoanalysis would contend, consciousness is not that transparent nor totally determining.⁷ Perhaps the thought that we share a common essence is unnerving for elements of autonomy, control, and eccentricity are diffused in commonality; but to appropriate Freud (1930), this is merely “a piece of unconquerable nature . . . a piece of our own psychical constitution” (p. 86). However, given the disparate terrain of individual, social, and cultural diversity including developmental, gender, sexual, and racial differences, it is understandable why there is a recalcitrant proclivity to view human nature as being highly resistant to essentialist formulations. Yet while Young-Bruehl commits to a non-essentialism, she insists on the multilayered, interactive, and overlapping character of prejudices. This is particularly problematic for she commits herself to a plurality of essences that have the capacity for interaction and mutual causal influence. Philosophically, she ropes herself into the enigma of explaining how these particulars have the ability to interact when they have discordant essential natures.⁸ How can things with entirely different essences or substances have the ability to participate in mutual causal attributions? Furthermore, her reliance on a taxonomy of character types reminiscent of classical psychoanalytic theory assumes the very philosophical position she wishes to renounce, namely that character types share a common universal essence that are applied within the confines of a particular context. She therefore contradicts her fundamental thesis that she goes to great lengths to defend throughout the course of the book. Another criticism is that within her psychoanalytic formulations, she almost exclusively conceptualizes prejudice

within the framework endemic to the classical approach without offering any substantial contribution to the view of prejudice from the standpoint of contemporary object relations or selfobject theory.

Throughout her comprehensive appraisal of the anatomy of prejudices, Young-Bruehl surprisingly offers no operational definition of prejudice. Furthermore, while she trounces the faulty theoretical assumptions that prejudice is merely a cognitive phenomenon, the product of learning and socialization practices, or based on the pure overgeneralization of conditioned attitudes and beliefs, she still characterizes prejudice as a product of psychopathology despite the psychological needs prejudice fulfills. From this account, prejudice is exclusively a negative construct, when clearly it is not. In their forthcoming book, *The Ontology of Prejudice*, Mills and Polanowski demonstrate that most traditional and contemporary views of prejudice are myopic, shallow, or naive for they are either cloaked in a truncated and simplistic theoretical edifice or they adhere to an unrealistic, hence circumscribed conceptualization of human nature. Prejudice is such a loaded topic, that the public, as well as the social sciences, can no longer step back and examine it critically for it has become tainted with a negative facticity. There is a tacit assumption that prejudice *itself* is an inherently heinous creature which is merely the deposit of socialization or egregious forces governing character development, while in fact this supposition is itself prejudicial. Society's preoccupation with the pathology of prejudice has furthermore overshadowed its dialectical reality.

Prejudice is humankind's unadulterated destiny and is no more likely to disappear than the existence of the external world. Every human being by nature is prejudiced, it is simply a matter of degree. While I do not intend to normalize pathology, in its most pristine form, prejudice is neither irrational or an anomaly of selfhood, rather it is the *a priori* condition necessary for the construction and evolution of the self and civilization to even occur. In fact, without prejudice, existence and morality would not be possible. While historical usages delineate the dark side of prejudice, in-itself, prejudice is a neutral psychical predisposition. What do I mean here by prejudice? In the most generic sense, prejudice is defined as the subjective bias or preconceived preference for one's own inclinations or desires.⁹ Like Young-Bruehl's position, prejudice is beyond the mere classical definitions associated with the overgeneralization of irrational antipathies directed toward others, but unlike her position, however, prejudice is the universal *a priori* condition necessary for human subjectivity to unfold. As a mode of valuation and self-expression, prejudice is part of our psychological thrownness. Etymologically coming from the Latin noun *praejudicium* (before judgment), I wish to use the term generically simply to denote a preconceived idea, preference, or bias, while reserving specific forms of prejudice that acquire spurning, rancor, or

flagrant hatred to be equated with insidious or pathological prejudice. First and foremost, judgments by nature are valuative. All judgments are imbued with value for valuation is a particular form of self-expression. Thus valuation is prejudicial for it involves a relation between difference and similarity which is necessarily self-referential.¹⁰ Therefore all judgments presuppose self-valuation.¹¹ As a universal expression of our narcissistic facticity, prejudice by nature is perverse, for it has no bounds or restrictions. Unfortunately, the perversion of prejudice and its vicissitudes are subject to pathological manifestations as well as propitious and benign appearances. Despite its phenomenal disclosures, prejudice is the expression of value.

The *a priori* foundation behind this claim lies in the multiple structures and parallel processes that constitute the nature of subjectivity, conscious and unconscious organizations, and the psychodynamics of the self. As the ontological ground for selfhood and society to emerge, prejudice infiltrates the very structures of subjectivity and is essentially a dialectical process. As a result, prejudice disperses its being throughout an intricate and complex matrix of multiplicity that participates in the dialectical unfolding of all that is subjectively real. Prejudice is therefore an intrapsychic predisposition and the universal condition required for the very process of subjectivity to unfold,¹² thus the necessary foundation that gives rise to the self, the nature of one's identifications, and personal and collective identity.¹³ While Young-Bruehl nicely articulates the phenomenologies of prejudice, her conceptual approach fails to account for their universal features that underlie the most basic operations of thought and subjectivity. As I have attempted to demonstrate, prejudice has one essence with innumerable forms of appearance. While its essence constitutes its ontological structure, its phenomenal modes explain the marbled manifestations of prejudice, whether pathological or not. Appropriating Kant and Hegel, the essence of prejudice is dialectically organized and is instantiated in the very contours of subjectivity itself; insofar as if its structure were to be removed, consciousness and the unconscious would collapse to the ground.

These philosophical distinctions are important because phenomenology and ontology are two entirely different constructs. While she does not formally address this distinction, this is precisely the point Young-Bruehl makes. All prejudices are not the same simply because they are temporal phenomena that occupy particular intrapsychic, socio-cultural, and historical contexts. The phenomenologies of prejudice withstand reductionistic explanations merely because the quality and degree of the lived experiences may never be captured from one perspective. The significance of her position is that prejudice should not be treated as the same phenomena precisely because they never appear as

the same, for each type of prejudice is merely one appearance among many appearances.

Young-Bruehl's anti-reductionistic pluralism provides a novel account from the previous studies on prejudice and deserves special merit for the philosophical and applied questions she addresses. The value of this book is instrumental for it ferrets out the minutia and distinguishing phenomenon that beset the vast vicissitudes of prejudice while it furthermore opens a space for inquiry into the different needs these dappled forms of prejudice fulfill for the diverse populations of people within their distinct social conditions. Not only does she point out how the differences between the types of prejudice have been neglected, but she adds to the diagnostic nomenclature on the various subspecies, dynamic processes, and associated symptomatology that underlie their phenomenology. Young-Bruehl reinforces the notion that the way in which we talk about prejudice is a grave impediment to theoretical and applied discourse that needs to be analyzed and recast in order for social change to be realized. While her theoretical stance has palpable philosophical shortcomings, her learned critique of the phenomenologies of prejudice is the most integrative text to date. This book may truly be a harbinger for revamping the way in which we understand prejudice and its vicissitudes.

Notes

1. In his critical philosophy, Kant (1781/1787) cogently demonstrates that experience is constructed through the intuitive forms of sensibility and the categories for understanding that make thought and knowledge possible. Such universal and innate *a priori* structures of mind are the necessary preconditions for the possibility of consciousness and subjectivity to even emerge. The Kantian turn in late modernity was further advanced by the idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.
2. It is important to offer an operational definition of essence. Largely taken over from medieval interpretations of Aristotle, the term usually denotes, that which necessarily makes a thing what it is, and without which it would not nor could not exist. Unlike certain views of essentialism that maintain that certain definitions describe or reveal the true or exact essence of a thing *in-itself*, following Hegel (1812, 1817), the essential nature of *Geist* as *aufheben* necessarily involves its dialectical movement that constitutes its structural ontology. Therefore, essence does not suggest a fixed or static immutable property belonging to a substance or a thing, rather it is dynamic, transformative, and relational. Like Dimen (1991) who criticizes essentialist accounts that emphasize "fixed . . . hard-and-fast polarities" (p. 343), Hegel underscores the notion that essence is *process*. Thus, what is *essential* is change constituted through temporal-spatial relations and the dialectical positionality toward similarity and difference that comprise its very nature, without which existence would not even be possible.
3. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel (1807) perspicuously demonstrates that the phenomenal manifestations of consciousness are not opposed to essentialism at all, rather appearances are shown to be moments of the dialectical unfolding of subjectivity. This is further echoed in the *Science of Logic* (1812) as reason is shown to be the coming to presence of pure self-consciousness. Mills (1996) further demonstrates that the dialectic is the essential structural foundation of the unconscious.

4. While Kant (1781/1787) acknowledged that the self was composed of both its empirical and noumenal components, the *transcendental unity of apperception* (TUA) serves as the purely formal “I” that accompanies all object representations. As the unified unifier, the TUA is merely a unity of consciousness that is both impersonal and contentless. Like the intuitive forms of space and time and the categories, the transcendental unity is a universal source in all individuals for there is no way to distinguish it from others. As a synthesizing agent, the TUA is a pure form of subjectivity and the universal ground that makes selfhood possible.
5. In Heidegger’s (1927) existential ontology of selfhood, *Dasein* is thrust into the ontological contingency of Being-in-the-world that is structurally disclosed as *Dasein*’s facticity. Therefore, we are thrown into a world already constitutive of our Being, one that can neither be avoided or refused. Because *Dasein*’s structural relations are ontologically predetermined, the existential conditions for worldhood are necessarily universal instantiations.
6. Nominalism has its origins in scholasticism but was continued in modern philosophy from Hobbes to Locke, Leibniz, and Berkeley. While modern analytic philosophers, particularly logical positivists, carried on this tradition, continental theorists including Michel Foucault and most contemporaneously, Ian Hacking have taken this up with regards to social construction theory.
7. In his effort to canonize consciousness as nothingness, Sartre (1943) radicalized human subjectivity as a totally transparent operation. As a result, his decree of radical freedom became the benchmark of existential phenomenology. Existentialism therefore stands vehemently opposed to psychic determinism for Sartre vociferously denied the existence of the unconscious. Because existential approaches adopt the phenomenological method, mental activity is only considered from the standpoint of consciousness. In response, both Hanly (1979) and Mitchell (1988) have offered a defense of unconscious determinism from a compatibilist framework. While deterministic forces organize mental life, the difference between a free and a compelled act is due to the nature of their causal sources, for all acts are caused. Thus, will and intentionality may be seen as compatible operations with unconscious processes in which the notion of freedom is preserved within a deterministic model.
8. This has been a philosophical paradox since antiquity, from Aristotle’s attack on Plato’s ideal forms to the Cartesian mind-body dualism that continues to plague contemporary science and the philosophy of mind.
9. As the essential ingredient in the construction of selfhood, prejudice has its origins in narcissism. Generally following self psychology, narcissism is the fundamental ground of human motivation and is the requisite condition necessary for the development of the self and self-identity. Every thought, feeling, and action is a self-oriented enterprise, whether this is consciously or unconsciously constructed. No thought or intention can be conceived independent from the thinker nor motivated from reasons extrinsic to one’s own needs, wishes, desires, or self-purposes. As Fichte (1794) points out, “choice is governed by caprice, and since even a capricious decision must have some source, it is governed by inclination and interest” (pp. 14–15). Such inclination, of course, is always a self-inclination in the service of self-interest.
10. Reality is constructed through the lens of prejudice and is the essential component of thought. As thoroughly expatiated by Hegel (1812, 1817), thinking involves the act of differentiating between the content of what is being thought, thus it takes account of difference in reference and meaning. The act of differentiating is therefore the most basal ground of cognition. There is always the process of distinguishing self from object in experience, relating determinate content to universals, and altering what is fixed from what is infinite. As a result, we imbue all experience with our own meaning which necessarily requires the act of differentiation and self-reference. Therefore, the process of differentiation and self-reference is the ontological ground of cognition, hence a universal *a priori* operation.

11. In the words of Alfred North Whitehead (1930): "To be [a self] is to have a self-interest. This self-interest is a feeling of self-valuation; it is an emotional tone" (p. 97).
12. In the first *Critique*, Kant outlined the ground, scope, and limits of the faculties and powers of the mind with regards to the universal structures of subjectivity that make objectivity possible. In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant (1790) further demonstrates that every judgment of taste involves a subjective experience that is related to something internally discriminatory. In all aesthetic judgments, the determination of taste is not of or about anything that objectively inheres in the object, rather our *experience of* the object. That is, judgments are self-related, hence prejudicial and non-objective, yet they are necessarily subjectively universal. Not only is this an attitude we take toward aesthetic judgments of beauty and the sublime, but this is an attitude we take toward *everything*. Hence, Kant's theory of *subjective universality* underscores the very essence of prejudice.
13. The prejudicial process of subjectivity becomes even more lucid when we notice how unconscious operations of wish and defense express themselves within the very of structures of consciousness. While Freud introduced the notion of primary and secondary process mentation in his collaboration with Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria* (1893–1895) and later in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), he further showed that conscious processes involve the procedure and product of projection, which in turn constitutes the very dynamics of transference (Freud, 1911, 1912). By definition, every individual we encounter is a transference figure, thus is automatically an object of prejudice. Furthermore, Klein's (1946, 1957) pivotal work traced the defensive, hence prejudicial character of fantasy formation to be present at birth. Thus ego genesis by nature is prejudicial as well as the contents of all unconscious fantasy systems. While Lacan (1953) attempts to show that symbolic linguistic processes structure the unconscious, he further points out the ineffable nature of the dialectic of desire which is characterized by being in relation to lack (Lacan, 1936, 1960). Thus the negative, absent feature of desire is prejudicial insofar as desire seeks *jouissance*, although foreclosed by the Real. To desire is to want and to want is to value. Therefore, just as Freud (1921) points out, the objects of value (identification) are prejudicial.

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