

NOTES ON CHARLES MILLS, *THE RACIAL CONTRACT*

INTRODUCTION

“RC” as theory is different from SC as theory; the latter is ideal and abstract; the former is real and concrete.

RC as fact is between white people to agree in ruling over non-whites.

CM uses “RC” as theory descriptively to define the massive fact of global white supremacy for 500 years. He echoes here Rousseau in 2D: first, deceitful SC proposed by rich people locks in property differences and hence social inequality. He also echoes Pateman: excavating in order to subvert. See also p. 91: the “RC” as theory allows you to identify the barriers to the achievement of what ideal theory says would be a just society.

TEN THESES

1. The RC is political, moral, and epistemological
2. The RC is a historical actuality
3. The RC is an exploitation contract
4. The RC norms (and races) space, demarcating civil and wild spaces
5. The RC norms (and races) the individual
6. The RC underwrites the modern social contract
7. The RC has to be enforced through violence and ideological conditioning
8. The RC historically tracks actual moral / political consciousness of (most) white moral agents
9. The RC has always been recognized by nonwhites as the real moral / political agreement to be challenged
10. The “RC” as a theory is explanatorily superior to the raceless social contract

OVERVIEW (CHAPTER 1)

1. RC is political, moral, and epistemological
  - a. Political:
    - i. SC: agreement to move from non-social to social
    - ii. RC: agreements establishing whites as fully human and others as inferior
      1. Whites are political / civilized
      2. Non-whites are pre-political / savage or deficient / barbaric
  - b. Moral:
    - i. SC is either objective / natural or conventional (Hobbes)
    - ii. RC is taken by CM as mostly intended as objective

1. Freedom and equality of natural man is basis of SC
  2. But RC sees only
    - a. Freedom and equality of white men
    - b. And bondage and inequality of non-men / non-whites
  - c. Epistemological
    - i. SC has men capable of rationality
      1. Hobbes: prudential self-interest calculations
      2. Locke: understanding of laws of nature
    - ii. RC requires an “epistemology of ignorance” for whites who “don’t see race”
2. RC is a historical reality
    - a. Global scale
    - b. Historical acts: conquests, treaties, laws, colonial codes, etc.
    - c. Crystallization of infra-human status: “savages” or “barbarians”
    - d. Slavery in New World
    - e. Colonialism in Africa and Asia
    - f. White settler colonialism
    - g. Global white polity: whites can move and invest anywhere
  3. RC is an exploitation contract that creates global European economic domination and national white racial privilege
    - a. SC creates secure framework for “industrious appropriation” of nature and labor but w/o much detail other than “equality”
    - b. RC allows white economic domination
      - i. Biological racist explanations are not acceptable in most academic settings
      - ii. But cultural “European exceptionalism” is still accepted:
        1. Euros are rational, scientific, aggressive, expansionist
        2. Others are superstitious, custom-bound, passive, isolationist
      - iii. Critical theorists point to material factors
        1. Slavery profits (Eric Williams)
        2. Colonial and post-colonial “under-development”
        3. Financial capitalism still dominated by former colonial powers
        4. On national scale, cumulative and progressive family wealth (housing)

## DETAILS (CHAPTER 2)

4. The RC norms (and races) space, demarcating civil and wild spaces (41-53)
  - a. Supposedly unraced SC
    - i. Does divide Euro space into pre and post SC
      1. But Euro SN is mostly theory
      2. Euro SC is actual (though admittedly fragile via civil war)
    - ii. But space needn’t be theorized; it’s neutral
  - b. The RC requires a theorization of space
    - i. Nonwhites live in a wild space that needs to be discovered, mapped, tamed
    - ii. Epistemology (44-46)
      1. European science must travel to explore and civilize
      2. Nonwhite savages who have only myth, custom, habit, superstition ...

- iii. Morality 46)
  - 1. European Christianity is objective moral code that must be imposed
  - 2. On nonwhite superstition, atrocity, immorality, devil worship ...
- iv. Symbolically, the journey into the Heart of Darkness is a test for whites (47)
- v. There are divisions of space in Euroland too (47-49)
  - 1. "Good" and "bad" neighborhoods
  - 2. Ghettoization
  - 3. Or protective islands in colonies ("Green Zone")
- vi. Taming the land = rendering it appropriable (49-50)
  - 1. Although often called "virgin territory" or "uninhabited"
  - 2. There has to be active clearing of natives, both human and flora / fauna
  - 3. Thus replicating Euroland
- vii. "Body politics" (51-52)
- 5. The RC norms (and races) the individual, establishing personhood and subpersonhood
  - a. SC: Abstracting from bodies possible bcs of implicit white norm
  - b. RC identifies nonwhite bodies as ineligible for SC
    - i. Subpersons or infrahumans: not fully "persons" in legal / moral sense
    - ii. Racializing as a process accomplished in (not before) modern slavery
    - iii. Orlando Patterson: (white) freedom accomplished via black slavery
    - iv. Aesthetic privilege of white bodies
- 6. The RC underwrites the modern social contract and is continually being rewritten
  - a. RC is what creates race and hence "white" people
  - b. SC writings refer to wild men, beasts, etc
    - i. Hobbes: SN = SW; actual SN in America
    - ii. Locke:
      - 1. SN mostly governed by rational law of nature, so irrational = beasts
      - 2. Nature given to all for rational industrious appropriation so native non-agricultural land should be appropriated by whites
      - 3. Locke and slavery:
        - a. A full human with property in person cannot agree to slavery
        - b. So Locke's real role in slave trade implied he thought blacks were not fully human
    - iii. Rousseau:
      - 1. In 2D those cited as closest to savage man are nonwhites
      - 2. So barely out of the animal status of "pure state of nature"
    - iv. Kant:
      - 1. Most advanced of the classical SC writers
      - 2. Creator of modern concept of race as biological heredity
      - 3. And popularizer of color-coded talent hierarchy
      - 4. So whites are the fully human persons of Kant's moral philosophy
  - c. Constant rewritings of the RC
    - i. At first, de jure white supremacy
    - ii. Now, only de facto, and hence RC is hidden ("epistemology of ignorance")
      - 1. Globally, writing off of nonwhite areas as backward, primitive, underdeveloped

- 2. Nationally
  - a. Acceptance of formal extension of personhood
  - b. But resistance to real, material efforts
- 3. Shifting contours of who counts as white (78-81)
- 7. The RC has to be enforced through violence and ideological conditioning
  - a. SC is supposed to be egalitarian and voluntary (“liberal democratic state”)
    - i. Lots of controversy about the exact form of that state
    - ii. Minimalist (“night watchman”) vs welfare state
    - iii. Contestation by communitarians, fascists, anarchists, Marxists
  - b. RC has created and enforced the white supremacist state
    - i. Violence:
      - 1. First conquest
        - a. Native and / or slave resistance seen as “rebellion”
        - b. Maroon flight / resistance rendered invisible
      - 2. Continued subordination
        - a. Police as “occupying army”
        - b. Vigilantes
          - i. Lockean punishment of law-breakers w/o state
          - ii. “Self-defense” / Stand Your Ground laws
    - ii. Ideology:
      - 1. Whites learn to see nonwhites as subpersons
      - 2. Nonwhites learn to see themselves as subpersons
        - a. Destruction of native culture
        - b. Acceptance of white culture as norm and nonwhite culture inferior, as degeneration, ...

#### “NATURALIZED” MERITS (CHAPTER 3)

- 8. The RC historically tracks actual moral / political consciousness of (most) white moral agents
  - a. In underlying the SC, the RC renders itself and racism invisible to many and at best gives it the appearance of a deviation from the norm. But it is the norm, so most whites operate with an “epistemology of ignorance.”
  - b. Using “RC” theory we see
    - i. White racial epistemology as simultaneous acceptance and denegation of RC
      - 1. Feeling of legitimacy
        - a. Affirming explicit forms of legal and social white supremacy
        - b. Then a shift to illusory “de-racing” of WS, rendering it invisible
      - 2. Assessment of whiteness are relative distance from nonwhites
      - 3. Reduced empathy for nonwhites
    - ii. Explains record of atrocities (98-101)
      - 1. Conquest
      - 2. Slavery
      - 3. Colonialism
      - 4. Nazism and the Holocaust (102-106)

- c. "RC" theory use opens theoretical space to decouple white phenotype from "White" as components of RC and white supremacy
    - i. Opting out of the "tacit consent" of the SC is highly questionable
    - ii. But there is a real option for whites to opt out of the RC, once they learn to recognize it (that is, by use of "RC" theory)
      - 1. Protest
      - 2. Abolition
      - 3. Resistance
9. The RC has always been recognized by nonwhites as the real moral / political agreement to be challenged
- a. Standpoint theory: bottom-up perspective more likely to be accurate
    - i. Nonwhites clearly see that the RC is invisible to whites
    - ii. Explains the nonwhite intellectual focus on the RC (something that is mysterious to white philosophers, or at best seen as a "special interest")
  - b. Resistance to RC takes form of racial solidarity
    - i. In colonial conquest as that which is to be eliminated by genocide
    - ii. In colonial rule as danger of "rebellion"
    - iii. In post-colonial calls for, e.g., pan-Africanism
  - c. International white racial solidarity can be seen
    - i. Punishment of Haiti
    - ii. Intervention in Chinese "Boxer Rebellion"
    - iii. 20<sup>th</sup> century post-colonial agreements over "zones of influence"
  - d. With the RC now invisible
    - i. Nonwhite political philosophy must first reveal it
    - ii. Then struggle to assert personhood
    - iii. And fight anti-black aesthetics of bodies
10. The "RC" as a theory is explanatorily superior to the raceless social contract in accounting for the political and moral realities of the world and in helping to guide normative theory
- a. Modern SC theorists can't dodge the "RC" theory challenge
    - i. If you're going to do ideal theory you have to know what's keeping us from getting there
    - ii. Plus, if you present the SC as raceless then
      - 1. You have bought into the RC
      - 2. And are reinforcing its present invisibility by pretending racism
        - a. Was incidental to founding of modern liberal democracy
        - b. Which had noble principles but "just fell short sometimes"
    - iii. Rather, the RC and its denigration of nonwhites IS the norm
  - b. Indeed, qua philosophy, modern SC theory must identify
    - i. Its political ontology and epistemology
    - ii. If it does this in a raceless way, it's just false to reality
    - iii. It misses resistance to the RC as fundamental political realities
  - c. "RC" theory and race
    - i. Recognizes its reality (it's a fundamental reality of life)
    - ii. Demystifies its origins (it's constructed, not natural)
    - iii. Is not about guilt-tripping whites for what their ancestors did

- iv. But is about challenging them to renounce the RC and struggle to eliminate “race” as a fundamental social category
- v. This is possible because “RC” theory shows that white racism is not natural but the result of contingent historical factors
- vi. So the struggle is not against white people but against “Whiteness” as standard for humanity and beneficiary of RC and white supremacy
- vii. In fact, “RC” theory shows that white supremacy isn’t the only racial hierarchy
- d. “RC” theory is not pomo but is materialist Enlightenment ideology critique (129)
- e. “RC” theory is part of long tradition of oppositional black theory (131)