Whose Integration? What's Imperative?

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1.

Elizabeth Anderson's *The Imperative of Integration* is a fine and serious effort by one of our best contemporary ethicists, as well as a testament to the mainstreaming of concerns that have long animated philosophical race theory. Anderson shows in impressive detail that the persistence of racial segregation is a problem, that non-ideal theory is an invaluable resource for understanding this problem, and that something like integration is central to solving the problem. Unfortunately, the book's central conceit in some ways pulls against its most powerful arguments. Professor Anderson shows that racial justice is imperative, to be sure, and that talking about integration is one way to make and explore this point. But it may be imperative to take up this thought in other ways, and to be suspicious of appeals to integration per se. To her credit, Anderson anticipates some aspects of this worry and attempts to deal with them in advance. But she seems to underestimate the concern, and to overlook its connections to her own methodological commitments.

2.

One reason to be suspicious of twenty-first century appeals to integration emerges from a careful consideration of the concept's relationship to the US civil rights movement - the sort of consideration that one finds in recent work by civil rights historians. Charles Payne, for example, notes that the apartheid South, as he puts it,

> involved plenty of integration; it just had to be on terms acceptable to white people…. 'Segregation' is the way apologists for the South liked to think of [their social order]…. It was the most innocent face one could put on that system. When we use the term as a summary term for what was going on in the South, we are unconsciously adopting the preferred euphemism of nineteenth-century white supremacist leadership.[1]

Payne goes on: "If 'segregation' is a poor way to describe the problem, 'integration' may not tell us much about the solution."[2]

One of the things Payne has in mind is the fact that integration was not obviously a central goal for many of the people who participated in movement work or who came to support that work. This ambivalence had multiple roots, from the experience of watching assiduously-husbanded black resources siphoned off into white communities in the name of integration, to the conviction that, as James Baldwin puts it, it is unwise to integrate into the " burning house" of a system in decline.[3] Whatever the motivation for the ambivalence, the facts on the ground are such that, as historian Todd

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[1] Charles Payne, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View From the Trenches," in Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement: 1945-1968, 2nd ed.* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006) 99-136, 144.

[2] Payne 145.

[3] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1962; New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 94.

Moye puts it, "scholars now see the civil rights movement preeminently as a movement for self-determination rather than a movement for integration of the races or even for equal civil rights."[4]

As I say, Anderson knows this history, and goes to some trouble to insulate her project from the criticisms that might emerge from it. She points out that as she uses the term, 'integration' does not mean that the cultural practices that we identify with particular racial groups have to be eradicated and replaced with 'white' practices (§§6.1, 9.2), or that all forms of race-related solidarity have to be replaced by fealty to abstractions like 'humanity' or 'individuality.' And it certainly does not provide a cover for "the dissolution of black-owned enterprises" (§6.1) of the sort that was rampant in the south as local authorities operationalized the mandate to integrate.[5]

On Anderson's account, racial integration is what we aspire to and work towards when we resist the race-related social closure that we call 'segregation.' This social closure has both horizontal and vertical dimensions, compartmentalizing people into separate spaces as well as into separate niches or roles. The horizontal segregation of residential spaces is a problem because it enables some communities to hoard access to opportunities and resources, or to shift certain of the burdens of social life - pollution, undesirable public facilities, and so on - onto other communities. Similarly, the vertical segregation of nodes in opportunity networks sorts people of different races into, among other things, different social roles and occupational strata, even when they occupy the same physical spaces. And segregation along both these dimensions contributes to the persistence of racial animus, as it rules out the kind of routine and thoroughgoing interactions among equals that would help break down or prevent the formation of implicit racial biases. All of this of course has

obvious consequences for democratic ideals of collaborative citizenship and associated living.

On Anderson's account, what Charles Payne calls 'integration' just isn't worthy of the term. It simply isn't true to say that the Jim Crow south involved plenty of integration, if one also has to say that this integration had to happen on terms acceptable to whites. The control that whites had over the conditions of racial interaction points directly to the vertical social closure that real integration - "the participation as equals of all groups in all social domains"[6] - means to undo. Similarly, only a kind of "confusion" can lead one to say that integration is equivalent to the cooptation or eradication of the black-owned enterprises and black-run institutions and opportunity structures that emerged under Jim Crow. Integration is an ethical ideal, and the ideal requires the visualization and pursuit of a social condition that simply is not identical with the half-hearted, uneven, and often duplicitous pursuit of integration that we witnessed in the US after the successes of the civil rights movement. And the vindication of the ideal, the resurrection of the integration-imperative "from the grave of the civil rights movement,"[7] is crucial to social justice.

3.

Anderson can block the first reason to worry about the appeal to integration by distinguishing her ideal from various counterfeit invocations of it. But stipulating to a narrower and more precise definition that one finds in the wilds of actual social practice points to a second reason for concern. We're meant to think that Moye's activists were in fact calling for a higher form of integration, or insisting on its true form, rather than rejecting integration as such. But one might think that what these people thought they were doing should matter to a truly democratic politics.

We might start to unpack this second worry by asking a question: If there are reasons, strong reasons rooted in historical practice, to refuse a particular way of characterizing an ethical ideal, to refuse a

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[4] Todd Moye, "Focusing Our Eyes on the Prize," in Emilye Crosby, ed., *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 166.

[5] It does mean, however, that we have to relinquish our attachment to what Paul Gilroy once called 'cultural insiderism' - the thought that, as Alain Locke put it, cultures have colors, and that participation in a racial practice is and must be limited only to the members of the racial group with which that practice is associated.

[6] Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 155.

[7] Anderson 12.

vocabulary that happens to come freighted with substantial historical baggage, then what is at stake in insisting on the problematic characterization? I suspect that Anderson thinks that integration-talk represents the cleanest, simplest, most direct way to make the relevant points. But it is clean and simple only if we ignore certain of the experiences that the language occasions, and it is direct only if we forget the work she has to do to stipulate to a definition of integration that avoids the stakes of this discursive choice.

I mean to be making a point about the relationship between non-ideal theory and a political phenomenology, which may become clearer if I link it to Anderson's own Deweyan claims about non-ideal theory. She explains that "in non-ideal theory, normative inquiry begins with the identification of a problem. We then seek a causal explanation of what can and ought to be done about it, and who should be charged with correcting it" (p34, §1.5). We learn a bit later that committing to non-ideal theory in the context of a democratic culture involves a further commitment:

> [R]acial equality requires not just propositional knowledge, but practical knowledge of how to work together on terms of equality. Only racially integrated collective agents can generate this practical knowledge. Only by working and thinking together can we work out mutually respectful and cooperative habits of interaction. (p207, §9.2)

This is a very Deweyan picture, and it seems to me to require a rather different posture toward the historical baggage of integration-talk than the one Anderson adopts. On this sort of picture, to say that normative inquiry begins with the identification of a problem is to point to a social process, a process of conjoint or collaborative inquiry, during which ethical agents constitute themselves as a public by identifying a problem and orienting themselves to it, together. Collective inquiry of this sort involves the discovery or creation of a shared *vocabulary*, a shared discursive framework that all parties can accept as a basis for "working and thinking together." If this is right, then it matters that some people might worry about the suitability of integration-talk as a resource for characterizing the pursuit of racial justice.

Contemporary heirs of Dewey in the study of democratic deliberation remind us that the process of conjoint ethical deliberation has

important experiential conditions and implications, some of which they capture by distinguishing deliberation from dialogue. Levine, Gastil, and Fung explain: "When a group seeks to deliberate on a public issue… it may be necessary to first engage in dialogue. This form of speech is not as concerned with solving a problem as with bridging linguistic, social, and epistemological chasms between different subgroups of the potentially deliberative body...."[8] This preliminary bridging work helps potential co-inquirers "truly understand one another's standpoints and appreciate the history and conviction of one another's views." This is valuable for straightforward reasons: "Once each subgroup understands how the others think, talk, and reason, it is easier to avoid conceptual confusions, symbolic battles, and epistemological thickets that could otherwise derail a deliberative process."[9]

In light of these reasonable extensions of Deweyan non-ideal theory, Anderson's assumption that integration-talk just is the right vocabulary for talking about racial justice seems to me to pull against her own methodological commitments. It turns out to take a great deal of work to maintain this assumption. She has to set aside the many reasons that Payne, Moye, and others find for suspicion about this vocabulary - reasons rooted, you'll recall, in the concrete historical accounts of integration-talk mediating and facilitating the continuation of racial oppression and exploitation well into the post-segregation period. She has to qualify her invocations of 'integration' to make clear that she has in mind only one of the various meanings that attach to it in commonsense usage, a meaning that does not involve assimilation, cooptation, and other forms of post-segregation racial injustice. And she has to develop this purified commonsense usage into a term of art, so that it can take on fairly unusual meanings involving the distortion of opportunity structures entirely apart from

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[8] Peter Levine, Archon Fung, and John Gastil, "Future Directions for Public Deliberation," *Journal of Public Deliberation*: Vol. 1: No. 1 (2005), Article 3, p9. http://services.bepress.com/jpd/vol1/iss1/art3. *See also* Oliver Escobar, *Public Dialogue and Deliberation: A communication perspective for public engagement practitioners* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Beltane -UK Beacons for Public Engagement, 2011), 45; report available at http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/new-report-public-dialogue-and-deliberation, downloaded 29 May 2012.

[9] Levine, Fung, and Gastil 9.

restricted access to physical space. These techniques for strategically narrowing and expanding the meanings of terms are standard moves in analytic philosophy, and they have their place. But here they come at some cost: they require that we set aside the way the vocabulary actually functions in the practices of conjoint normative inquiry. And when that happens we have to ask whether the cost is too high, in ways that undermine the chances for productive conjoint action.

Once again, I find encouragement for this worry in Anderson's own express commitments. In discussing the conditions for "a sound political philosophy," she explains that "[i]t is one thing to lay out an objective required by justice, another to implement policies capable of achieving that objective" (p212, §9.3). Contemporary work in the practice of democratic deliberation, combined with the suspicion of integration-talk that emerges from historical accounts of The Movement, suggests that policies aimed at achieving what Anderson calls 'integration' might need to be formulated in rather different terms. If movement activists were less interested in integration than in self-determination - if, that is, they were less likely to represent their aims to themselves in terms of integration than in other terms - and if they felt this way because the language of integration had in their experience been bound up with problematic events and practices, then reviving the ideals of the movement may mean leaving the *vocabulary* of integration buried in the grave where Anderson finds it.

4.

I have tried to raise the worry that Anderson's recuperation of integration-talk may be, in a way, counter-democratic. This counts as a worry for independent reasons, if one values democracy, but also for reasons that are internal to her view, with its commitments to the responsible production of non-ideal theory and the responsible conduct of normative inquiry in democratic contexts. Still, I suspect these worries will not trouble Anderson very much, and perhaps that is as it should be. She may seize the opportunity I mean to have given her at the end of the preceding section just to say that we should deal with these concerns about the language of integration at the implementation phase. Her aim, she might go on to say, was to articulate and defend an ethical ideal and to defend some policies that should help instantiate it, and the language that seemed most

congenial to her at the time to do the work happened to be the language of integration. If we have to shift to another vocabulary to build consensus around the relevant practices and policies, then so be it.

Adopting this strategy -- effectively bracketing questions about the way integration-talk functions in concrete contexts of democratic deliberation, in order to contain any problemsuntil the process of social amelioration has gotten farther along -- may be the right response to the worries I've raised. But I find myself wondering if the process of dialogue, as described above, should enter into the process even at the stage of philosophical articulation. Anderson endorses the Deweyan thought that "social and political philosophy needs to be grounded in an empirically adequate understanding of the problems we face" (p201, §9.1). But Dewey never tired of explaining that empirical adequacy had to do with experience in all of its existential and phenomenological depth. For Deweyans, and for anyone keen to do justice to the actual exercise of ethical agency by social beings, normative philosophy must also be grounded in a *phenomenologically* adequate understanding of our problems. And this means attending to the way we frame and navigate our shared problem-spaces, and to they way this work validates or invalidates the experiences of the people with whom we hope to collaborate in struggle.

Attending to the phenomenological dimensions of political life has never been the strong suit of liberal political philosophy. Anderson's oddly tone-deaf reading of Hegel's lord and bondsman narrative (p122, §5.4) situates her squarely in this tradition, as does her determination to present her argument as a middle way between (more or less) equally benighted separatists, multiculturalists, and conservatives. She has nevertheless achieved something remarkable, and given us a variety of powerful and persuasive reflections on various questions of racial justice work. My fear is that these arguments will translate and travel less well than they otherwise might, because they have been formulated without regard for a philosophy of the history of racial politics that refuses the centrality of liberal frames, and that makes room for the wider vision of human flourishing that animates certain forms of the black radical imagination. (I should say, and should say that I wish I didn't have to say, that 'black radical' here is *not* identical with non-starter racial separatism, of the sort that seems to haunt mainstream dreams of the

post-racial idyll. I am thinking here of Claudia Jones, not of Marcus Garvey.)

I want to say that *The Imperative of Integration* deserves an audience beyond the whitely post-civil rights liberals for whom it seems to have been written. But 'deserves' may not be the right word, given the book's indifference to the way its language might register to those outside its target audience. Perhaps better: there are readers who might benefit from the book, and who might enrich its arguments, if they were contemplated as members of its discursive and deliberative community. I hope that what I've written here, together with Professor Anderson's response, will begin the process, in Deweyan terms, of making the interracial, pan-ideological public constituted by the burdens of racial injustice aware of itself as a public, and as an inchoate community.