

EDI DIALOGUES @UCL. Episode #2.

Transcript

Podcast Contributors

- Simona Aimar (Vice Dean EDI, Arts & Humanities, UCL)
- Daniel James (Philosophy Lecturer, TU Dresden – invited external speaker)
- Kirstine La Cour (Doctoral Student, UCL Philosophy)
- Tina Chikasha (Undergraduate Student, UCL Philosophy)

Welcome:

00:00 Simona: Welcome everyone to EDI Dialogues at UCL. This is the second episode we are recording. My name is Simona Aimar, and I am the Vice Dean for the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at UCL.

00:20 Tina: Hi, I'm Tina. I'm a second-year philosophy student.

00:25 Kirstine: And I'm Kirstine, a finishing PhD student here at UCL.

With us here today is Dr. Daniel James from the Technical University Dresden. Welcome, Daniel.

00:38 Daniel: Thank you for having me. It's great to be here at UCL.

Introduction to Daniel's Talk:

01:00 Kirstine: You're here at UCL because you were just giving a talk about black history, and the talk you were giving takes us through from Hegel's paternalist racist rejection of black history as significant in its own right, and through to the way those ideas are taken up by the Trinidadian writer and scholar C.L.R. James. Could you talk to us a little bit about what led you to this project?

Explaining the Project:

02:00 Daniel: So, I'm a Hegel scholar by training, and I think what led me to the project in the first place was a frustration with my fellow Hegel scholars, many of whom tend to dismiss or ignore many of the racist or pro-colonial statements you can find in Hegel's work. Probably in response to more recent events and the fact that more people had been calling out Hegel, a more prominent Hegel scholar explicitly wrote an article about why Hegel is not a racist. Something like that. And I think I was quite frustrated with the strategy that many people then pursue, that Charles Mills called "fire-walling." You make these firewalls between all these statements that you might find quite problematic and they take to be the core inside of views. A friend of mine and I thought that things are more complicated than that, and we want to have a closer look at how the statements relate to the central parts of his philosophy. That's what inspired the project's first part. The second part was that Hegel, despite all these things you can find in his work, has a somewhat ambivalent legacy and inspired many anticolonial and anti-racist thinkers as well. We were quite fascinated with his ambivalent legacy, so we thought it would be an interesting way to explore his ideas through the lens of that tradition.

World Historical:

04:10 Tina: In the talk, you also mentioned "world history." Is this a technical term? Could you expand on Hegel's notion of the "world historical"?

05:20 Daniel: Yes, I can try. I think it's a very 19th-century idea. Hegel conceives of it by contrasting it with "universal world history." Every nation-state has its own particular history, but then you move a step back, and now you see how there's an entire process that emerges through the relations between nation-states. Especially with 19th-century thinkers such as Hegel, but also people like W.E.B. DuBois, they offered this overarching process, typically thought of in theological terms of some end or goal directed at progress. Many of these thinkers conceived of world history as this overarching process of progress that can be seen on the world as a whole.

C.L.R. James and Other Black Thinkers:

07:05 Kirstine: Your discussion of C.L.R. James in the talk is bookended by references to other black thinkers, such as Carter G. Woodson and Charles Mills. There might be two different ways of taking up the project of the talk that align with the way each of these two thinkers was used. So, what do you think the implications of this are for how we do philosophy going forward?

09:20 Daniel: I'm inclined to say neither because, at least on this approach, it's not just adding something or replacing canonical texts; it allows you to shed new light on canonical texts. In teaching, I might teach something like Hegel's "Phenomenology of Spirit" and then discuss it in the context of the black intellectual tradition. It's an interesting model to explore in engaging with the Canon, rather than just adding things to it or replacing canonical texts.

Closing:

11:30 Kirstine: That's all we have time for today, but there are many further questions raised by this. For anyone interested in these topics, I recommend listening to Daniel's talk, "Black History as World History in Full." You'll find a link to the recording of that talk in the description for this episode. So, that's all for us now, and once again, this has been UCL's EDI Dialogues. Thanks for listening.