

**“Creating a Black Vernacular Philosophy. Devonya N. Havis.
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Western philosophy has long been preoccupied with defining freedom, humanity, and subjectivity through strict frameworks that exclude all marginalized voices. Devonya N. Havis's *Creating a Black Vernacular Philosophy* challenges these limitations by offering a revolutionary rethinking of black Philosophy through the lens of the Black Vernacular Phenomena, a term used by the author to describe Black life's performative, cultural, and linguistic expression. The main argument of the work is that Black difference is not an issue to be assimilated into Western humanist traditions but rather an independent and disruptive force that cannot be totalized. Engaging with the works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Emmanuel Levinas, Devonya Havis critiques how Black philosophy is often constrained by redemptive narratives that attempt inclusion within a system built on exclusion. The book proposes an alternative way of conceptualizing Black philosophy that embraces identity fluidity, performance, and improvisation as essential political and philosophical strategies.

Through a multidisciplinary approach that combines literary criticism, philosophy, and cultural studies, the book explores how Black performance, sound, and language function as an act of resistance and epistemological interventions. The book contains five chapters followed by an introduction and conclusion. Each chapter builds on a central argument that Black Vernacular Phenomena challenges Western traditions, in particular, its emphasis on totality, fixity, and universal reason. The text is particularly critical of Black philosophy's engagement with humanism, claiming that these projects often reinscribe the hierarchies they seek to dismantle. In the final chapter, the book arrives at an important conclusion that there can be no more redemption songs, instead, the Black difference must be understood as a liberated and autonomous site of meaning-making and world-building.

The book begins by the first chapter examining the performative utterance, the idea that language is not just descriptive but also creates reality and truth. By using J.L Austin's speech act theory, the author argues that Black speech, music, and performance are not just cultural expressions but performative acts that generate new ways of being. This chapter frames the Black Vernacular as a counter-discourse that resists dominant narratives about Black history and identity. One example

that the author provides is the analysis of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, where Bigger Thomas' struggle with language becomes a site of identity formation. The novel illustrates how Bigger's inability to articulate his emotions and feelings in conventional terms forces him into performative modes of expression like violent action rather than speech. The work argues that Bigger's failure to perform within the expected linguistic frameworks is not a deficiency or inability, but an illustration of how traditional speech fails to express the Black experience. Thus, the author explains why Black vernacular forms such as music, coded language, and call and response serve as alternative communicative strategies. Moreover, the chapter examines the African American church tradition, where performative utterances in gospel music function as spiritual and political interventions. By analysing the ritualized call-and-response structure of Black worship, the book stresses how these utterances serve as a collective act of resistance, allowing the community to speak into existence reality that is denied by the dominant culture.

The second chapter introduces the concept of the Black (W)hole Ritual, a metaphor for how blackness exists within a disrupted power system. Using Foucault's critique of power, Havis challenges the common assumption that power is oppressive and prohibitive. Instead, power is seen as something that operates through normalization, control, and surveillance, shaping how people see themselves and the world around them. The key argument of this chapter is that Black identity cannot be fully captured by dominant conceptual frameworks since it is inherently unstable, performative, and fluid. The author uses Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* as an illustration, of the character Reinhart, a person who embodies radical indeterminacy. Reinhart is a gambler, a preacher, a hustler, and a lover all at once. His ability to shift between roles reflects the way a Black person resists categorization and containment. The book suggests that this character's multiplicity mirrors the improvisational nature of Black vernacular, where the meaning is never fixed but is in motion. Black (W)hole is a concept that is also tied to Derrida's deconstruction method, in particular his critique of binary logic and fixed meaning. Havis argues that Blackness, as constructed within Western thought, has always been positioned as the "Other", thus the absence against which whiteness defines itself. Besides seeking to reverse this binary, the book argues that Black difference should embrace its role as a disruptive force that challenges the inconsistencies of the system itself.

One of the most provocative arguments of the book is the critique of Black philosophy's engagement with humanism. Devonya Havis argues that several Black intellectual traditions have sought to reclaim the Black subjectivity within a humanist framework, but by doing so they often reproduce the same exclusionary logic of the Western system. For instance, the book critiques W.E.B Du Bois'

concept of double consciousness arguing that while Du Bois provides an important framework to understand the Black self-perception, his aim remains to promote assimilation into the Western ideal of humanity. The author suggests that instead of seeking inclusion within a system built on exclusion, Black thought must develop a new epistemological system that rejects the Eurocentric concepts of self, reason, and autonomy. This argument is further explained through a discussion of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. While Fanon critiques the psychological effect of colonialism, the author highlights that his goal remains the attainment of a kind of universal humanism. The work argues that this project is ultimately flawed because it assumes the concept of humanity is neutral rather than a concept shaped by the histories of violence and exclusion.

The final chapter brings the most radical claim that there can be no more redemption songs because the notion of redemption is tied to oppressive structures. Redemption assumes an endpoint, a resolution, a restoration of what was lost, but what if Blackness was never meant to be part of the Western philosophical project? Instead, Devonya Havis argues that Black difference should be understood as an autonomous power that operates outside of and in opposition to the dominant thought. Drawing on Levinas' Philosophy of alterity, the book argues that rather than seeking reconfiguration from the system, Black thought should embrace alterity as a mode of being. Havis uses jazz and blues as a metaphor for the black difference, illustrating how these forms of art resist standardization, embrace improvisation and refuse to have a single meaning. The chapter ends with a significant meditation on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in particular the character of Sethe. Havis argues that Sethe's act of infanticide is not just a tragedy, but an act to refuse redemption, a refusal to allow slavery's logic to determine her future. In this novel, *Beloved* herself becomes a figure of Black (W)hole, a haunting presence that refuses resolution.

In conclusion, *Creating a Black Vernacular Philosophy* is an uncompromising work that challenges not only traditional Western philosophy but several assumptions within the Black thought itself. Through cantering the Black performance, sound, and vernacular traditions, the book offers an insightful way to think and understand philosophy as something that lives, embodies, and is in flux. While some may find its critique of Black humanism controversial, its argument is compelling since rather than seeking redemption, Black difference should be embraced as an autonomous force. For Black studies scholars, researchers of cultural theory, and philosophy, this work is an essential read. It not only brings rigorous critique of the existing philosophical frameworks but also opens a new way for thinking about Blackness beyond Western epistemological thought.