

In particular, I was intrigued by your description of the subjects in your book as performing natural law as opposed to discerning it or articulating it.

LLOYD: I'm interested in thinking about natural law not just as a set of propositions to be affirmed or denied or as a pathway through reasoning to get to such propositions. Rather natural law is more of a holistic process of discernment examining the ways of the world that distort our orientation to the good, the true, and the beautiful and practices in the world that help to right that orientation. That orientation allows us to see that the laws on the books are not ultimate, and that there is something beyond them, that we can, through this process of discernment, move in the direction of better, more just laws.

For example, Frederick Douglass, who was one of the most famed orators of his day—many accounts show his listeners being dramatically moved by hearing him speak. I wanted to take seriously the moral effect of that rhetoric. It's not just mere rhetoric, but rather a set of ideas and forms of persuasion that work together to help listeners and a community see the limitations of social norms and laws and think about what alternatives might be possible.

OWENS: One of the fundamental claims of natural law theory is that it's universal. It describes a moral reality that exists outside of our particular experience. Yet your articulation of it is challenging—that in some way by reaching to the particular. Can you speak to that a little bit?

LLOYD: I'm interested in the moral implications of negative theology. While there are many fascinating ways that theologians try and speak about God, they are always getting God wrong because God can never be expressed rightly in human languages or with human concepts. When we move to moral theology, this point can seem stifling. How can we know how to act if all we can know about God is in the negative?

One of the ways that I wanted to address that, using the specific example of African American thought, is to think about the way that human nature is universal, and that what is universal about it is the way that it is ineffable. It images God. God cannot be rightly expressed in human languages or concepts, so there's something about the human that cannot rightly be expressed in human languages or concepts. It's out of that universal aspect of the human that we can discern critical and normative conclusions through collective processes of discernment.

OWENS: What then is the upshot for the well-established regime of describing human rights in g (en-US)M/CID 2018 DC BT9.5 o o 9.5 f humafLUhaffit

moral tradition meaningful to the Western culture?

LLOYD: That's an interesting way of put-