

the urban neighborhoods whites had fled.

In 2007, only 54 percent of African Americans owned their own homes. That rate is two percentage points lower than the

white rate in 1870. In recent decades, white homeownership has averaged about 77 percent.

Because homes are a major form of wealth in the United States, more is at stake than sim-

ply who owns the roof over a person's head. With income and educational inequalities persistent, there is little prospect for a quick reduction in the racial homeownership gap.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy for the Few

THE SOURCE: "Philosophy That's Not for the Masses" by James Ladyman, in *The Philosopher's Magazine*, Second Quarter 2011.

IT'S A COMMON CHARGE THAT philosophers do little of practical value and fail to make their work relevant and accessible to the general public. University of Bristol philosophy professor James Ladyman has had quite enough of this sort of rubbish. "I do not see why all philosophers, or even most, should be interested in communicating their thoughts . . . to the world," he writes.

The masses generally want answers to big questions: What is the meaning of life? Does a respect for animal life require me to be a vegetarian? But any answer philosophy could provide has long since been offered by generations of wise men past. Today's philosophers immerse themselves in fields such as physics and computer science that push the outer limits of human knowledge. There they can do the work of the gadflies Socrates exalted, applying their philosophical tools to expose flaws in scientists' episte-

mology and methodology. But in order to do so, philosophers must master these obscure, technical fields, and it is this specialization that makes their work so unintelligible to the layperson.

Philosophy should not be held to a different standard than other fields of academic inquiry, Ladyman argues: "Who understands the terms in which mathematicians and theoretical physicists communicate, other than those with sufficient training in the relevant technical areas?" The public is simply not equipped to understand the intricacies of these disciplines. "To these people, much of the dictionary will be impenetrable jargon," he asserts, "so philosophical journals pose no unique problems."

And with so many popular books on philosophy by writers who specialize in mediating between academia and the general population, why should academics have to translate their work themselves?

Perhaps, Ladyman suggests, the charge that philosophy does nothing of value stems from the

fact that the unschooled find it easier to believe that they aren't missing out on anything important than to do the hard work that is needed to understand modern philosophy.

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

Big Religion

THE SOURCE: "American Postwar 'Big Religion': Reconceptualizing 20th-Century American Religion Using Big Science as a Model" by Benjamin E. Zeller, in *Church History*, June 2011.

THE 20TH CENTURY SAW THE rise of the "bigs": big business, big government, and big science. Benjamin E. Zeller, a professor of religion at Harvard College, wants to add one more to the list: big religion.

Although no one has attached the "big" narrative to religion before, Zeller says that American religion since World War II has the same hallmarks as "big science"—heightened institutionalization and professionalization, increased entanglement with the government, a growth of popular support, and, of course, critics.

After the war, church membership jumped, growing from 90 million in 1950 to more than 114 million in 1960. The National Council of Churches (NCC) was established in 1950 (the same year as the National Science Foundation), bringing 25 Protestant denomina-