Paul C. Taylor is W. Alton Jones Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University. He received a bachelor’s degree in philosophy from Morehouse College, a master’s degree in public administration from Harvard University, and a Ph.D. in philosophy from Rutgers University. His research focuses primarily on aesthetics, social and political philosophy, critical race theory, and Africana philosophy. His books include *On Obama* and *Black is Beautiful: A Philosophy of Black Aesthetics*, which received the 2017 monograph prize from the American Society for Aesthetics. He has also provided commentary for a variety of print and broadcast outlets, including Xinhua News, the CBC, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the BBC.

As scholars increasingly turn to James Baldwin to diagnose the maladies of racial politics, and as theories of epistemic injustice grow increasingly sophisticated, it is tempting – and eminently reasonable – to use notions like innocence to track certain dubious and distressing features of contemporary ethical life. “Innocence and Devastation” begins with the thought that racial innocence is a problem, and will explore some aspects of this problem. But I will also argue for the importance of cultivating a more productive kind of innocence in relation to contemporary philosophical race theory. This productive innocence is a response to what Lewis Gordon calls “disciplinary decadence” and to what Elena Ruiz calls “epistemic imperialism,” and one route to it runs through the aesthetic theories of Mary Mothersill.

**Thursday, November 21 • 3:45 PM • YMCA 401**