Race, Reason, and Reality

Race:
The Reality of Human Differences

Vincent Sarich and Frank Miele
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Reviewed by Leslie Jones

Ashley Montagu called race "the phlogiston of our time" (Brace, 2000). Fellow anthropologist Alexander Alland Jr. (2002) describes it as a "flawed category." However, in their new book, Frank Miele, senior editor of *Skeptic,* and Vincent Sarich, professor emeritus of anthropology at Berkeley, show that it denotes a biological reality. Indeed, so wide ranging is the evidence they present that this review has unavoidable lacunae.

Race and Slavery in History

In *The Emperor's New Clothes*, Joseph L. Graves claims that the race concept is a relatively modern social construct (Brace, 2001); the Public Broadcasting System documentary *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, shown in 2003, suggested that the ancient civilizations did not differentiate people according to their physical characteristics. Miele and Sarich demonstrate, however, that racial groups were identified in the iconography and literature of all the ancient civilizations. The ancient Greeks elaborated a naturalistic/environmentalist theory of racial differences. Hippocrates attributed them to climate, in particular to gradations in intensity of sunlight. The classical scholar Frank Snowden (1996) has praised the clarity of the classical Greek authors when describing Egypt's "woolly haired neighbours" to the south.

Islamic scholars produced a sophisticated racial taxonomy. Historian Ibn Khaldun attributed black primitivism and impulsiveness to the tropical climate. The jurist Sa'id al-Andalusi agreed that blacks had not produced any science and learning and were lacking in self-control. Note, however, that the Arabs were no less derogatory about northern Europeans, also deemed to have an unpropitious climate.

Marxist scholars have suggested that racism emerged when the Western bourgeoisie needed to justify the enslavement of blacks (D'Souza, 1995). But this theory overlooks the universality and ubiquity both of notions of racial inferiority and of slavery throughout history. Indeed, enslavement of blacks within the Islamic empire preceded enslavement of blacks by Europeans. As the authors remind us, the Arabs were massively involved in the slave trade with black Africa. The worst conditions of black slaves in Islamic society rivalled the worst conditions in the antebellum South. When the American Civil War cut off the American supply of cotton to England, the Egyptians expanded their cotton production by importing more black slaves.

When the Europeans discovered the Americas, the issue arose of how native Indian peoples should be treated. Miele and Sarich argue that if race was essentially a convenient ideological device to justify slavery, the European ruling classes of the sixteenth century should have eagerly embraced the theory of polygenism (multiple origins of races). Yet in 1537, in *Sublimis Deus*, Pope Paul III upheld monogenism and the capacity of native Indians to receive Christianity. Similarly, in 1550, at a council convened by Emperor Charles V to consider colonization, the rights of native peoples were upheld (in theory at least).

The American School of Anthropology

The ethnologist James Cowles Prichard (1843) believed that all mankind was derived from a common stock and that the present diversity of races reflected the influence of climate and diet. But in *Crania Americana*, published in 1839, physician Samuel George Morton pointed out that paintings on ancient Egyptian and Assyrian monuments indicated that races had remained unchanged for at least 4,000 years. His collection of ancient skulls provided further evidence of the immutability of races since antiquity and also of race differences in brain size. Furthermore, Morton complained that the biblical account of the putative creation provided inadequate time for races to appear.

In *Types of Mankind* (1854), George R. Gliddon and Josiah Nott endorsed Morton's definition of species as "primordial organic forms." In their view the white man differs from the black man as much as the gorilla does from the orangutan. As for Prichard's Lamarckian theory of racial differentiation, they agreed with Morton (1842) that white people had inhabited hot countries for many centuries without any change in skin tone. Miele and Sarich deny that sympathy for slavery drove the American school's support for polygenism. They maintain that Morton and Gliddon were indifferent to the political implications of their racial theories. Yet in *Types Of Mankind*, Nott pointedly refers to Gliddon's conversations with Secretary of State John C. Calhoun, in May 1844. At this time, Calhoun was trying to negotiate the annexation of Texas in order to perpetuate slavery therein. Gliddon recommended Morton's research on race differences to Calhoun. According to Nott, Calhoun consid-

ered Morton's work a refutation of "current speculations about the origin and perfectibility of races…."

Anthropology: Science of Race or of Culture?

Originally, anthropology was regarded as the science of race. In 1866, James Hunt, the founder of the Anthropological Society of London, declared that anthropology's primary truth "is the existence of well-marked psychological and moral distinctions in the different races of men" (Hunt, 1866). After 1945, however, this viewpoint was marginalized within anthropology as cultural determinism became de rigueur.

As the authors observe, the fin de siècle disagreements between Ernst Haeckel, professor of zoology at Jena, and his former teacher, the cellular pathologist and radical politician Rudolf Virchow, were a precursor of this transformation of anthropology. The contending issue was the origin of man's distinctive moral and intellectual faculties, i.e., man's place in nature.

Virchow, the founder and president of the German Anthropological Society, was initially favourable to Darwinism. But he subsequently disputed man's descent from the apes and declared his agnosticism as regards the origin of species (Haeckel, 1906). Indeed, in his 1877 discourse *The Liberty of Science in the Modern State*, Virchow claimed that Darwin's theory of evolution was merely hypothetical and should not be taught in German schools and universities. Furthermore, he depicted Darwinism as subversive, discerning an affinity with socialism.

Whereas Virchow delighted Darwin's religious opponents by declaring that the mind is an immaterial entity, Haeckel advocated social Darwinism à outrance. In his opinion, anthropology, ethics, and political philosophy should all be subsumed to the theory of natural selection. He counterposed his monistic system to all forms of dualism that exempted man from the laws of evolution, notably Christianity. In *Freedom in Science and Teaching* (1879), a response to Virchow, Haeckel argued that socialism has an affinity not with Darwinism but with Christianity, since the latter proclaims the equality of all men before God. For Haeckel, Darwinism was inherently aristocratic since it showed that in any species only a select minority can survive and flourish.

Haeckel viewed anthropology as an extension of biology. In *Monism* (1894), he maintained that high civilization is a monopoly of the Mediterranean and Mongolian races. In *The Pedigree of Man* (1903), likewise, he attributed the immense superiority of the Caucasians to selection and predicted the eventual disappearance of inferior races. Like Spencer, Haeckel inferred that in the inexorable racial struggle the more perfect, nobler man triumphs.

There is an interesting postscript to this dispute. Q*ua* anthropologist, Virchow exerted a profound influence on Franz Boas, a German Jew who sought refuge in America from European anti-Semitism, eventually becoming professor

of anthropology at Columbia. Just as Virchow rejected social Darwinism and the descent of man from the apes (the pithecoid theory), so Boas contested the significance of race/biology for anthropology. Boas and his epigones upheld the autonomous influence of culture and the plasticity of human nature.

Race and Evolution

In "The Apportionment of Human Diversity" (1972) geneticist Richard Lewontin argued that human populations are so polymorphic that the human variation within any one population (85%) will exceed that between it and any other population (15%). Lewontin concluded that racial classification is of no heuristic value as regards *Homo sapiens* and that the race concept is socially destructive.

But Lewontin's figures, although technically correct, only apply to classic genetic markers such as blood groups, hemoglobin variants, and enzymes that are indeed more variable within populations than between them (Entine, 2001). Nevertheless, Professor Sarich, a molecular biologist, acknowledges that genetic differences between human races are small. Chimps share 98.4% of our DNA. He deduces that very small differences in DNA may translate into profound differences in morphology and behavior, both within humans and between humans and other species. He reminds us that artificial selection as practiced by breeders has in only a few hundred years produced the various different dog breeds. Yet notwithstanding the huge differences between breeds in morphology and behavior, researchers can only differentiate between a few breeds at the level of the gene.

Moreover, Sarich shows that despite the fact that genetically humans are 99.9% alike, racial morphological distances within our species are much greater than those between different species of gorillas or chimpanzees. Indeed, he believes that except for domesticated dogs, there is no other mammalian species whose constituent races are so strongly marked.

Sarich compared a data set of cranial/facial measurements for 29 human populations with a data set of ape measurements (chimpanzees and gorillas). Chimps are divided into two species. The two chimpanzee lineages separated 1.5 million years ago, and Sarich found that they differ from each other by 15% on the morphological distance scale. This is the same amount of variation as between the Japanese and the Arikara. Yet the latter only separated 15,000 years ago!

Rushton (2000) identified the primacy of variation as "Darwin's *Really* Dangerous Idea." Sarich, in similar vein, insists that natural selection "must have genetically based phenotypic variation to work on," both within and between groups. He notes that within a population, randomly chosen, normal individuals of the same gender can differ in brain size by around 12%. Two different populations can also differ on average by the same amount. Indicatively,

brain size and intelligence are correlated, as Leigh Van Valen demonstrated in a pioneering 1974 paper.

Extrapolating from the latest nuclear DNA, mitochondrial DNA, and Y chromosome studies, Sarich gives an estimated figure of forty to fifty thousand years for the African origination and dispersal of *Homo sapiens* under the "Out of Africa" scenario. As Watson (2003) has remarked, even 140,000 years "is a blink of an eye by evolutionary standards." Professor Sarich concedes that *Homo sapiens* is unquestionably a young species and that its differentiation into races is even more recent. Conversely, in many other species, subspecies (races) have been geographically isolated for millions of years and have accumulated large differences through genetic drift, mutation, and natural selection.

Because our species is so young, Gould (1992) inferred that race-specific genetic differences are very limited. Like Boas, he upheld the inestimable significance for man of cultural evolution. Echoing Huxley's 1893 Romanes lecture *Evolution and Ethics,* he (Gould) maintained that there is no evidence of changes in brain size since *Homo sapiens* appeared some 50,000 years ago. In other words, social progress has not depended on selection.

But Miele and Sarich dispute Gould's assumption that elapsed time determines the amount of change in traits that have survival value. Entine (2001), likewise, notes that natural selection can produce very rapid change, creating new species in relatively few generations. Geneticist Luigi Cavalli-Sforza has estimated that a variant of a gene leading to 10% more reproductive fitness could become dominant in merely 1,150 years. Messrs. Miele and Sarich also argue, contra Gould, that Western cultural superiority is intrinsic and springs from regional differences in "the selective demands on human cognitive capacities" during the last 10,000 years.

Indeed, the authors endorse the evolutionary theory of race differences elaborated by Kidd (1894), Jensen (1998), Lynn (1991), and Rushton (2000). According to this theory, for the populations that colonized the temperate and cold northern regions and that evolved into the Caucasoids and Mongoloids, complex mental abilities were more essential for survival than they were for the tropical or subtropical Negroid populations.

Critics of this "stimulus of cold winters" hypothesis have recently identified its apparent Achilles' heel, the fact that sub-Saharan Africans have the lowest average IQ (about 70) ever recorded. The implication that 50% of African blacks are mentally retarded by European standards is regarded as risible by these commentators.

However, in 1998 Rushton (2000), in collaboration with Mervyn Skuy of Witwatersrand University, undertook a study in South Africa of the comparative performance of black and white students on Raven's Progressive Matrices. This study confirmed the earlier findings of depressed black African IQ. But its authors concluded that environmental factors, notably poor schools, poor

homes, and high unemployment, may explain the lower IQ of black Africans compared to Afro-Americans.

Race and Politics

Races exist, then. But how should we live with them? Like Dietrich (2004), the authors observe that de facto America is becoming increasingly segregated on racial lines. Another salient trend is the demographic decline of the Caucasian populations of the U.S., as lamented by Buchanan (2002).

However, Miele and Sarich reject what they call "ethno-politics," as articulated by white or black nationalists. Unashamed individualists (notwithstanding their recognition of race), they are no less critical of ethnic quotas and race-norming in academic and faculty selection, as described by Gottfredson (1994). Professor Sarich witnessed the unintended effects of these invidious policies at Berkeley from 1984 to 1996, where two mutually resentful student bodies emerged separated by race, expectations, and performance. The authors agree with Jensen (2000) that, given the existence of racial differences in *g*, there is no escape from the adverse impact of cognitive tests on minority groups, except by imposing different selection standards for different groups.

In place of group rights and "ethno-politics," the authors favor maximum individual opportunity in a color-blind meritocracy. The main advantage of such a system, they maintain, is that productivity and overall standards in every domain will increase, though at the price of inequality and the alienation of certain groups with lower average cognitive performance.

Race: The Reality of Human Differences is a "trip out of political correctness." On undertaking such a journey, the reader could not wish for better guides.

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