

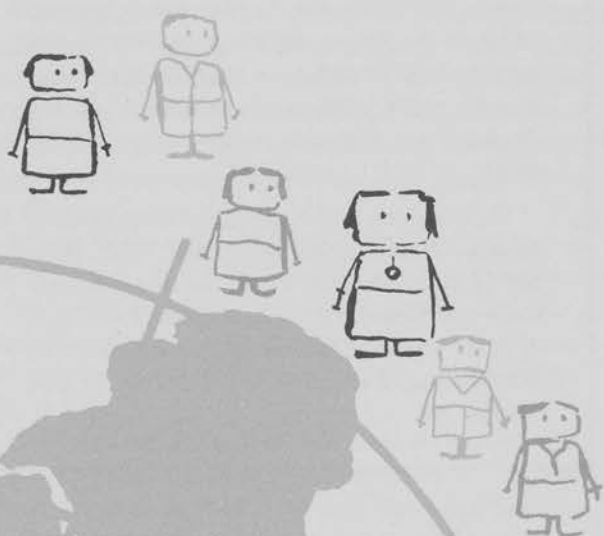


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National Conference of Christians and Jews



RACE

by John Gillin

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RACE

By John Gillin

Human beings, in talking about each other, use a great variety of words, some of which are more reliable than others.

A reliable word is one whose use promotes clear thinking and common understanding, rather than confusion and conflict. In recent times *race* applied to groups of men and women has proved to be one of the more slippery terms. So much is this the case that many people have advocated that it be dropped from the language.

Among the obvious objections to its continuation in the vocabulary is the fact that it has come to be used in an invidious sense by demagogues and other mountebanks to refer to any group or member thereof against whom the manipulator wishes to arouse dislike or hatred.

For example, "Members of *that* race—not our own, of course—are subhuman, and therefore . . ." In fact, one is tempted to speculate that there has been an attempt, unconscious or otherwise, to confuse in English, at least, two etymologically distinct homonyms — "race" referring to a human group, and "race" referring to a contest of speed—so that we are supposed to regard such-and-such a despised "race" as somehow having lost the "race" of human evolution or progress.

Very confusing?

I agree.

Yet it seems unlikely that for this reason alone the word will be immediately abolished from usage. It, therefore, seems more profitable for the person who wishes to avoid confusion to consider the scientific aspects of "race" as referring to groups of mankind.

Is "race" anything more than a word, or is there something or some class of things to which it properly

refers scientifically? And, if so, what is reliably known about it or them?

All Human Beings Belong to One Single Species

All living human beings belong to one single species, which is known scientifically by the Latin name *Homo sapiens* ("wise man"). This means, among other things, that all normal members of the species are able to interbreed, that they all have very similar structures, functions, and capabilities. In other words, no normal member of our species would ever be mistaken for a horse, or even for one of the great apes, by a conscientious and informed observer. We human beings have more in common with one another than with any other kind of living beings.

Nevertheless, within this large group we call our species (now estimated at over three billion members) there are some physical differences. The fact is that it is highly improbable that any two members of the species (with the possible exception of identical twins, triplets, etc.) are born exactly alike in all respects. Why this is and should be so can be proved on genetical grounds of probability or chance. The probability of such total, exact similarity in genetic materials seems to be in the order of one in several quadrillions. On this basis, since there are no more than two billion humans extant at this time, the chances of any two individuals, with the possible exceptions noted above, being born exactly alike at present are for all practical purposes nil.

This fact of divergence (even though minor) among human individuals is, of course, a matter of common observation. If it were not so, we in America — where most of the body is normally covered, at least in winter — would be unable to recognize our friends and acquaintances from their exposed body portions alone.

How can we explain these universal differences between individual members of the human species?

There are, in very general terms, two "factors" — heredity and environment. Let me try to elucidate briefly and non-technically.

First, the way we are built, act, and react is basically governed by our biological inheritance from our ancestors. It is now known that "biological inheritance" is transmitted by genes in the germ plasm. Each parent contributes one set of genes, and the other parent contributes another. Although the total number of genes in human beings is not precisely known, several reliable estimates have it that each of us carries no less than 40,000.

Since the experts on these matters now believe that the 40,000 contributed by each parent can be "shuffled" more or less at random (with some exceptions) in their contribution to the offspring, one begins to see why none of us should be exactly like either one of our parents, or exactly like our brothers and sisters.

We've All Got More Than a Million Ancestors

Try working out the permutations and combinations of 40,000 with 40,000 different traits — and I think you'll have quite a series of mathematical answers. Now, take into account the ancestors. Their number increases by geometric progression, so that I think you'll find that, even no more than 20 generations back, you'll have more than a million ancestors, provided there is no duplication of certain ancestors, such as occurs for offspring of cousin marriages. Each one of them contributed, in some combination, part of his 40,000 genes. If you like mathematics and have access to a modern "electronic brain," you may have a lot of fun calculating the results—and also you will see why I say that it is so very unusual for two human beings to be exactly alike.

So much for the "hereditary factor." Add to this the environmental factor, which literally means anything else — such as sun-burning or tanning of the skin, thousands of cultural patterns learned from



childhood in a particular social group, the results of "accidents" either major or minor, and so forth. Even if one is not a mathematician, he can see that "astronomical" is too weak a word to apply to all the possible combinations that might occur in a human being by the age, say, of 21.

Thus it is that the science of human development (including, of course, genetics) supports the common observation that human beings are individuals, that is, that they differ one from the other.

But the man in the street, although he may admit this much, nevertheless says, "Yes, but some are 'more different' than others." One is reminded of the old crack that, "We're all equal here, but some are more equal than others." Science does support the observation that, in certain respects at least, some human individuals are "more different" than others. Let us first consider where these differences actually lie.

Since the protagonists of "racism" usually point to alleged hereditary differences among groups of mankind, let us take them up first. What does science have to say? Zoology and physical anthropology (the latter is the branch of zoology dealing specifically with human beings) have a good deal to offer. Fundamental conclusions, not the technical details and the proofs, will be set forth here.

No Two — Not Even Brothers Are Exactly Alike

Science has indeed ascertained that biologically inherited differences do in fact exist between individual human beings. For example, in many a family one brother has a lighter skin than another brother: he can only get sunburned whereas his brother can acquire a beautiful tan. Likewise, many a mother has been exasperated by the fact that her daughter lacks the naturally curly hair she herself has. And so on. We have seen why it is that such differences may occur, even between members of the immediate fam-

ily. However, such differences were not much noticed among individual members of families, or even communities, until modern times when improved means of transportation gave many more people than previously the opportunity to see at firsthand a considerable variety of the families of the human race. It was then that numerous "white" people had the chance to observe that many Negroes, for example, had darker skins and kinkier hair than they had, regardless of the various individual differences among white people themselves. Likewise, it became obvious that on the whole most Mongoloids had "yellowish" skins, straighter and coarser hair, and flatter faces than most "white" people.

It was on the inspiration of such common observations that the scientific study of race as a biological—that is, as a hereditary—phenomenon began. Without going into details, one can say what some of the principal results have been.

First off, a close look at the other portions of mankind has shown beyond doubt their families, communities, nations, and so on, exhibit just about as much variety in and among themselves as "whites" do. Furthermore, these variations overlap with all others. Thus there are some "native Africans," south of the Sahara, who have hair as straight and skin as light or lighter than many a "native European." The latter may not want to believe this, but it can be proved.

Physical anthropology, when it comes to the exact description of the physical characteristics of mankind, is not a matter of guesswork. Very accurate methods of measurement and observation have been developed, not to mention precise procedures for investigating significant (although not all) genetic factors. And large quantities of carefully collected data have been analyzed.

The Notion of "Pure Races" Is a Myth

From all this it now appears that the notion of "pure races" is a figment of the imagination. If there ever



were pure races of human beings, science has been able neither to find them in fact nor to explain them in theory. Most human groups have apparently interbred since the beginning of being human. Since the beginning, some members, at least, of our species have been addicted to wandering. How else would they have inhabited all parts of the earth? And, generally speaking, history and archaeology both show that almost always when one wandering or exploratory group of humans came into contact with another group, however strange in appearance or tradition, the two groups interbred to some, even if to a small, extent. Whatever the rules regarding the "illicitness" of such intergroup sexual relations have been, experience has shown that, when opportunity offered, some interbreeding has practically always taken place. The mulattoes of the United States and the general tendency of European Jews to resemble in physical type the populations among whom they have lived are merely cases in point.

In view of these facts, the notions of "pure" races and also of "racial types" — considered as genetically distinguished and bounded groups within the human species — have been discarded by most scientific students of the matter. If we define a race as a major sub-group of the human species distinguished on the basis of *biological hereditary* characteristics, the most that can be said is that mankind as a whole can be sorted into large aggregations that cluster about certain *averages*. Even thus, averages of so many distinct criteria — skin and eye color, stature, shape of the head, amount of body hair, form of hair, blood groups, etc., etc. — are required that it is for practical purposes impossible to arrive at a description of a racial *type* which is anything more than an abstraction. This is to say that very few if any living individuals actually correspond to all details of a racial "type" thus constructed. For example, a modern examination of Norwegian army recruits (and Norway was once universally conceded to be the most "Nordic"

nation anywhere) showed that less than 19 percent of them exhibited even six of the 18 traits thought to be characteristic of the "Nordic type." Thus, on the basis of scientific studies, most of the so-called racial types of which the layman has heard simply do not exist as realities. On the whole they must be relegated to the category of "dream boys" and "dream girls" whom one never sees in the course of real life.

"Hereditary differences, I repeat, do exist among individuals, even among members of the same family. Hereditary likenesses also may be found among people whose ancestors have tended to interbreed with each other, and hence to plough back or mix their genetic materials with each other. Science does not deny the fact of "family likenesses" and even group likenesses in certain cases of relatively isolated breeding stocks. But, any scientific attempt to divide present-day mankind as a whole into precisely delimited categories of "races," such as the white, yellow, and black races, is doomed to failure. The most we can say is that certain numbers of individuals tend toward a given average, others toward another statistical norm, and still others are so differentiated that they do not "tend" anywhere — they are just what they are.

These findings, of course, run contrary to what most non-specialists believe. The layman thinks that there are pure races and that they are realities. He also has been led to the notion that any individual who does not conform to his notion of the ideal racial "type" must be "miscegenated," "tainted," "mixed up," and so forth. Perhaps as the findings of science in these matters become more widespread such popular misconceptions regarding race may be replaced by more realistic notions, just as folklore and superstition have been superseded by scientifically guided realistic points of view in many of the "material" aspects of life. From both a scientific and humanistic point of view, the important things in these matters have to do with *human* capabilities and potentialities, rather than with imaginary racial "types" or abstract



statistical arrays and averages. Being a member of the human species is what counts, not being tagged as a member of an illusory "racial" group.

The Idea of Racial Types Must Be Discarded

If the foregoing is understood, most of the improper "racial arguments" will be seen to be drained of meaning, even in their own contexts. If the notion that mankind can be divided into racial groups, distinct and delimited one from the other on the basis of biological heredity, has been shown to be rather ambiguous and unrealistic, arguments which were specious even when that notion was accepted, turn out to be absurd on their face.

Even at the time when it was still assumed that the human species consisted of several biologically delimited "races," the statement that "the Aryan race is superior to all others," was a contradiction in terms. Aryan is merely another word for the Indo-Germanic family of languages. And, even at the time it was introduced, scientifically informed people knew that the language one speaks has nothing to do with one's biological heredity. One learns his language, he does not inherit it through his genes. Most of the so-called Negroes, Orientals, and American Indians in the United States are Aryans, because they speak English, an Indo-Germanic language. They may be "superior to all others," but certainly not because they belong to a single, homogeneous, biological group.

Just as language has nothing to do with biological heredity, so likewise is the case with religion. Some feel that our religion comes to us by inspiration or revelation, others see it as a result of learning in a group with certain cultural traditions. But even the great religious leaders — such as Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha — do not claim that religion is a gift of the germ plasm. Thus the Jews, who, if they are to be thought of as a group at all must be considered a religious group, are certainly, on this basis

at least, not a "race," even in the older sense. Furthermore, numerous investigations of the physical features of the Jews show them to have an extremely wide physical variation throughout the world. There are Jews who are blond and those who are brunet; some are tall, others short; some fat, others thin; some with curly, others with straight hair; and so on. Essentially the same is true not only of Jews, but also of Mohammedans, Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists, and members of the other world religions.

Nationality Has No Connection with Race

To mention one other impropriety in the usual "racist" argument, we point to the well-established fact that nationality has no necessary connection with race or bodily heredity. This is especially obvious in Western Europe and the Western Hemisphere, where each nation includes a wide variety of physical types. Only rabble-rousers and their dupes can permit themselves any longer to use such empty phrases as "the German race," "the British race," "the American race," and the like.

If there are no clearly defined and demarked hereditary races, queries such as "Which race has superior intelligence?" are begged questions. The only proper answer is that, on the basis of our present evidence, mankind as a whole has more intelligence than any other species of animal.

Our need is to develop and use all the intellectual potential that there is in the species, rather than to worry about possible differences in "racial" intelligence. However, it should be mentioned that a great deal of scientific energy has been expended on trying to test the "intelligence" and other psychological characteristics of various groups tending toward diverse statistical norms of physique (*i.e.*, what used to be called biological races of men). Literally hundreds of tests of all types that scientists were able to think up have been administered. On the whole these efforts have failed to produce conclusive



evidence of either inferiority of superiority in intelligence or other abilities to contribute to or participate in civilization.

Intellectual Ability and Physical Traits Bear No Relationship

One of the reasons for inconclusiveness is, of course, the fact that it seems to be impossible to devise a test that measures innate ability as distinguished from learned experience and background. Furthermore, it is perfectly true that the tests show beyond doubt that there are differences between individuals in all large groups of mankind.

In any given group with common traditions, some are "brighter" than others. This is as we should expect, for not even in physical traits, as we have seen, are members even of a single family exactly alike. Yet, there is as of the present practically no evidence to indicate a correlation between intellectual ability and physical type of healthy and normal members of the species, whatever their skin color, hair color or form, and the like.

I know that some readers will probably ask something like the following: "Do you mean to tell me that you can place, say, a five-foot brunet Southern Chinese alongside a six-foot blond Swede and maintain that there is no hereditary difference between them?"

The answer is that of course there are differences between them. But, what we are doing is comparing two individuals, not two races of mankind, and we have no right to assume that these two individuals are "representative" of major racial groups.

When we compare all so-called whites with all so-called Mongoloids the range of variations in each group is so large and the intermediate types are so numerous that our two specimens can not be regarded as "typical" of these large populations taken as wholes. One reason this point is difficult to grasp is that there is still a strong current of thought among

us that holds that the various individuals of the world population *should* very much resemble one or the other of such "ideal types." The fact is, however, that the great majority of people do not, and there is practically nothing that can be done about it short of a policy of controlled breeding extending over centuries.

The outlook for the future, however, is that mankind will continue interbreeding at an increased rate with a resulting decline in hereditary resemblance to any ideal or "pure" types.

In the light of present actualities, then, "race" as a biological concept has become less and less useful in considering the human species. Nonetheless, the socio-cultural aspects of race are still very much with us and should be mentioned briefly. If it is becoming increasingly difficult to describe human groups precisely in terms of true hereditary homogeneity or approximation to type, it is still possible, of course, to say that many a group is "racial," even if it is not. Striking examples of this are to be found, for instance, in parts of South America.

In Peru, the culture defines two large "races," namely Peruvians and Indians (plus some others). The former wear European-type clothing, speak Spanish, and follow a European-type culture in general. The Indians, on the other hand, wear distinctive styles of clothing, speak a native language and follow a culture pattern that is a modified version of the aboriginal ways. Yet, large numbers of both "races" have mixed ancestries, so that from the point of view of physical anthropology alone it is often impossible to distinguish members of the two groups. It is obvious that we have here two large social categories who actually differ primarily in culture and mode of life. It happens that there is at least one community of "Indians" in the mountains of Peru who are of practically pure European ancestry. They are the descendants of a group of Royalists who took refuge in the mountains after the Republicans won



independence from Spain and who were later cut off from participation in the life of the new republic. Although they did not intermarry with the Indians, they were forced by isolation to take over "Indian" costume, mode of life, and language. Thus, they are today classed as "Indians." In Peru and many other countries, therefore, "race," while it connotes a biological group, actually denotes a socio-cultural division.

In most cases of "racial prejudice" the members of an upper group discriminate against members of a lower "racial" group, because of the customs, manners, costume, and/or social position of the latter, rather than because of their biological heredity itself. It has been repeatedly shown that whites have no inborn incompatibility or disgust vis-a-vis Negroids, for example. If, later in life, they exhibit prejudice, it is because they have acquired such an attitude from members of their own group. If white people have been trained to believe that Negroids are biologically inferior to them, it makes little difference in their attitudes and policies that this is not so.

Many well-meaning persons have the notion that prejudiced "race" attitudes can be eliminated in adults simply by bringing the scientific facts to their attention. Although it is true that some white adults do change their attitudes toward Negroids by a process of intellectual enlightenment alone, many others are unable to do so. Nor should the latter be indiscriminately branded as stupid or wicked because of this.

Racial attitudes are usually built into a person during the early years of life by a series of influences and incidents controlled and interpreted by the members of his own family and social group. These developments often take place during an age period before the child has fully developed the use of language and critical experience, and they are usually associated with basic emotions. Thus by the time he is an adult, even many an intellectually enlightened

person is unable to explain to himself or to understand why he feels repelled by members of another so-called racial group.

The situation is analogous to dislikes for certain kinds of food — the individual may persuade himself intellectually that his revulsion is silly, that it has no logical basis, and so on, but, nevertheless, he still "feels" it and he "can't help it." Such attitudes are deeply ingrained and emotionally tinged.

Thus it would seem that, while education of all adults in matters of race is eminently desirable, the crucial aspect is the education of parents and other rearers of children. It is they who must be motivated and trained to raise the next generation of children without building into them unreasoning and unnecessary attitudes toward other groups of human beings.

There may come a day when all men will treat each other as brothers, but such seems Utopian to say the least. In the meantime we may be able to learn to look at other human beings as individuals and to judge each on the basis of his true worth.

WHAT IS THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CHRISTIANS AND JEWS?

NCCJ is a civic organization engaged in a nationwide program of intergroup education. It enlists Protestants, Catholics and Jews who without compromise of conscience or of their distinctive and important religious differences work together to build better relationships among men of all religions, races and nationalities. Its operation is civic and social although, obviously, the roots of the brotherhood which it seeks to build are in the moral law and in religious faith.

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