

parents have the power to give life to one; nature has the power to make plentiful or barren the area in which one lives; the national state has the power to protect one's life and all that which is *familiar* to one. To some extent, these powers over life can be purposely manipulated, although, even then, the consequences of such manipulation are often unforeseen. To some extent these powers remain beyond our manipulation; that is one of the reasons why human beings stand in awe of them: they remain *ineffable* and *coercive*. Herein lies a part of the reason for the significance that human beings attribute to primordial relations attendant on birth: the family, the locality, and one's own 'people' bear, transmit, and protect life. This is why human beings have always attributed and continue to attribute sacredness to primordial objects and the attachments they form to them. This is one of the reasons why human beings have sacrificed their lives and continue to sacrifice their lives for their own family and for their own nation.

The above observations on primordiality are by no means new. They are merely a modest extension of Tönnies's<sup>15</sup> recognition of the significance that human beings attribute to descent and land and Weber's<sup>16</sup> recognition of the charismatic importance of the blood relationship (*Sippen*—or *Erbscharisma*). Eller and Coughlan, in so far as they are aware of it, disapprove of this tradition of sociological analysis and its recognition of the ineffable, the coercive, and the sacred in human affairs, including in ethnicity and nationality. They object to 'the mystical and spiritual language' used to describe the attachments to family and kin.

Perhaps Eller and Coughlan ought to raise their sights a bit higher, beyond the concept of the primordial, and object to Weber's concept of charisma as being 'unsociological, unanalytical, and vacuous', for charisma—certainly ineffable and coercive—is the gift or grace of god. It is of course of secondary importance that something was said by Tönnies or Weber or Shils. It is, however, of the utmost importance that human beings hold beliefs about the gift, preservation, and continuation of life and order some of their actions in accordance with those beliefs.

Understanding better the social phenomena of ethnicity and nationality is our task. Let us not be diverted from that task by either Eller and Coughlan's pedantic objection to 'terms [which] are not typically found in the sociologists' lexicon' or their callow political litmus test of acceptability as expressed in their objection to 'a concept specifically drawn from sociological discourse that can be shown to shore up the structures of social and racial inequality'. By such a statement, have our authors unwittingly let the cat out of their bag? When all is said and done, is it politics that drives their argument?

[The verdict of history: the inexpungeable tie of primordiality—a response to Eller and Coughlan', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 17: 2 (1994), 164–71.]

## 9 Does Race Matter?

*Do social races have any biological underpinning?*

At a trivial level, the answer to that question is an obvious 'yes'. A social race is *defined* as a group sharing physical (as distinguished from cultural) attributes.<sup>1</sup> But *must* there be such a linkage? Do physical differences between groups always lead to social differences? More generally, do physical phenotypes always matter socially? And, if so, why?

My theory, first stated a decade-and-a-half-ago, is very simple.<sup>2</sup> All social organisms are biologically programmed to be nepotistic, i.e. to behave favourable (or 'altruistically') to others in proportion to their real or perceived degree of common ancestry.<sup>3</sup> Social organisms evolved to be nepotistic because altruistic investment in unrelated organisms is biologically wasted and therefore *could* not evolve, as Darwin clearly saw well over a century ago. The evidence, both human and non-human, for rampant nepotism is overwhelming. The bibliography on humans alone now runs into several hundred titles. Favouring kin among humans is sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious, and biologically, it does not matter which. But, consciously or unconsciously, we must be able to discriminate according to degree of biological relationship to ourselves, if our beneficence to others is to increase our inclusive fitness.

For the most fundamental mammalian social tie, the mother–infant one, a simple mechanism is typically present: identification and imprinting shortly after birth by sight, sound, olfaction or a combination of these. Experimental switching of neonates has demonstrated these simple recognition mechanisms in many mammalian species. But often, and certainly for humans, the situation is much more complex. More than most (perhaps all) other organisms, humans recognise and make fine gradations of kinship, and dispense their largesse or their nastiness accordingly.<sup>4</sup>

Being intelligent and opportunistic animals, humans use all possible clues of relatedness, with a preference for the ones that are reliable, quick and cheap. Since it pays, in fitness maximisation terms, to be a fine-tuned discriminator of kinship in a wide range of situations involving hundreds or even thousands of relationships, any readily identifiable, unfalsifiable marker of probable common ancestry will be used. Specification of a few simple properties of the marker itself, of the social circumstances of the individual, and of the ecological conditions of the social encounter can lead one to good behavioural predictions. For example, it can be predicted that, among social mammals with heavy biparental investment in offspring, parenthood will be 'tested' by males more than by females, because paternity is exposed to much

more uncertainty than maternity. Mothers *know* their babies are theirs; fathers cannot be so sure, and therefore will look much more for physical resemblance, especially for signature-like rare characteristics such as a mole on the nose. Women concerned with paternal investment in their offspring, on the other hand, can be expected to stress the physical resemblance of their babies to their mates more than to themselves. 'Isn't he his father's spitting image?'

Let us now widen the focus from kinship in the narrow sense, to that form of extended kinship we call race or ethnicity. Both racial and ethnic groups are socially defined by real or putative common descent, and the distinction between the two types of groups is merely in the relative salience of biological or cultural *markers* of membership. My contention is that, in both cases, the social concern is with common biological descent, *even when the markers are primarily cultural*.

There are three main objections to my formulation of ethnocentrism and racism as extended forms of biologically rooted nepotism.

(1) The common descent of ethnic groups is often a myth, not a biological reality. Therefore, my argument is invalid. To which I reply: A myth, to be effective, has to be believed, and a myth of ethnicity will only be believed if members of an ethnic group are sufficiently alike in physical appearance and culture, and have lived together and intermarried for a sufficient period (at a minimum three or four generations) for the myth to have developed a substantial measure of biological truth. The Emperor of Japan can effectively claim to be the father of the Japanese nation in a way that Queen Victoria could never validate her claim as mother of India. Ethnicity or race cannot be invented or imagined out of nothing. It can be manipulated, used, exploited, stressed, fused or subdivided, but it must correlate with a pre-existing population bound by preferential endogamy and a common historical experience. Ethnicity is *both primordial and instrumental*.

(2) If ethnicity and race are both rooted in the biology of nepotism, why is it that most ethnic groups stress cultural markers of membership rather than heritable physical ones? The answer here is quite simple: because most ethnic groups seek to differentiate themselves from their immediate neighbours in situations where some short-distance migration and intermarriage take place. Therefore, most ethnic groups *look* so much like their neighbours that they *must* rely on cultural markers of distinction. The proof of the biological pudding is that, where physical, genetic markers do a reliable job of differentiating between groups, they *are* used. In fact, the conditions under which racial groups do emerge are quite predictable: they appear after long-distance migration of sizeable groups across visible genetic clines: slavery, colonialism, indenture, voluntary migration, military conquest are so many examples, especially across large geographical barriers such as oceans or deserts. And racial groups can only survive as long as interbreeding remains relatively

infrequent. Three or four generations of 25 per cent or more exogamy typically erode both racial and ethnic boundaries, and lead to the formation of new ethnic groups. Both race and ethnicity are *not* immutable, but their mutability is a function of exogamy over several generations.

(3) If biological nepotism is extended to large groups, which, under modern conditions, often comprise millions of individuals, has not the concept been diluted to the point of meaninglessness, and reduced to a mere analogy?

Of course, the more distant the biological relationship between two individuals, the more diluted the benefits of nepotism become. Indeed, the biological model predicts that the preference is proportional to the degree of relationship. Relatedness is relative. Ego is at the core of a set of concentric circles defining declining degrees of relationship: nuclear family, extended family, lineage, clan, dialect group, subethnicity, nation. These levels of relatedness are imbedded into one another. Circumstances and interests will determine the level of solidarity which is activated at any given place and time, in a classical fission-and-fusion scheme such as British anthropologists have described for African segmentary lineage societies. But the principle of nepotism, however diluted, suffuses all levels, and there is no *a priori* reason why nepotistic discrimination should stop at any particular point, unless it can be displaced by a superior strategy of fitness maximisation. Brothers *do* murder each other, but not gratuitously and not as easily as strangers. When they do, there is usually a big payoff, such as a throne, an inheritance or a harem. To affirm the operation of nepotism, even in large groups, is not to deny the operation of other principles of cooperative behaviour (such as class solidarity), or fitness maximisation (such as deceit and treachery). The size of the group dilutes the effectiveness of solidary behaviour whatever the base of solidarity, but not more so for ethnic groups than for other social groups such as classes, corporations, clubs or army units, and perhaps even *less*. Ethnic and racial groups can be politically mobilised, even on a huge scale, with greater ease and rapidity, than other social groups, especially under external threat from an enemy who is himself defined in ethnic or racial terms.<sup>5</sup>

*Does the biology of social race explain the etiology of racism in contemporary societies?*

Better put, does my theory of the biological genesis of social race predict and explain contemporary racism better than competing theories? The answer, I think, is yes, not because it supplants other theories, but because it complements them at a higher level of theoretical generality. It provides a predictive scheme of when, where and why racism can be expected to wax and wane, on a world-wide basis, without having to invoke any special cultural, psychological or historical causes.

Racism, defined as discriminatory behaviour based on inherited physical appearance, can be expected to arise whenever variance in inherited physical appearance is greater *between* groups than *within* groups. This is a relatively rare event, except when two or more hitherto isolated populations migrate across large geographical obstacles. It is even rarer for intergroup variance to *remain* greater than intragroup variance for long, because contact generally brings about interbreeding. So, racism will appear after long-distance migration, but will only persist as long as social barriers to exogamy prevent intermixture, and thus the recreation of a more typical situation where intragroup genetic diversity exceeds intergroup differences. Racism cannot be sustained long if racial membership cuts across the microkinship of the family. Precisely *because* social race is an extension of the principle of nepotism, it cannot long survive interbreeding. Even the rare exceptions, such as relations between white and brown Afrikaners in South Africa, confirm the rule: the 'races' only survived the interbreeding of slavery because of the reimposition of an endogamous caste system after slavery.

Having specified the objective conditions which lead to the rise and the decline of racism, does it follow that racism will inevitably accompany these conditions? Unfortunately, I think the answer is, again, affirmative. Why? Because we are not only selfish maximisers, but intelligently opportunistic ones. Sociality is synonymous with discrimination. Only a fool behaves indiscriminately towards all. We must constantly decide when to be nice or nasty, trusting or suspicious. In the last analysis, we have only two bases for doing so: reciprocity and nepotism. Reciprocity is tricky, unstable, open to cheating, and often dependent on costly information or past experience. It only works between *individuals* who *know* one another well and who expect to *continue* interacting in a mutually beneficial way without deceit or coercion. For nepotism to yield its genetic reward, the only requirement is correct assessment of relatedness. It works best if the cost of that assessment is minimised, that is, if the assessment is reliable, easy and fast.

These simple principles enable us to predict which markers of group membership will be used under what conditions. Where neighbouring groups look alike physically, cultural markers do a better job of assessing group membership than genetic traits. Not all cultural markers are equally good. The *beret* may be a symbol of Basque ethnicity, but it is not reliable. Indeed, it has been usurped by millions of Frenchmen, Spaniards and others. Military uniforms are used for ready recognition of friend and foe from a distance, but they too are open to cheating. That is why costume is frequently a *symbol* of ethnicity, but never a *test* of it. Facial scarification is much more reliable than dress because it cannot easily be undone. Cultural markers of ethnicity which permanently change physical appearance are common: circumcision, tooth filing, tattoos and so on. Language is also a common marker. Even though it is strictly cultural, it is learned early in life and difficult

to 'fake' in adulthood, because few people retain the ability to mimic the phonetics of a language learned after puberty. Until recent migrations, someone who spoke your dialect without a foreign accent was most likely to be a native fellow ethnic. But the drawback of language as a marker is that, though reliable, it is fairly slow. You have to ask questions before you shoot, and sometimes you cannot afford the delay.

Let us turn to biological markers. They only work between groups that look quite different. Between Zulus and Boers in South Africa, they worked with complete efficacy: you could shoot at 500 metres and never make a mistake. Norwegians and Swedes, on the other hand, could never be racists towards one another, even if they wanted to. They have to listen to one another before they can tell who is who. The Nazis tried to be racists with Jews but their biological markers worked with perhaps 10 to 15 per cent reliability. In practice, they used mostly cultural markers: circumcision, synagogue attendance, the Star of David, denunciations, surnames, etc. Nazi racial theory ludicrously outstripped the reality of genetic differences. They actually had a very difficult time picking out Jews from their Gentile neighbours, especially in the assimilated Jewry of Western Europe.

Physical markers, in short, only 'work' under the limiting and rare condition of genetic heterozygosity being greater between groups than within. If such a condition is present, however, does it follow that racism is inevitable? Not by a long shot, because most genotypic differences are phenotypically hidden by recessivity or are so cryptic as to be useless for purposes of quick and easy group membership ascription. Blood types, for instance, must be tested by antigens from a blood sample, and the test is slow and costly enough that soldiers in combat are *culturally* tagged (or, in the case of the SS in Nazi Germany, even tattooed) for their genotype.

In practice, then, only a few inherited phenotypes are culturally utilised to form social races, and they are chosen, not for their behavioural significance, but simply for their *visibility*. Skin pigmentation is the most widespread because it is the most visible from the greatest distance and subject to only a limited range of environmental variation. (The genetics of skin colour are still poorly understood and are probably under the control of four to six different loci.) Facial features (notably eye, lip and nose shape), hair texture and physical stature are also used where they are diacritic. For example, in Rwanda and Burundi where the Hutu-Tutsi-Twa distinction is marked by large group differences in height, stature is widely used as a criterion. It works better in Rwanda where a rigid caste system hindered interbreeding, than in the more fluid social structure of Burundi, but, in both cases, the physical distinction was used as a quick and dirty basis for sweeping genocidal action (against the Tutsi in Rwanda, against the Hutu in Burundi). A particularly gruesome atrocity against the Tutsi in Rwanda was to amputate them at the knee to cut them down to size.

This double condition of greater inter- than intragroup heterozygosity and high phenotypic visibility predicts when, where and why physical phenotypes get transmuted into social races. The reason why racism became the great pandemic of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was simply the sudden acceleration of large-scale, long-distance migration across wide genetic clines. The social consequences were enormous and noxious because racial distinctions are peculiarly invidious and immutable, well beyond cultural distinctions. All group distinctions between in-group and out-group are designed to exclude potential competitors from competition for scarce resources, but racial distinctions are especially nasty because they are almost totally beyond individual control. You can learn a language, convert to a religion, get circumcised or scarified, adopt a dress style, but you cannot become tall or white.

In practice, social race is always a social stigma for the subordinate group, and all attempts to pretend otherwise have been singularly unsuccessful. Pragmatically, in terms of policy, it means that institutionalisation of racial categories, however innocuous or even benevolent it may appear, is frequently noxious in its consequences. I am thinking of such measures as racial questions on censuses, race-based affirmative action and similar measures, which have generally had the effect of reinforcing stigmatised racial distinctions.<sup>6</sup>

### Conclusion

Let us now close the circle on the relationship between genes and behaviour. I have repeatedly stressed that behaviour, human and non-human alike, can only be understood within an evolutionary framework that gives equal weight to genes and environment acting in concert. For humans, culture is, of course, a large part of the social environment of our species. A genetic effect on behaviour can be direct and result from natural selection, even when it leads to a reduction in fitness (e.g. overeating when food is available, leading to obesity in affluent societies, but providing valuable caloric storage in unstable hunting and gathering economies characterised by cycles of feast and famine; or the craving for drugs which mimic the pleasurable sensations of natural enzymes).

The case of racism, however, is different. The linkage between genes and behaviour is clear, but it did not evolve by natural selection. Racism is conceivably a case of culture 'highjacking' genes which were selected for different ends (e.g. skin pigmentation regulating exposure to sun radiation in different latitudes), and making them serve a totally different social agenda. Yet, that social agenda itself had an underlying biological programme: fitness maximisation through nepotism. Finally, but not less importantly, that social agenda itself had an enormous feedback effect on the life chances of different

groups, on their reproductive success, and therefore, in the final analysis, on the course of human evolution itself.

We are only in the infancy of understanding the co-evolution of genes and culture, but understand it we must if we are to make sense of our behaviour, especially behaviour, such as racism, which does not *seem* to make sense.

[ 'Does race matter?', *Nations and Nationalism*, 1: 3 (1995), 359–68.]

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## 10 Ethnicity as Being, Doing, and Knowing

### Language and ethnicity

The contempt for ethnicity and its passionate rejection by the bulk of modern Western intellectuals make it imperative that we recognize Herder and the social, cultural, anthropological tradition derived from his seminal contributions. We need to recognize and appreciate that ethnicity is a powerful experience. Sex roles are not the same as sexism; religious beliefs are not the same as religious bigotry; and the phenomenon of ethnicity is not identical to ethnocentrism or racism.<sup>1</sup> Ethnicity must therefore be approached seriously, even sympathetically, as a social dimension that has received too little attention and too much abuse during the past two centuries. That approach will benefit the Eastern European specialist and all of social theory.

### Ethnicity is 'being'

Ethnicity in the pre-mobilized state is the untutored and largely unconscious ethnicity of everyday life and ethnographers have catalogued how members of various ethnic collectivities discuss and recognize that phenomenon. The extent to which ethnicity is intuitively defined and experienced as part of an actor's 'being' (as distinct from his 'doing' and 'knowing') is often overlooked in a literal sense. Ethnicity has always been experienced as a kinship phenomenon, a continuity within the self and within those who share an intergenerational link to common ancestors. Ethnicity is partly experienced as being 'bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, and blood of their blood.' The human body itself is viewed as an expression of ethnicity and ethnicity is commonly felt to be in the blood, bones, and flesh. It is crucial that we recognize ethnicity as a tangible, living reality that makes every human a link in an eternal bond from generation to generation—from past ancestors to those in the future. Ethnicity is experienced as a guarantor of eternity.

The sense of 'being' of ethnicity pre-dates the Hebraic and Hellenic *Weltanschauung* of familial kinship. The externalist is concerned whether that