

NOTES AND DISCUSSION

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THE CONCEPT OF RACE *

I remember a seminar held at the University of Heidelberg, soon after Hitler came to power. Karl Jaspers, who was shortly to lose his professorship because he had committed the crime of *Rassenschande*—in other words, because he had married a Jewess—was discussing a student's essay on Hegel's philosophy. He said: "In these days when we hear all too much about race, I advise you to read X's book on 'race among the herrings'. You will then see what we know about race today, when human passions are not involved."

* The following is a critical examination of the bases of international action already taken in this sphere, in which it is difficult to combine (or to separate) the claims of scientific objectivity and the demands of ethics. It is thus a study of the kind of difficulties inherent in work that is characteristic of certain institutions of our time. These difficulties raise questions that lie far outside the scope of this study, which aims only to put before the reader an example—an example that is anything but clear-cut, and requires discussion—of the conflicts that arise in areas where races meet, all of which can only be allayed if responsibilities are more evenly shared. (*Editor's note*)

Ambiguity

The concept of race is one of the most ambiguous concepts known to man. So, of course, are many other concepts of the first importance, such as life, the soul, matter—or justice and love—or eternity and the absolute.

Ambiguity, however, is even less acceptable in the concept of race than in those just mentioned. Its very meaning demands that it shall not be ambiguous but clear, positive and empirically obvious. The soul implies mystery; race precludes it. There have always been two aspects of the concept of race. First, it has been the sum of a set of characteristics, differing from one group to another, and clearly perceptible—wholesale statements and crude observations. Second, it anticipated a branch of science still uncharted, based on knowledge yet to come. Race has never been a hypothesis used for purposes of explanation, like ether, for instance—it has been a collection of empirical data to be elucidated and explained. For all its original ambiguity—on the one hand a fact of everyday life which was beyond all doubt, and on the other the subject of critical scientific research—race in both its aspects has at least been accessible to objective research and experiment.

When a concept foreshadows scientific knowledge, its legitimacy increases as its content is clarified. Its meaning becomes clearer, its relationship to facts more diversified and many-sided, and its substance increases as knowledge advances. Scientific progress, however, has made the concept of race more and more difficult to grasp, more and more indistinct and evanescent—the opposite of what should have happened. Every attempt to define it more exactly has made it more elusive.

In the end, we began to question its very reality. Yet, no sooner had a careful study shown it to be lost in insubstantiality than again the same old rough and ready observations cropped up—the colour of the skin or the texture of the hair.

“Inequality”

Then, again, human passions—or simply human interests—have profoundly affected the issue.

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These quite obvious differences, which anybody could see, chanced at a certain moment in history to coincide with differences in strength and in stages of development. The stronger enslaved the weaker, and recognized no bound to their supremacy than those of their own interests—beyond which point the slave would die. Nor was this limit always observed, for there were plenty of slaves, and they had plenty of children.

But if the former enjoyed unlimited power and the latter had no means of resisting, did it not show that the former were “superior” and the latter “inferior”? This view added “superiority” or “inferiority” to the other objective, manifest characteristics of races. It was seen as a factual element in the situation, and at the same time as justifying that situation. In this way, fact and value became combined in the concept of race.

Man loves nothing better than that which justifies his injustice. He will cling to it with all his might.

Race has become a component part of the world system and of the course of history.

“Objectivity”

At this juncture, however, we must point out that, as a rule, those who wield power do not really feel that they belong to a particular “race”—even to a superior one. They belong to the human species. It is the others who are marked out by the fact that they have physical characteristics peculiar to a certain race, which anyone can see—and this means that they are partly or altogether sub-human. In short, these others are at fault in belonging to a race, whereas those in power are “universal.” (As we shall see, Nazism was exceptional and atypical on this point, as on others. It lies outside the general history of racialism.)

Here we note again one of the inherent characteristics of race—it objectifies, it pertains to the other, to man as an object, not to “me.”

Hitlerian racialism and colonialism

The end of the Second World War saw both the fall of Hitlerism and the decline of the colonial era. And there was just enough real

connexion between the two, as regards race, to make all sorts of confusion possible. The word "racialism" is used in both contexts and rightly so. In both cases the word implies a detestable attitude. But the facts of the two are quite different.

The colonial racialists consigned people of a different colour, or of an obviously different physical type from their own, or who lived far from their own country, to the sub-human category of a race apart. The Nazi racialists behaved in the same way towards people of the same colour as themselves, people whose physical differences from them were so ill-defined that there remained always a pervasive and general suspicion about everybody, people whose geographical origins were now obscure and forgotten, and who lived in their midst. The colonialists' prime object was to go on exploiting their victims, and they justified their exploitation by an appeal to racial prejudice—the claim that those they were exploiting were intellectually inferior. The Hitlerites always used people's envy of the Jews, whom racial prejudice credited with a dangerous intellectual superiority, as an emotional spur. Whereas the colonial racialists claimed that their victims had no culture of their own, the Nazi racialists expressed fears that the Jews would exert too great an influence on the Germans' own culture. The colonialists wanted "the other race" to survive as a source of profit to them; the Hitlerites' aim was to destroy it utterly.

The statement, in the preamble to the Constitution of Unesco, adopted in 1946, that the Second World War ("the great and terrible war which has now ended") "was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men and by the propagation in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races," does not refer primarily to colonialist racialism, but to Hitlerian racialism. But by 1951, when the "Statement on the nature of race and race differences" was issued, under the auspices of Unesco, by a group of anthropologists and geneticists, what was in mind was no longer Hitlerian racialism but colonialist racialism, which was coming more and more into the forefront of discussion as the process of de-colonization advanced. This change of viewpoint between 1946 and 1951, which has grown still more marked, must be made clear. Failure to do so has led to a certain amount of confusion and failure to distin-

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guish between different ideas, which has further bedevilled a sufficiently complex problem, to no good purpose.

The evolution of the idea of race

Let us now see how ideas on race have evolved between 1951 and the present day. We may distinguish three stages: the above-mentioned 1951 Statement, the "Moscow Propositions," drawn up in 1964 by twenty-four biologists and physical anthropologists, and the present situation as described by various sociologists recently consulted.¹ To put it briefly, the 1951 Statement, which includes the reservations and set formulae to be expected in a document signed by scholars and dealing with questions that are still controversial, attenuates or expurges the very existence of "race," as far as possible. The idea behind the 1964 "Moscow Propositions" is quite different, although some passages are word for word the same. They rather reaffirm the existence of races, but stress the haziness of the borderline between one race and another and the fact that they can be affected by social, cultural and historic factors. The present situation seems to be essentially one of extreme perplexity. It is therefore more necessary now than ever before to submit implied assumptions, ideas and intentions to critical examination.

It should be made clear at the outset that both the Statement and the Propositions were inspired by ethical considerations; they were not simply scientific accounts. They were produced as a result of the urgent need for action. The various forms of racialism were using the authority of science in general and biology in particular for their own ends, and were claiming scientific justification for their tenets—that some races were "superior," and others "inferior," that ability or lack of it was determined once and for all by unchangeable genetic structures, that degeneracy would result from mixed marriages, and so on. The superstitious faith in science that is characteristic of our day enabled these tenets to poison public opinion. The first essential, therefore, was to put a stop to the spread of inhuman propaganda built up on a pseudo-science. Because of this, however, certain

¹ During a Unesco information mission.

judgements (for instance, concerning possible inequalities in given fields) were, *a priori*, excluded. Some basic ideas were not clearly defined, and no doubt could not be (the very idea of “equality” in this context, for instance). It may be that the dangerous if salutary perplexity of our day is the result of this excessive readiness, in the past, to meet the requirements of international morality. If it is true, however, as various specialists maintain, that the problem of race is destined to become more and more crucial to peace, perhaps the time has come for us to strive more earnestly to seek the truth.

1951 Statement

(a) The first principle laid down is that all men belong to a single species and are derived from a common stock; it is not explained, however, how the different “human groups” diverged from the “common stock.”

It would seem that the statement is analogous to that on which the Catholic Church bases the universality of original sin (the encyclical *Humani generis*). For while the fact that there was a common stock does not imply that there was only one original couple, it indubitably implies that there was only one divergence from the previous species towards man, and that is occurred at one time and in one place.

Questions

Does *the unity of the human species* depend on this unity of the stock? Should we have to discard belief in it if the hypothesis of the emergence of man as a scattered process were one day proved to be true? Is it subordinate to some positive fact? And what do we mean by this “common stock,” on which our argument is essentially based? Are we not much more sure—*although in a different way*—of the unity of the human species than of the “common stock?”

Even from a moral and political standpoint, is the “common stock” a guarantee against racialism of any kind? What objective criteria could we use to distinguish *all*

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descendants and only them—in other words, to define the limits of the human race?

(b) It is explained how “the physical differences between human groups” are due to *a combination of differences in heredity and environment and to various crossings*. “Existing races are merely the result, considered at a particular moment in time, of the total effect of such processes on the human species.”

Questions

It is certain that the term “physical differences” has a scientific meaning, in reference to human beings? Could one, without changing the human state, completely dissociate the “physical differences” (the “zoological frame”) from cultural processes, when “marriage customs” have been included among the causes of these same “physical differences?”

(c) It is stressed that *political, religious and cultural groups do not coincide with racial groups*, and that socio-cultural differences appear not to be influenced by genetic differences.

Just as “physical differences” were isolated, so here genetic differences are isolated—that is, the body.

(d) *The scope of racial classifications has been limited* in several ways: because of disagreement among anthropologists; because the groups grade into each other and overlap; and because the differences among individuals belonging to the same group are greater than those between the averages for different groups. It is also emphasized that the differences observed “give no support to” notions of any general “superiority” or “inferiority” in reference to these groups.

Questions

If the classification of races were easier and more obvious, or if it were one day to become so thanks to the discovery of new criteria, would that help the case of the racialists?

Is it enough to say that observed differences “give no support” to any “superiority” or “inferiority” of a parti-

cular group? And what if that were to change one day? Do not human rights require a far deeper foundation?

Besides, what would “superiority” or “inferiority” mean here?

(e) Anthropologists disagree about *mental characteristics and capacity* and attribute varying importance to innate capacity and environmental opportunity. The text of the Statement reflects these differences of opinion by juxtaposing moderate affirmations of opposite trends, but seeks to play down any relation between racial group and performance in intelligence tests. It shows that it is difficult to study psychological heredity because of the educability of the individual and concludes that “his intellectual and moral life” is largely conditioned by his training and environment. Social and cultural differences seem scarcely to be determined by hereditary genetic differences, but rather by *history*.

Questions

Have not the “mental characteristics”, “capacity” and “intelligence” measured by psychological tests themselves been defined, accorded value, and made measurable by a particular racial group?

Even supposing that certain “intelligence tests” thus defined yield averages varying considerably from one racial group to another, would that be enough to give credit to the principle of racial inequality? Is the equality referred to in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of this order?

Moreover, if they were to be valid, such comparisons would first necessitate equality of material, social, psychological and other conditions among the various racial groups, i.e. the end of all discrimination. Even so, are we prepared to make the principle of equality among men dependent on the equality or inequality of the results of these tests?

The 1951 Statement itself replies “no” to this last question. In its short paragraph 8, unexpected in this context, but all the more valuable, it says: “We wish to emphasize that equality of

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opportunity and equality in law in no way depend, as ethical principles, upon the assertion that human beings are in fact equal in endowment."

But on what, then, do they depend?

(*f*) There remains the dual affirmation that there is no evidence for the existence, anywhere, at the present time, of so-called "pure races" and that *race mixture* cannot be regarded as having "disadvantageous effects," the conclusion being that no "biological justification" exists for prohibiting or advising against intermarriage between persons of "different races."

Questions

What is meant here by "disadvantageous effects"? What criteria of value are being considered? Are they universal criteria—or peculiar to a certain "race," however impure it may be, or to a certain "group of mankind"? Is it possible or permissible, in a text involving scientific responsibility, to use the expression "disadvantageous effects" as if its meaning were unequivocal and self-evident?

Admittedly, the intention was to combat racial prejudice, in support of which pseudo-scientific certainties had been advanced, from the biological standpoint. But is it in fact combating them to accept that same standpoint for such a debate without making immediate, express reservations?

Moscow Propositions

Thirteen years later, the "Statement" has been—symptomatically—reduced to "Propositions," which incidentally show striking progress in clarity. A number of obscure paragraphs in the first text have simply disappeared.

(*a*) The "Propositions" endorse the affirmation of derivation from a "common stock," and the attribution (in much more categorical terms) of biological differences to the inter-action of heredity and environment; they also refute the idea of pure races,

defined with new precision as genetically homogeneous populations. While stressing the great genetic diversity of each population, they declare that there are “obvious physical differences” between populations, many of which have a genetic component. But immediately there is a qualification: these differences “most often consist in differences in the frequency of the same hereditary characters.”

(*b*) Like the Statement, the Propositions refer to the usual racial classifications, but again with qualifications: no clear-cut categories, intermediate groups, differences between individuals within a race, non-correspondence of the “combination of these traits in most individuals” to the “typological racial characterization.”

But then comes the great novelty. The Statement, according to its title, was concerned with race and race differences; the Propositions are confined to “biological aspects of race.” Yet it is precisely in the latter that emphasis is placed repeatedly on the specific attributes of human evolution. Reference is made to the “complexities of human history,” migrations, territorial expansions and contractions, and to the fact that, as a consequence, general adaptability to the most diverse environments is more pronounced than adaptation to specific environments, that progress is based on cultural achievements and not on genetic endowment (implying a profound modification in the rôle of natural selection in man today), and that the mobility of human populations and the social factors lead to more frequent mating between members of different human groups, tending to mitigate or eliminate acquired differentiations with increasing intensity and bearing no relation to what occurs in other species. Hence the “dynamic equilibrium” of the hereditary characteristics of the human populations, the fluid character of “races” constantly “in a process of emergence and dissolution” and thus incapable of the clear-cut definitions possible in the case of many animal races.

(*c*) As regards interbreeding, the Propositions endorse the ideas of the Statement and add two more: they affirm on the one hand, that “the biological consequences of a marriage depend only on the individual genetic make-up of the couple and not on their

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race,” and on the other hand, that, far from having “biological disadvantages for mankind as a whole,” interbreeding “contributes to the maintenance of biological ties between human groups and thus to the unity of the species in its diversity.” There is therefore “no biological justification” for prohibiting intermarriage between persons of different races, or for advising against it “on racial grounds.”

Questions

If the “unity of the species” depends on the number of inter-racial marriages, must we admit that it is compromised by the plurality of races?

After all that has been said about the predominance of specifically human factors—mobility, history, society, culture—what can be the meaning of this “maintenance of biological ties” and “unity of the species” by interbreeding? How important is it? Has it a scientific significance?

What is the meaning of “human diversity” coupled with “biological unity” through interbreeding? Is this mere rhetoric?

(d) The Propositions lay emphasis on *the intervention of cultural factors* in human evolution. “Man since his origin has at his disposal ever more efficient cultural means of non-genetic adaptation.” Here we must stress the importance of “since his origin”. The authors of the Propositions did not, as we see, want to envisage human evolution as purely biological to begin with, with cultural factors as a later addition. No, cultural factors are operative *from the start*. We shall revert to this later. We are told, moreover, that biological and cultural factors are by no means independent. Cultural factors “enlarge the size of the breeding populations and so act upon their genetic structure.” But “it is not justifiable to attribute cultural characteristics to the influence of the genetic inheritance.” Paragraph 12 seems full of subtle distinctions, with a “however” and a “but.” It seems to admit “a certain degree of coincidence between physical traits on the one hand, and linguistic and cultural traits on the other,” due to the genetic effects of cultural factors, and not the reverse.

(e) The exclusion of *mental traits* from any racial classifications, in particular those measured by certain “psychological tests,” is less radical than in the Statement. It is admitted that heredity may have an influence, but emphasis is immediately laid on the absence of proof and the difficulties of the study, whereas “ample evidence attests to the influence of physical, cultural and social environment.” In addition, the “genetic capacity for intellectual development, like certain major anatomical traits peculiar to the species, is one of the biological traits essential for its survival in any natural or social environment.”

Questions

What is this “genetic capacity for intellectual development”? Does the sole fact that it is “essential to the survival of the species” justify the assertion (a) that it is universal, (b) that it is identical at all times and in all places? Can such an immensely general notion be studied scientifically by biology? It is really in this notion that we should seek solid basis for (a) the unity of the human race, and (b) the equality of men?

(f) The final paragraphs of the Propositions raise many difficulties, in so far as they depart from properly circumscribed scientific data and go off into general “ideology.”

We are told for example that “the peoples of the world today appear to possess equal biological potentialities for attaining any civilizational level,” and that “differences in the achievements of different peoples must be attributed solely to their cultural history.”

Questions

What is the meaning here of *appear*, (which in its French form occurs in both sentences)? Can we talk in this context of “biological data” in the same sense as in the last paragraph?

Is the notion of *biological potentialities* clear enough today for such a sentence, quite apart from its factual uncertainty (“appears”!), to have any real meaning? When

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are these biological potentialities *equal*? By what criteria? What does it amount to saying? That they are identical? That they are of the same order?

Are the "*civilizational levels*" really only "levels," that is, quantitative variations of degree, along one and the same scale, according to an unequivocal hierarchy? Are civilizations distinguished only by differences of level?

Do the signatories of the Propositions then consider the "*differences* in the achievements of different peoples" as inequalities? If so, in what sense, and why not specify that sense?

If, as was said earlier, cultural factors can effect genetic evolution, how can we thereupon rule out (assuming that such terms mean anything) "genetic inequality" resulting from this "cultural history," which is declared to be the sole cause of present differences?

(g) After asserting that nowhere, in the field of hereditary potentialities, "is there any justification" for the concept of "superior" or "inferior" races, the Propositions close with a strongly worded paragraph. "The biological data given above stand in open contradiction to the tenets of racism. Racist theories can in no way pretend to have any scientific foundation, and the anthropologists should endeavour to prevent the results of their researches from being used in such a biased way that they would serve non-scientific ends."

It is true that the "biological data given above" in no way lend scientific support to the tenets of racialism. They contradict these so far as the latter claim any scientific basis. It is also true that anthropologists have a duty to prevent any biased or non-scientific use of the results of their research. This being so, it must be obvious that the results in question, according to the Propositions themselves, lend scientific justification neither to the thesis that races are unequal, nor to the thesis that they are equal. The moral superiority of the one and the criminal inhumanity of the other thesis make no difference in this respect.

It remains to be determined whether "scientific justification" is necessary in this context, whether it has even meaning and is

not self-contradictory. It even remains to be determined whether the idea of equality or inequality has any meaning at all in the context.

Perhaps the justifications or refutations of anti-racialism have been lazy. And, therefore, dangerously fragile.

The present state of the question

The present state of the question seems to invite the latter conclusion.

Essentially, the earlier texts expressed a biological point of view. When the sociological approach comes to predominate, perspectives change and the entire problem of race takes on a different complexion.

For the sociologist, what is real is not the strictly biological meaning of the concept of race, as a name given in anticipation of knowledge yet to be gained; and therefore not the meaning to which the experts of 1951 and 1964 tried (without always succeeding) to confine themselves. *What is real is the notion of race as it actually exists in the mind of the ordinary man in the street*; this notion it is which, however vague or unscientific, is a social reality, and which appears to be having increasingly important effects in the realm of social phenomena. Furthermore, at the social level, the less the idea of race is clarified, the greater its effect seems to be. It is a vast cover term applying to the experience of encounters between people who are felt to be physically, culturally, or religiously different.

The contemporary sociologist, for the most part, does not choose between the *individual* and the *social* aspect of racial prejudice, but he hesitates as to their relative importance, and is therefore equally hesitant about the effectiveness of education on one hand, and of social and legal measures on the other.

In addition he is at grips with a *fresh ambiguity* as a result of political changes in the world, which make him uncertain what "*moral*" *slant* he should give to his research, that is, what "*morally desirable*" results it should have. Since 1951, many new States have made their appearance in Asia and particularly in Africa. For many of them, national unity is still threatened, still pre-

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carious, still seeking its ingredients, in the absence of historical unity, if possible in cultural unity reflecting racial unity. The formerly oppressed "races" are no longer content to share the alleged universality of the formerly dominant "races"; they demand that their originality, their difference, shall be acknowledged. On the other hand, the various forms of migration which have constantly grown in intensity as the century has progressed, have created the problem of a single or multiple cultural heritage and its relation to the maintenance of the State.

In 1951, the victims of colonialism expected the experts to remove the "scientific" justification of racial exploitation by denying or attenuating the biological reality of "race." In 1967, they are demanding acknowledgement of their own racial and cultural individuality. Minorities, too, are less and less satisfied with the increasing opportunities for "assimilation," which seems to aim at rendering them indistinguishable from the majority; they too are claiming their racial and cultural individuality.

The expression "racial and cultural," in any case, lacks clarity. Its very vagueness strives to express the essence, the quintessence, of a community, the indissoluble unity of its body and soul, the sacred collective personality which demands recognition of its rights. This is the personalization of race and it defies all analysis.

Parallel with this absolute assertion, sociological study has increasingly revealed the inextricable entanglement of factors and aspects. Ethnic conflicts are inextricably mixed up with processes of colonization and decolonization, with relations between majorities and minorities, with conflicting economic interests, with inequalities of development, with urbanization, political structures and social environment.

The racial problem can no longer be circumscribed (it can no longer be exclusively a question of genetic heredity), it is losing its moral bearings. Diagnosis becomes difficult and so does the definition of healthiness. Is it surprising then that sociologists have difficulty in recommending specific remedies? Only one thing seems obvious: today, rightly or wrongly, they attribute more efficacy in the struggle against discrimination to modifying the environment and to legislative measures than to education.

Some concluding remarks

The evolution of the world situation has, as we have seen, profoundly modified the ideological orientation of research into race and its political and educational applications. From anti-racialism, which sought to eliminate racial discrimination by expunging or denying the idea of race, we have moved to a situation where the former victims of discrimination refuse to be assimilated and demand, as it were, "each man's right to his own race." This is certainly one of the reasons for the present disarray.

But in my opinion there are more profound and more essential reasons. Racial questions have been posed in insufficiently clear terms and on the basis of implied assumptions that are questionable.

I should like to make a preliminary remark not only on race, but on any *classification* applied to men and human affairs. Any valid classification in this field is simultaneously both obvious and fictitious, depending on one's approach. For example, the distinction in French literature between "classical" and "romantic" works is obvious to all observers. Yet you will look in vain for a typical example illustrating one or other of these categories, and having all the characteristics set out in the textbooks. This does not mean that the classification is meaningless, only that the validity of the terms employed is subject to certain conditions. It also means that the essence of the work as such is not that it displays classical or romantic features, even though without these features it would not be the work it is. The same is true of race. The concept has not the exaggerated content which has been claimed for it, nor can it be dismissed, as has been attempted out of sheer good-will, as non-existent. Within certain limits and under certain conditions it can be used as a very incomplete means of characterizing varieties within the human species. There is no certainty that progress in biology and the social sciences would make the concept clearer.

In fact—and this is my second preliminary remark—not all concepts call for the same degree of precision. Even the natural sciences know that, as philosophers discovered long ago, in order to use certain concepts clearly, there are different optimal degrees of precision above and below which their meaning becomes blur-

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red, like an image seen through a magnifying glass which is held too far from or too near to the object. Race is certainly one of these notions. The question therefore is not whether it exists, but at what level of relative precision it becomes a valid instrument for interpreting an infinitely complex reality, and at what level it ceases to be so.

These two remarks are concerned with methods. I come now to the “questionable assumptions,” particularly those pertaining to *the idea we have of man*.

Most disputes and discussions about race between biologists or anthropologists have implied an image of the human species in which the body and the mind, or, if you prefer it, the physical and the psychological, were juxtaposed. This is why, out of respect for the “true” human being (that is, the “psychological” being, with his capacity and intelligence, etc.), efforts have been made to isolate the racial element (“in the purely physical,” the “zoological” etc.). But if man were essentially the *union of mind and body*, the whole set of problems would become meaningless and some of the difficulties mentioned above would vanish. It is true that “race” also would then acquire both a more profound and a more flexible “value.”

A second alternative, in my opinion just as artificial, has dominated the debates of the sociologists. First they told us that racial features characterized (by the frequency with which some of them occurred) vast groups of human beings, but not individual genetic combinations. Today they tend to render biological data concerning race completely otiose by reducing them to the effects of highly complex social factors of all kinds. But there again, the *individual* and *society*, the biological and the social, are so essentially involved one in the other—thus constituting the concrete situation which at the same time makes possible and limits the human condition—that their opposition makes the problem intractable. It therefore seems to me extremely important that Unesco is now undertaking a biological, sociological and philosophical study of the race problem.

Finally, the third implication, more serious and more harmful than the other two, is to conceive man and the human species as being essentially “describable” as reducible to an inventory of

established findings. This has led both racialists and anti-racialists to identify the human being as such with a group of racial characteristics, which the former accept and the latter contest. And it has caused research workers, biologists or sociologists, to feel a need to establish certain morally acceptable characteristics, that is, features compatible for instance with the rights of man (such as equality). For the same reasons they are embarrassed by racial data which are too conspicuous or not sufficiently so.

Does race exist? Does it not exist? It seems to exist at a certain level of precision—a rather crude one—and at that level to be real and have consequences. It seems to disintegrate or fade as precision increases. But it loses any claim to pre-eminence over any other objective datum of existence, when man is no longer observing himself, but is creating and inventing himself. It is on this—and not on some positive equality of capacity, intelligence, etc.—that the *unknowable equality* of the human species is based. What other meaning can we give to the equality of men and races? Quite apart from the shakiness of any empirical denial of inequality—which is dependent on an arbitrary classification of capacity and a method of measuring it—how can the infinite variety of human aptitudes be reduced to homogeneous quantifiable units? Whether physically or psychologically, men are not empirically equal; each is unique and there is no common measure for all.

Certainly biological and sociological researches are useful and legitimate when fighting on their own ground against prejudices which claim to have an empirical basis. But they cannot themselves establish empirically that which is essential, and when they try to do so, they dangerously prejudice its significance.

That race should be an ambiguous notion falling somewhere between objectivity and subjectivity, reality and unreality, humiliation and pride, is in the nature of the human condition itself: it is fruitless to try to reduce the ultimate difficulty of this condition by scientific means. The tangible results of scientific research can only assert their truth and effectiveness against the inhumanity of racialism if they are apprehended as fragmentary and linked with an equality of men transcending all knowledge.

The 1951 anti-racialist Statement confined race to the purely biological nature of man, denying that it had any effect on the

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psychological or cultural plane. Even today, some believe that this is still the solution to the problem. But others declare that race has nothing at all to do with any biological factors whatever, and depends only on social factors. Such a divergence of opinion after so many years of research would seem to show that the question has been wrongly put.

Man does not make himself from nothing, but he does make himself. The data of his existence, always specific, constitute both the material of his work and its limiting condition. Race is one of these data. It is not what settles men's fate, but only one factor among many others. It cannot be purely biological because the purely biological does not exist in man, and because cultural factors, as we see from the 1964 Propositions, are operative from the first, if only in marriage customs. Race is constantly transformed, being inextricably bound up with social conditions and their development. Race, therefore, is not only a fact but also a responsibility.

If the concept of race remains thus suspended between the biological and the psychological, between the biological and the cultural or social, between the fixity of observable fact and the constant evolution of history, this does not make racial problems any less real, or in any way remove the responsibility incumbent on men of our time. Quite the contrary.

As a natural fact, it forces on man plurality and diversity and dismisses the claim of anyone to possess universality.

Inextricably entangled as it is with social conditions and social structures, racial individuality proves to be something which is molded by culture and therefore involves human responsibility. If it becomes a source of paralysis, of diminished chances or frustrated possibilities, if it has a dehumanizing and humiliating influence, the blame does not rest with race, but with social structures and prejudices desired or tolerated by those whom they benefit.

As we have seen, statements of the equality or inequality of races, isolated from any specific context, are without empirical content, because there is no universal norm, and because human aptitudes differ so widely, and cannot be measured or compared one with another. On the other hand, inequality of both in-

dividual and collective opportunities is a tragedy for which there can be no atonement. It often uses as a justification a so-called natural inequality, of which it, alas, generates not only the semblance but the reality. Any "racial" difference there may be between elements of the same population all involved in the same process of civilization, is given greater weight and bulk by racialist structures. Inequality of opportunity enormously widens the gaps. Racial inequality assumes the guise of doom.

Cultural influences penetrate man's body. Biological influences penetrate his culture. That is why a wrong done to man is never limited in its consequences. It is total.

Whence the ambiguity of race—a fact, a pretext and a crime, all in one.