

Behavioral Biology and Racism

A view of human nature as being significantly innate and other insights of behavioral biology can support a fight against racism.¹ First, evolutionary scholars have shown that race does not explain the differences between cultures.² Cultures developed as better and worse ways of doing things from the standpoint of the people themselves, and they depended on variations in geography and ecology.³ Because innovations, such as those in agriculture tended to spread along lines of similar climate, such innovations moved more easily in Eurasia because Eurasia runs from east to west in contrast to Africa and the Americas, which run north to south.⁴ Similarly, in early cultures, transportation of large goods occurred over water, requiring natural harbors and navigable rivers, which Europe and parts of Asia had but Africa and Australia did not, allowing innovations to spread over large distances in Eurasia.⁵ Thus, “Eurasia conquered the world not because Eurasians were smarter but because they could best take advantage of the principle that many heads are better than one.”⁶

Significantly, an innate concept of human nature provides more protection for people, including protection from racism, than moral relativism does. Professor Chomsky has declared:

But a deeper look will show that the concept of the “empty organism,” plastic and unconstructed, apart from being false, also serves naturally as support for the most reactionary social doctrines. If people are, in fact, malleable and plastic beings with no essential psychological nature, then why should they not be controlled and coerced by those who claim authority, special knowledge, and a unique insight into what is best for those less enlightened.⁷

In other words, “The principle that human nature, in its psychological aspects, is nothing more than a product of history and given social relations removes all barriers to coercion and manipulation by the powerful.”⁸ Or, as Professor Pinker has remarked, “the conviction that

humanity could be shaped by massive social engineering projects led to some of the greatest atrocities in history.”⁹

One can apply these principles to racism; individuals are not protected from racism by a relativistic approach to human nature.¹⁰ As Professor Bracken has argued, “racism is easily and readably stateable if one thinks of the person in accordance with empiricist teaching because the essence of the person may be deemed his color, language, religion, etc., while the Cartesian dualist model provided . . . a modest conceptual brake to the articulation of racial degradation and slavery.”¹¹

On the other hand, behavioral biologists believe that there is a universal morality hardwired into our brains, which aided mankind’s survival.¹² The fundamentals of morality derived from how our brains evolved with the details of morality arising from how an individual culture reacted to how differing geography, ecology, and social conditions affected survival. This innate morality provides protection from racism, while moral relativism cannot.

Under behavioral biology, all humans are moral equals.¹³ Because there is a vast number of genetic combinations, each person is unique. Thus, society should treat each person as an individual, not as a member of a group with its stereotypes.

Part of our moral sense is that human beings can identify suffering in others through mirror neurons. “Individuals recognize actions made by others because the pattern of firing neurons [mirror neurons] made when observing an action is similar to the pattern produced to generate that action.”¹⁴ In other words, empathy and sympathy are innate. When we feel someone else’s suffering, we want to reduce that other person’s suffering.¹⁵ Accordingly, individuals identify with suffering caused by racism, and they have an innate sense that they

should reduce that suffering.

Behavioral biologists also believe that mankind has an innate sense of fairness, which is similar to the golden rule (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you).¹⁶ Professor Pinker has declared: “No creature equipped with circuitry to understand that it is immoral for you to hurt me could discover anything but that it is immoral for me to hurt you.”¹⁷ For example, slavery is against our innate sense of fairness because slavery contradicts man’s moral sense not to be exploited.¹⁸ It also interferes with the autonomy of the individual and the individual’s right not to be treated as a means to an end. The same principles apply to other types of racism.

Equally importantly, behavioral biology has shown that from a genetic standpoint racism is unfounded. There hasn’t been enough time in the human evolutionary process for significant differences to occur among localized populations.¹⁹ Professor Pinker has noted that “people are qualitatively the same but may differ quantitatively. The quantitative differences are small in biological terms, and they are found to a much greater extent among the individual members of an ethnic group or race than between ethnic groups or races.”²⁰ Likewise, Professor Goldsmith has declared: “Even when different members of different human populations look different and where there are demonstrable differences in gene frequencies underlying physical characteristics, the presumption remains that cultural differences reflect alternative phenotypic expressions of a common genetic heritage.”²¹ In sum, when one shows that the mind is the same in all humans, then unimportant biological aspects like skin color become irrelevant, and the reasons for prejudice should vanish.

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1. As Professor Pinker has written, “Nor does acknowledging human nature have the political implications so many fear. It does not, for example, require one to abandon feminism, or to accept current levels of inequality or violence, or to treat morality as a fiction.” STEVEN PINKER, *THE BLANK SLATE* ix (2002).
2. *Id.* at 65-69.
3. *Id.* at 68; Thomas SOWELL, *MIGRATIONS AND CULTURES: A WORLD VIEW* 376-77 (1996); TIMOTHY H. GOLDSMITH, *THE BIOLOGICAL BASIS OF HUMAN NATURE: FORGING LINKS BETWEEN EVOLUTION AND BEHAVIOR* 128 (1991) (“Many cultural choices represent options that, like adaptations, enhance reproductive success and survival.”); Lionel Tiger, *The Evolution of Cultural Norms* in *THE SENSE OF JUSTICE: BIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE LAW* 282 (Roger D. Masters & Margaret Gruter eds., 1991); *see generally* JARED DIAMOND, *GUNS, GERMS, AND STEEL* (1997). Professor Tiger has continued: “By displaying this situational flexibility [humans] can maintain basic hominid patterns such as group formation and sociality, reproductive access and assortment, management of space and resources, protection and socialization of the young, and so on. *Humans generate cultural variation in order to maintain their basic behavioral social biology.*” Tiger, *supra*, at 282.
4. PINKER, *supra* note 1, at 68.
5. SOWELL, *supra* note 3, at 377; PINKER, *supra* note 1, at 68.
6. PINKER, *supra* note 1, at 68.
7. NOAM CHOMSKY, *REFLECTIONS ON LANGUAGE* 132 (1975). Similarly, Professor Rorty has acknowledged: “When the secret police come, when the torturers violate the innocent, there is nothing to be said to them of the form ‘There is something within you that you are betraying. Though you embody the practices of a totalitarian society, which will endure forever, there is something beyond those practices which condemns you.’” RICHARD RORTY, *CONSEQUENCES OF PRAGMATISM* xlii (1982). Likewise, Catherine MacKinnon has written, “according to postmodernism there are no facts; everything is a reading so there can be no lies. Apparently it cannot be known whether the Holocaust is a hoax, whether women love to be raped, whether Black people are getting genetically inferior to white people, whether homosexuals are child molesters.” Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Points Against Postmodernism*, 75 *CHICAGO-KENT L. REV.* 687, 703 (2000).
8. CHOMSKY, *supra* note 7, at 132.
9. PINKER, *supra* note 1, at xi.
10. Behavioral biologists do not believe in strong moral relativism. For example, two scholars have declared, “From an evolutionary perspective, the survival of the animal depends on its maintaining its inner milieu within a very narrow range of values.” William D. Casebeer & Patricia S. Churchland, *The Neural Mechanisms of Moral Cognition: A Multiple Aspect*

Approach to Moral Judgment and Decision-Making, 18 *BIOLOGY & PHIL.* 169, 175 (2003); see also Morris B. Hoffman, *The Neuroeconomic Path of the Law*, 359 *PHIL. TRANS. R. SOC. LOND. B.* 1667, 1669 (2004) (“[T]here is indeed a relatively fixed and immutable set of right and wrong human behaviors.”).

11. Harry M. Bracken, *Essence, Accident, and Race*, 116 *HERMATHENA* 81 (1973); see also CHOMSKY, *supra* note 7, at 130-32.

12. MICHAEL S. GAZZANIGA, *HUMAN: THE SCIENCE BEHIND WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE* 115-18 (2008); Sharon Street, *A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value*, 127 *PHIL. STUD.* 109, 113-114 (2006); MARC D. HAUSER, *MORAL MINDS: HOW NATURE DESIGNED OUR UNIVERSAL SENSE OF RIGHT AND WRONG* xvii, 36, 53-54, 419-20 (2006); PINKER, *supra* note 1, at 187-88, 193.

13. Scott Fruehwald, *A Biological Basis of Rights*, *S. Cal. Interdisc. L.J.*, in press.

14. GAZZANIGA, *supra* note 12, at 63; see also MARCO IACOBONI, *MIRRORING PEOPLE: THE NEW SCIENCE OF HOW WE CONNECT WITH OTHERS* 4 (2008); HAUSER, *supra* note 12, at 224.

15. Jonathan Haidt, *The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Institutional Approach to Moral Justice*, 108 *PSYCHOL. REV.* 814, 824 (2001).

16. DONALD W. PFAFF, *THE NEUROSCIENCE OF FAIR PLAY: WHY WE USUALLY FOLLOW THE GOLDEN RULE* 410-12 (2007); HAUSER, *supra* note 12, at 410.

17. PINKER, *supra* note 1, at 193.

18. LARRY ARNHART, *DARWINIAN NATURAL RIGHT: THE BIOLOGICAL ETHICS OF HUMAN NATURE* 163-69 (1998).

19. Owen D. Jones & Timothy H. Goldsmith, *Law and Behavioral Biology*, 105 *COLUM. L. REV.* 405, 477 (2005).

20. PINKER, *supra* note 1, at 143; see also Jones & Goldsmith, *supra* note 19, at 497.

21. GOLDSMITH, *supra* note 3, at 125.