

*What is Racism?**

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Fighting racism requires knowing what it is — not an easy task. Today the word “racism” has so many contradictory meanings that it takes on the aura of a *myth* and is, therefore, difficult to define. The following will attempt to define racist ideology, independently of any sociological considerations. The first difficulty arises from the fact that racism is a *Schimpfwort*: a term with pejorative connotations, whose very use inevitably tends to be more *instrumental* than descriptive. Deploying the adjective “racist” involves using a powerful epithet. It can be a smear designed to disqualify those at whom the term is addressed. To call someone a racist, even if the charge is intellectually dishonest, can be a useful tactic, either in successfully paralyzing or in casting enough suspicion as to curtail credibility. Such an approach is commonplace in everyday controversies. On the international level, the term can acquire a significance and weight that does not hide its real nature and purpose.¹ Because of a certain affinity, “racism” can be used as the correlate of a whole series of other terms: fascism, the extreme Right, anti-Semitism, sexism, etc. Today, the almost ritualistic recitation of these terms often implies that they are all synonyms and that any one falling into one of these categories automatically belongs to all of them. The end result is to reinforce the vagueness of the term and to discourage meaningful analysis.

* Translated by Francis J. Greene

1. Thus, Resolution 3379, adopted by a 72-35 vote, with 22 abstentions on November 10, 1975, by the UN General Assembly, according to which Zionism is “a form of racism and racial discrimination,” sought to delegitimize the State of Israel by semantic means. See Thomas Mayer, *The UN Resolution Equating Zionism and Racism, Genesis and Repercussions*, in *Research Report* (London: Institute of Jewish Affairs, April, 1981), pp.1-11.

Used in the most diverse senses, the terms “racism” and “racist” become prepackaged formulas, generating *stereotypes*. Antiracists tend to attack racists in much the same way as racists might go after anyone else. Paradoxically, while the signifier “racist” is vague, the signified is rigidly *fixed*. The charge of having a “racist temperament” follows the same reasoning for which racists are rightly reproached, i.e., vaguely attributing to an entire group traits found in some of its members which, as Pierre-André Taguieff has pointed out, generates another problem: “There is no effective struggle against *racism* once one creates a false image of it, for then antiracism becomes a mirror image of the racist myth. To treat in a racist way those whom one is accusing of racist conduct is part and parcel of current antiracism, and one of its shortcomings. Above all, to fictionalize ‘the Other,’ even if he be *racist*, is to miss who ‘the Other’ really is, never coming to know him.”²

Public opinion’s disapproval of racist theories and conduct itself contributes to obscuring the issue. In France, where racism is a crime and where, on the whole, it is severely sanctioned,³ there is a tendency to deny it the status of an *ideology* or of an *opinion*. Furthermore, the law makes no distinction between racist theory (“inciting racial hatred”) and racist behavior. Under these conditions, racism has less to do with ideas than with the penal system.⁴ As for the approach which tends to define racism as an intellectual disease — an approach frequently using biological metaphors — racism becomes a “leprosy” (Albert Jacquard) or “madness” (Christian Delacampagne). This does not help matters either. Moreover, these two interpretations — as “delirium” and as “crime” — are contradictory. If racists are mad, they do not belong in court, but in asylums and, of course, a

2. See Pierre-André Taguieff, “Les Présuppositions Définitionnelles d’un Indéfinissable: ‘Le Racisme’,” in *Mots*, No. 8 (1984), pp. 71-72.

3. As Irène Kraut, a lawyer for LICRA, has stated: “I have never seen an accused racist acquitted of the charge,” in *L’Arche* (August-September, 1985).

4. Contrary to common belief, public opinion polls do not indicate a “resurgence of racism,” but, rather, a decline. According to the IFOP poll, published in *Le Point* (April 29, 1985), only 6% of the French have negative attitudes toward Blacks and Asians, while 33% and 27% respectively claim to be positively disposed to both groups. The proportion of positive and negative feelings toward Arabs is the same: 20%. By contrast, a SOFRES poll among Parisians, published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* (November 1, 1967) registered 65% hostile to Arabs and 52% to Blacks. Public opinion polls, however, are unreliable indicators of behavior. According to Michael Billig: “The fact that a person expresses prejudicial feelings toward a particular alien group does not necessarily mean that the individual will always react with hostility to a specific member of that group.” See his “Racisme, Préjugés et Discrimination,” in Serge Moscovici, ed., *Psychologie Sociale* (Paris: PUF, 1984), pp. 450-451. The opposite is often the case.

biological dimension raises the question of contagion. When all is said and done, the word “race” and its derivatives (racism, racist, etc.) appear so emotionally charged that it has been compared to the word “sex” in the 19th century. Both words invite evasion or semantic substitution. Any study of racism must take all of this into consideration, even if only to avoid falling into the same trap. This is why it is advisable to follow Pierre Fougeyrollas’ advice: “The social sciences must study racism as an ensemble of observable phenomena among others and in relation to other phenomena.”⁵

I

The word “racism” appeared in the *Larousse* dictionary for the first time in 1932. A careful examination of dictionaries since then reveals that the definitions of the term overlap: “A system which affirms the superiority of one racial group over the others” (*Larousse*); “A doctrine claiming the existence of biological differences between various races and the superiority of one of them” (supplement to the *Grand Littré*); “A theory of the hierarchy of races based on a belief that social conditions depend on racial characteristics” (*Robert*); “A theory of racial hierarchy which claims the necessity of preserving the so-called superior race from miscegenation and the right to dominate other races” (*Petit Robert*), etc. UNESCO’s 1978 “Declaration on Race” defines racism as “any theory claiming the intrinsic superiority or inferiority of racial or ethnic groups which would give to some the right to dominate or even eliminate others, presumed inferior, or basing value judgments on racial differences.” Ruth Benedict writes: “Racism is a dogma according to which one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital superiority.” More recently, Arthur Kriegel has written: “Racism is an ideological-scientific system which divides the contemporary human species into sub-species, resulting from separate development and endowed with unequal average aptitudes. Miscegenation with these inferior sub-species could only result in half-breeds inferior to the favored race.”⁶ None of these definitions deals with *behavior*. Rather, they all focus on *theory* — a “system,” a “doctrine,” a “dogma.” These theories share two major characteristics: belief in the *inequality* of various races, and that this inequality legitimates *domination* of so-called “inferior” races by those deemed “superior.”

More sophisticated definitions have been suggested, and the literature

5. See Pierre Fougeyrollas, *Les Métamorphoses de la Crise: Racismes et Révolution au XXème Siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1985), p. 90.

6. Arthur Kriegel, *La Race Perdue. Science et Racisme* (Paris: PUF, 1983), p. 143.

on this subject is considerable. For the most part, these definitions echo those already discussed, and they suggest five main components as constituent elements of racist ideology: 1) A belief in the superiority of one race, and more rarely of several races, over others. This belief is usually accompanied by a hierarchical classification of racial groups; 2) The idea that this superiority and inferiority are of a biological or bio-anthropological nature. The conclusion drawn from this belief is that superiority and inferiority are ineradicable and could not, for example, be modified by social milieu or education; 3) the idea that collective biological inequalities are reflected in social and cultural orders, and that biological superiority translates into a “superior civilization,” which itself indicates biological superiority. This implies a continuity between biology and social conditions; 4) A belief in the legitimacy of the domination of “inferior” races by “superior” ones; 5) A belief that there are “pure” races and that miscegenation has an inevitably negative effect on them (“decline,” “degeneration,” etc.). The question is whether one can infer racism when (and only when) all these theoretical traits are present, or if there are some elements more “fundamental” than others. The first point is that, above all, racism is a theory of *racial hierarchy and inequality*. This is fundamental. As to the rest, things are more complicated.

First of all, a racist viewpoint does not require any knowledge of biology, nor recourse to biology, to explain perceived racial inequality. Most 18th century liberal authors and “enlightened” *philosophes* were convinced of the inferiority of Blacks, but they did not necessarily relate this “inferiority” to any “natural” constitution. Most did not even raise biological questions. Others explained “inferiority” in terms of “customs,” “habits,” “climate,” etc. David Hume wrote: “I am led to believe that Blacks and in general all other human races (for there are four or five different types) are naturally inferior to Whites.”⁷ He did not base this conviction on any biological consideration. This is also true of Locke, who was a well known apologist for slavery, as were many Enlightenment *philosophes*.⁸ For most of

7. David Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (London: A. Millar, 1758), p. 125. See also his *Of National Characters* (1748) and the collection published by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose, *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary* (London, 1875).

8. See Richard H. Popkin, “The Philosophical Basis of Eighteenth Century Racism,” in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, Vol. 3 (London: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1973), pp. 245-262; Urs Bitterli, *Die “Wilden” und die “Zivilisierten.” Grundzüge einer Geistes- und Kulturgeschichte der Europäischen Überseeischen Begegnung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1976); Pierre Pluchon, *Nègres et Juifs au XVIIIème Siècle* (Paris, Tallandier, 1984).

them, the idea that reason resided “fully in each person” (Descartes) sufficed to nurture the certitude that anyone can, on his own, recognize the superiority of European civilization. Conversely, in the 19th century, the many writers who sought to relate sociology to biology did not necessarily make racist judgments. This is the case with some social Darwinists, such as Herbert Spencer, who was a pacifist and a believer in the idea of progress. Lastly, in the 20th century, some “racist” authors even objected to any recourse to biology and went so far as to denounce biological racism as madness.⁹

Nor is the idea of a “pure race” — essentially a romantic notion — accepted by all racist theoreticians. Albert Memmi is wrong in claiming that racist ideology is based on three postulates: “that pure races do, in fact, exist; that pure races are superior to others; that, since these races are pure, their members deserve political, economic, and cultural advantages.”¹⁰ The eugenicist Karl Pearson, whose work is tainted by racist judgments, constantly fought against the idea of a “pure race.” Arthur de Gobineau himself wrote his *Essai* for one reason — to prove that pure races had disappeared for good. For Houston Stewart Chamberlain, as for René Martial, all that matters is “racial achievements.” Likewise, for many racist writers, “superiority” is not automatically associated with the idea (or fantasy) of “purity.”

Opinion is also divided on the issue of miscegenation. In the 19th and early 20th centuries almost *all* anthropologists saw miscegenation as “an element of degeneracy with reference to anthropological distinctions between the races” (Charles Robin).¹¹ By contrast, Auguste Comte did not propose racial hierarchies and even supported “appropriate miscegenation,” though he had written in his *Cathéchisme Positiviste* (1852) that the different races do not have the same type of brain. The Saint-Simonian Victor Courtet, a clear precursor of racism,¹² thought that, by miscegenation, it would be possible to regenerate humanity. He wrote enthusiastically: “Long-live miscegenation,” for which he was later considered a “communist.” More recently, Frank H. Hankins has challenged “the perverse and doctrinaire assertions of egalitarians on racial matters.”¹³ He

9. See, Julius Evola, *Sintesi di Dottrina della Razza* (Milan: Hoepli, 1941).

10. Albert Memmi, “Racisme et Hétérophobie,” in *Sens* (Sept.-Oct., 1984), p. 357.

11. See, among others, the positions of J. Perrier, Dally, Nott, Boudin, Waitz, Long and Lewis, Van Amring, Hamilton Smith, Dixon, etc.

12. See his main works: *La Science Politique Fondée sur la Science de l'Homme, ou Etudes des Races Humaines sous le Rapport Philosophique, Historique et Social* (1837-1838) and *Tableau Ethnologique du Genre Humain* (1849). On Courtet, see Jean Boissel, *Victor Courtet (1813-1867), Premier Théoricien de la Hiérarchie des Races. Contribution à l'Histoire de la Philosophie Politique du Romantisme* (Paris: PUF, 1972).

13. Frank H. Hankins, *Les Races dans la Civilisation* (Paris: Payot, 1935).

writes: “It seems clear that the races are equal in no way whatsoever.” But, at the same time, he emphatically supports miscegenation.

The issue of the *instrumentalization* of racial theories is equally complex. For Memmi, “racism offers overall and final validity to the idea of biological differences, real or imagined — all to the advantage of the dominant party or to the detriment of the victim, in order to legitimate an act of aggression or certain privileges.”¹⁴ This definition differs from the previous ones. In this case, racist domination is no longer seen as a result or as a potential consequence of theory. On the contrary, theory is seen as resulting from the *intention* to dominate or exploit. Thus, racist ideology turns into a theory forged to justify an act of aggression or to legitimate a relation of domination from which one would expect to *profit*. Racism, then, becomes a belief which justifies behavior. This is not unlike the idea that class consciousness is the driving force of proletarian action. It is also similar to so-called “conspiracy” theory, a pseudo-explanatory construct occasionally used by victims of racism.¹⁵ Close to Memmi is Colette Guillaumin, for whom racism is not so much a theory or an opinion but a *social relation*. She writes: “This is a very particular relation, one of domination, which is seen as completely *natural*.”¹⁶ More broadly, racism is generated from the “normalization” of a relation of domination. This idea is frequently espoused by authors who see an intimate relation between racism, colonialism, imperialism, etc.

This alleged relation between racism and domination is, at best, tenuous. Of course, belief in the natural inequality of the races helps legitimate relations of domination or exploitation, particularly colonialist ones. It is also clear, however, that racism can just as well lead to a desire to “banish” others, to set them apart. Whereas domination implies *contact*, it can, nonetheless, express itself as rejection pure and simple, or as an abhorrence not directly related to the desire for domination. To the extent that it is a *phobia*, racial xenophobia is not concerned so much with domination

14. Albert Memmi, *L'Homme Dominé* (Paris: Payot, 1973), p. 210. The same definition is found in his work *Le Racisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

15. “Every people, every social group,” wrote Maxime Rodinson, “tends to see in attacks against it (or in resistance to its own attacks) clear evidence of pure hatred on the part of the rest of humanity and of a conspiracy of evil against good which, of course, the victims believe they represent.” See his “Quelques Thèses Critiques sur la Démarche Poliakovienne,” in Maurice Olender, ed., *Le Racisme, Mythes et Sciences* (Brussels: Complexe, 1981), p. 318.

16. Colette Guillaumin, “Le Chou et le Moteur à Deux Temps. De la Catégorie à la Hiérarchie,” in *Le Genre Humain*, No. 2 (1982), p. 31.

of the Other as with its *removal*, to its disappearance from everyday life. Racist opponents of immigrant workers do not want to “exploit” them; they want to see them *gone*. Thus, the idea that there is a hierarchy among the races does not necessarily imply domination, and it is unwarranted to explain racial hierarchies merely on the basis of a perverse desire to realize personal profit or advantage from exploitation.

Moreover, if racism has often accompanied and even encouraged colonialism, sometimes racist beliefs have also played the opposite role. William B. Cohen writes: “It has been suggested that racist theories developed in the second half of the 19th century were the basis of French imperialism. But, a number of those who believed in the inferiority of the black race were opposed to French colonial expansion in overseas territories.”¹⁷ Colonialism is a *relation*, even if one of domination. Moreover, historically, racist domination has never precluded miscegenation, while at times opposition to colonialism has *also* been motivated by opposition to miscegenation. Gobineau vigorously denounced all forms of colonialism; Broca inveighed against “the subordination of one race to another.” Gustave Le Bon, who believed in racial inequality, was one of the staunchest opponents of colonial expansion: in 1910, he criticized colonialist “stupidity” and “barbarity” because “hitherto, no race has ever been able to change its fundamental mental constitution in order to adopt that of another race.”¹⁸

On the contrary, throughout the 19th century, the ideology resulting from the 1789 French Revolution not only did not curb colonial expansion, but actually encouraged it. In particular, French colonialism evolved largely in the name of “progress.” It assumed that the Western world had a “mission” to extend the blessings of the ideology of “human rights” to all colonized peoples. In England, as in France, in polemics concerning slavery, the most fervent abolitionists were almost always avid advocates of colonialism. Seen as an obvious fact, belief in racial inequality nourished a certain paternalism (which was not devoid of traces of sympathy for these “children,” i.e., indigenous peoples). Lord Acton thought that the existence of “inferior races” sufficed to justify “their political union with intellectually superior” ones, and this for the very purpose of remedying their

17. William B. Cohen, *Français et Africains. Les Noirs dans le Regard des Blancs, 1530-1880* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

18. Gustave Le Bon, *La Psychologie Politique et la Défense Sociale* (Paris: Flammarion, 1910), p. 231 (republished in 1984). Similar viewpoints are found in Gabriel de Saussure, *Psychologie de la Colonisation Française* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1889), Périès, Pellarin, etc.

perceived inferiority. Jules Ferry claimed that “superior races have the duty to protect and guide inferior races.” On July 9, 1925, Léon Blum addressed the Chambre des Députés: “We acknowledge the right and even the duty of superior races to draw unto themselves those races which have not reached the same cultural level and to challenge them to a level of progress which can only be achieved through the contributions of science and industry.”

The doctrine of colonialism unquestionably mixes racist judgments with an apology for colonialism (although these racist judgments should be placed within their historical and cultural contexts). Colonial doctrine also tends to legitimate colonial domination by appealing to typically democratic values, through the politics of *assimilation* which, during the Third Republic, won almost unanimous acceptance. This led Maurice Violette, a socialist, to argue, while addressing the League of the Rights of Man in February, 1931, that: “I do not know of any colonial politics possible other than that of assimilation. I cannot understand the thesis held by some that the colonial ‘native’ should evolve, as they say, on his own and within his own civilization.”

In this context, depending on the degree of individual conviction, many regarded ideas of “superiority” and “inferiority” to be provisional. During the 19th century many people claimed that there were inferior races, but they also thought it possible to “elevate” them to the level enjoyed by “superior” races. Whatever the cause, this “barbarity” is not irremediable. Seen from the perspective of a linear historical evolution, it is only an “arrested state of development.” They believed it is through colonialism that these peoples, who had somehow “fallen behind,” could catch up. “The Indonesian peoples and the black races of Africa,” wrote Emile Mireaux, “have hitherto remained in a condition bordering on barbarity. But does that permit us to deny their capacity for progress and possibilities for their future?”¹⁹ This statement is typical. Its ethnocentrism is evident. “Every one calls ‘barbarity’ what he is not accustomed to,” wrote Montaigne long ago. Also evident in Mireaux is a racist perspective. Yet, his outlook did not reflect the *idées reçues* of his time. Thus, in depicting racism simply as an ideology justifying domination — especially of a colonial nature — one risks making the mistake of projecting current views onto the past.

Domination implies *inclusion*, and thus *acceptance*. Of course, it is inclusion into a hierarchical structure where the “victim” occupies a subordinate position. Yet, the structure is, first and foremost, one of *integration*,

19. Emile Mireaux, *Philosophie du Libéralisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1950), p. 180.

even if there is, secondarily, the interplay of exclusion created by one's placement within a certain level of that hierarchy. To reiterate, it is racism that generates *exclusion* and isolation, rather than inclusion. The racist who believes that there are "too many immigrants in France" is hardly satisfied with the fact that these immigrants occupy a low position within the social ladder. What the racist wishes is their departure, their *disappearance from sight*, their being expelled from any position whatever in *the established hierarchy*. Moreover, recent research has shown that hierarchical systems cannot be analyzed or understood exclusively in terms of exploitation, domination or even contempt. "Hierarchy" is not synonymous with "inequality." Jean-Pierre Dupuy writes: "The most favorable context for mutual racial respect is not one where the principle of equality takes precedence, but rather where hierarchy is observed. A prerequisite for understanding this proposition is not to confuse hierarchy and inequality, but rather to see them as opposites."²⁰ In fact, the hierarchic principle is one of inclusion for those who are "different." Certain hierarchies are merely differentiated structures in which all the parts are equally indispensable for the well functioning of the whole. Similarly, in many traditional societies, subordination is not synonymous with inferiority. In India the caste system has traditionally been seen as a system of "holistic" complementarity which, far from establishing exclusion, prevents excluding anyone. In this case, hierarchy is nothing more than "the order which results when 'individual worth' comes into play."²¹ Jacques Dupuis has even ventured that: "In loosing the caste system, with its hierarchical acceptance of subordination, India would loose what has assured both the equilibrium and mutual tolerance of its communities."²²

In fact, only *secondarily* can racist ideology eventually be used to *legitimate* domination. A classic example is the colonizer's racist attitude toward the colonized. To a large extent, this attitude survives in the way some Westerners see the Third World: if these countries do not succeed in "developing," it is because they are fundamentally *incapable* to do so. In this instance race functions as an *explanation* (for their underdevelopment) and as the *legitimation* (it is, therefore, permissible to usurp from these "incompetents" their power or authority). There are also numerous examples of rivalries between races, countries, or ethnic

20. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, "Libres propos sur l'Égalité, la Science et le Racisme," in *Le Débat*, No. 37 (November, 1985), p. 40.

21. Louis Dumont, *Essais sur l'Individualisme* (Paris: Seuil, 1983), p. 263.

22. Jacques Dupuis, *L'Histoire* (September, 1985), p. 35.

groups, particularly between those closely related. The modern “nation” has been *naturalized* by being systematically associated with a series of biological “givens.” Thus, in 19th century England, anti-Irish racism was widespread. Authors such as John Stuart Mill²³ or Matthew Arnold²⁴ explained the endemic poverty of the Irish people in terms of “racial deficiency,” while Sir Robert Peel coldly proposed “the gradual extinction of the Celtic race in Ireland.” In France, in the context of WWI, a scholar such as Bérillon, in a series of astounding publications, boldly stated that “German flesh is not like that of the French” and that the “German race” has a unique “bodily chemistry” that produces “*sui generis* a nauseating odor, noticeable the moment one approaches a German.” He went so far as to claim that a “racial instinct” impels Germans to “sully both the public buildings and the homes which they inhabit.”²⁵

In light of all this, a number of authors have distinguished between a racism of *exclusion* and one of *domination* — a seemingly well-grounded distinction.²⁶ On the other hand, when it comes to evaluating objectively how “dangerous” each of these two categories is, opinion is divided. The uncertainty stems from the fact that exclusion can be much more benign than domination when it limits itself to refusing contact without interfering with the life-styles of those excluded, but it can also be much more deadly, as when it leads to extermination.

Another distinction, more rarely made, is between racism, properly speaking, and what might be called, for want of a better term, “racialism,” i.e., theory based on the idea that racial factors or, more generally, ethnic factors, play a determining role in the evolution of human society. From this perspective, socio-cultural roots are traced primarily or exclusively in terms of ethnic groups, and the great events of human history are systematically reduced to “events” of the racial order. In short, racialism postulates that the concept of race is the key to understanding the fundamental

23. John Stuart Mill, *England and Ireland* (London, 1865).

24. Matthew Arnold, *Irish Essays* (London, 1882).

25. Bérillon, *La Bromidrose Fétide de la Race Allemande* (1915); *La Psychologie de la Race Allemande, d'après ses Caractères Objectifs et Génériques* (1917); *Les Caractères Nationaux. Leurs Facteurs Biologiques et Psychologiques* (Paris: Amédée Legrand, 1920).

26. For Taguieff, *op. cit.* p. 76, the distinction between the two racisms — based on exclusion and domination, respectively — is reminiscent of the distinction between “other-referential” (*altéroréférentiel*) and “self-referential” (*autoréférentiel*) racism, one organized around the Other, and the other around the Self, i.e., in this case, the collective “We.” This position does not seem tenable, since the understanding of the Self and of the Other are inseparable. Each of these two understanding needs the other in order to function.

determinants of major social configurations. Thus, for Victor Courtet, “on almost every point the issue is race.” In 1850, the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox wrote: “Race is everything: literature, science, art — in a word, civilization — all depend on race.” In Germany, the Social Darwinist Ludwig Woltmann, a former social-democrat, explained the Renaissance by the presence, in North and Central Italy, of “Germanic” blood. In England, Benjamin Disraeli was also an advocate of racialism. Hannah Arendt saw him as “the first Englishman to have insisted unrelentingly on his racial convictions and on racial superiority as a determining element in history and politics.”²⁷ Likewise, Gobineau interpreted all human history in racial terms. Although, contrary to widespread opinion, his influence on National Socialism was almost nil,²⁸ similar viewpoints were popular in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s.²⁹ For Edward Mangold, racial differences “provide the key for understanding all major events of human history.”³⁰ In varying degrees, this theme of race as a determining factor is found in Newton, Montesquieu, Auguste Thierry, Camille Julian, d’Eichtal, Virey, Buffon, and even Guizot.

In genuine racialism, the racial factor is considered primordial and not just an element to be considered among an infinity of others.³¹ Moreover, true racialism maintains that there is a causal connection, often an almost mechanistic one, between the racial order and the socio-cultural domain in the sense that the former determines the latter. In addition, racialism does not imply racial inequality, and this is what fundamentally distinguishes racialism from racism. At first glance, in its most blatant

27. Hannah Arendt, *L’Impérialisme* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 108.

28. See Michel Lémonon, *Le Rayonnement du Gobinisme en Allemagne*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Strasbourg II, 1971.

29. See Wilhelm Erbt, *Weltgeschichte auf rassischer Grundlage. Urzeit, Morgenland und Mittelmeer* (Frankfurt/M.: Moritz, 1925) (2nd edition, enlarged: Leipzig: Armanen, 1934); Rolf Fahrenkrog, ed., *Europas Geschichte als Rassenschicksal. Von Wesen und Wirken der Rassen im Europäischen Schicksalraum* (Leipzig: Hesse und Becker, 1939); Max Wundt, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Völker. Gedanken über Weltgeschichte auf rassischer Grundlage* (Munich-Berlin: J. F. Lehmanns, 1940). Compare these works with Frank H. Hankins, *La Race dans la Civilisation, op. cit.*, which has the triple distinction of having a “Préface” by Georges Montandon; of specifically claiming to provide “a critique of the Nordic doctrine,” and to conclude that “great cultures have only resulted from combinations of highly gifted races” (p. 329).

30. Edward Mangold, “Rasse und Nation im französischen Denken,” in *Rasse* (1938), No. 5, p. 182.

31. Some scholars hold that questions of race are central to anthropology, but that no definitive social and political conclusions follow from this. This is essentially Ernest Renan’s position in *Discours et Conférences* (1887).

form, racism seems to be the result of a fusion of racialism and a belief in racial inequality.³² Moreover, it is clear how one can go from one to the other: if race is the central determinant of human affairs, it is tempting, to say the least, to explain balances of power which have been established throughout the world by the “racial characteristics” of the opposing parties. Yet, racialism and racism do not always intersect. By itself, racialism does not imply hierarchical value judgments. It limits itself to distinguishing between the races, eventually to classifying and attributing to them a determining role in social life. But to distinguish or classify is not the same as to create a hierarchy. To categorize is to list similarities and differences, affinities which permit drawing some boundaries between the various races. Hierarchy, on the other hand, implies a paradigm, and this paradigm is the distinctive characteristic of racist ideology. Moreover, this paradigm is almost always ethnocentric, i.e., self-referential. That is why sometimes racialism can be raciophile, but racist ideology is always raciophobic: it inevitably *deprecates* its object. Racialism adds the central importance of race to the simple idea that there is a link between the physical characteristics of individuals and groups and their mental characteristics, between the biological and the social. Racist ideology adds to racialism a discriminating value judgment. Races are arranged hierarchically. But racist ideology does not necessarily imply racialism. One can actually believe that there have always been inferior and superior races without believing that all social phenomena are reducible to racial factors. A belief in racial inequality and the idea that race is the main factor in human history are *not* two different versions of the same idea.

The racial hierarchy drawn by racist ideology is almost always linear — with one race invariably at the top, followed immediately by its civilization. The entire schema is marked by an “orderliness” which immediately signals the underlying ethnocentrism. In general, whereas racialism emphasizes the decisive importance of *race*, racist ideology emphasizes the importance of *a particular race*, e.g., Gobineau’s “Aryans” or Victor Courtet’s “Germans,” seen as “the nation’s oil.” As Chamberlain wrote: “Our entire civilization and all our current culture are the product of a

32. For Voltaire, blacks did not even belong to the human race. “The black race, he wrote, is a species different from ours, just as the spaniel is different from the greyhound.” See *Russie*, Vol. I, No. 1. In 1817, Cuvier claimed that the blacks’s morphological and cranial characteristics “clearly suggest their proximity to the ape” — a position retained long afterwards. Hegel took the position that, in blacks, “one finds nothing that suggests mankind.” Most contemporary anthropologists expressed similar views (Virchow, Broca and Quatrefages were among the more moderate).

single race: the Germans” (a heading under which he also places Celts and the Slavs).³³ For Hitler “the Aryan laid the foundations and set the framework for all human accomplishments. All these great past civilizations fell into ruin simply because the race which at first was creative later died from blood poisoning.”³⁴

Gobineau’s *Essai sur l’Inégalité des Races Humaines* (1853-1855) is clearly based both on racialism and racism as previously defined. The book’s title speaks for itself, and is repeated in the heading of Chapter XIII: “Races are Intellectually Unequal.” This work attempts to explain all of human history in terms of natural phenomena. Unlike the disdain in which Tocqueville held Arab culture during the same period, Gobineau expresses admiration for Islamic civilization. Nor is Gobineau anti-Semitic. He sings the praises of Greek art, in which he sees the fruit of a felicitous mixture of racial bloodlines where the Asiatic strain predominates, and he considers blacks as the founding fathers of what he calls artistic feeling. The “Aryans,” whose superiority he vigorously upholds, evolved over a long period of time. Himself a connoisseur of Mediterranean culture and of the Near-East, Gobineau did not share most of his compatriots’ attitudes toward indigenous peoples. On March 22, 1855, he wrote to Prokesch from Cairo: “Europeans are not very commendable, and they constantly justify the disdain and even hatred in which they are held by indigenous populations.” When all is said and done, his writings owe more to literary influences, specifically Romanticism, than to ideology.³⁵

In addition, racist ideology includes two very different perspectives, one pessimistic and another optimistic. For a number of racist ideologues, racial phenomena are used primarily to explain in retrospect the state of “decline” into which the “white race” has supposedly fallen. This type of racist ideology is part of “decadence theory” and belongs with other equally pessimistic visions.³⁶ It explains the current state of affairs in terms of the “weakening of bloodlines,” “miscegenation,” etc. Current problems are seen as due to “the domination of the white races by races of

33. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Grundlagen des XIX. Jahrhunderts* (1899).

34. Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, pp. 274-275.

35. This is the unanimous opinion of practically all those who have studied his works, from Robert Dreyfus to Hubert Juin, Jean Gaulmier and Jean Boissel. See particularly Robert Dreyfus, *La Vie et les Prophéties du Comte de Gobineau* (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1905); Jean Gaulmier, ed., *Etudes Gobiniennes* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1966-1978); Jean Boissel, *Gobineau, 1816-1882. Un Don Quichotte Tragique* (Paris: Hachette, 1981).

36. See Julien Freund, *La Décadence* (Paris: Sirey, 1984); and Pierre-André Taguieff, “L’Idée de Décadence et le Déclin de l’Europe,” in *Politique Aujourd’hui* (November, 1985).

color.” This causality is depicted either as an irreversible *fait accompli* (Gobineau) or as a threat that has already begun to materialize.³⁷ Other authors perceive racial struggle from an “optimistic” viewpoint, which seems to bear the imprint of Social Darwinism. Chamberlain shares this outlook when he writes: “Even if it were proven that there never had been an Aryan race in the past, we would want one for the future.” Later, he writes: “Far from being heaven-sent, race develops over time, and only slowly does racial purity win out.” (On this point, as on many others, Chamberlain disagrees with Gobineau). Curiously, Hitler shared this optimism. His racist project is akin to the “eugenic” viewpoint in the sense of “racial hygiene”: race is not so much an acquired characteristic to be preserved, as an objective to attain and a reality to bring about; race is less the “voice of the past” as it is “the call of the future.” Belief in a continuum between the biological and the social permits belief that natural selection in human society continues to operate in the sense of promoting “the best.” From this perspective, history is fundamentally *correct*: it is the strongest, the fittest, etc. who win out.

Two largely contradictory Social Darwinist strands are at work here. On the one hand, there are those who believe that natural selection operates in human societies as in the state of nature (a belief held especially by Anglo-Saxon writers and by Hitler!). On the other hand, there are those who believe the opposite — that the free play of natural selection in the social sphere runs into conflicts with certain “counter-selections” (Vacher de Lapouge) which call for voluntary corrections and, thus, state intervention. Here the link between the first variant and liberal ideology is clear: the same “invisible hand” that is supposed to reestablish automatically the “optimum” economic state is also supposed to assure “optimum” social relations and interactions. “Free competition” and “natural selection” operate on the same principle. The second variant is decidedly interventionist — paradoxically contradicting its initial postulate (if there is a continuum between the biological and the social spheres, why does natural selection not operate naturally in human societies?).

Joseph Gabel claims that “racism derives from Social Darwinism.”³⁸

37. Since the 1920's, literature on the subject has grown. See, e.g., Lothrop Stoddard, *Le Flot Montant des Peuples de Couleur contre la Suprématie des Blancs* (Paris: Payot, 1925); Muret, *Le Crépuscule des Nations Blanches* (Paris, 1925); Madison Grant, *Le Déclin de la Grande Race* (Paris: Payot, 1926).

38. Joseph Gabel, “Racisme et Aliénation,” in *Praxis International*, Vol. II, No. 4 (January, 1983), p. 432.

This needs a qualification. Obviously, with the aid of Social Darwinism, Darwin's ideas reinforced 19th century racist ideas. Evidently, it was appealing to depict the white race as the most thoroughly evolved and developed branch of the human race.³⁹ The fact remains, however, that there was racism, including its theoretical formulations, well before Darwin, and that many racist authors were fundamentally hostile to Darwin and the theory of evolution (on the grounds that it was one of the major avatars of the theory of progress). Conversely, not all Social Darwinists have been racist. Social Darwinism differs from racism by being elitist. As such, it is not overly bound by ethnic considerations, whereas, in sound racist logic, a white should feel closer to a street sweeper of his own "race" than to a Chinese Nobel Prize winner.

In reality, beside the obvious tendency to biologize social relations, the common ground between racism and Social Darwinism is the idea of a "race war." From this viewpoint, racial conflict becomes one of the elements of universal selection. Here the names of Vacher de Lapouge and his German counterpart, Otto Ammon, come immediately to mind.⁴⁰ Yet, they are not the most important. In fact, the main theoretician of racial struggle was the Pole, Ludwig Gumplowicz.⁴¹ Along with those of the German sociologist, Gustav Ratzenhofer, his ideas, would be popularized in the US by Albion Small. For Gumplowicz, struggle is a primordial and inevitable relation between different racial groups, and the state is the political instrument created by the victorious race to assure its domination over the vanquished race.

Thus, the critique of racialism and racist ideology is clear. In pretending to be universal, racialism turns out to be *reductive*. Attributing to racial factors a central, determining role in understanding human affairs takes its place alongside similar systems, which also posit their own "ultimate categories": economics, class, sexuality, the subconscious, etc. Moreover, the mechanistic causal relation established between race and culture is untenable. To posit such a connection is to dismiss the social interaction found in all societies, and to deny the specific character of historical factors and

39. Recently, the "Darwinian legitimacy" of Social Darwinism has been questioned. For "exculpations" of Darwin, see Kriegel, *op. cit.*; Patrick Tort, *La Pensée Hiérarchique et l'Évolution* (Aubier-Montaigne, 1983). See also Hannsjoachim W. Koch, *Der Sozial-Darwinismus. Seine Genese und sein Einflüsse auf das imperialistische Denken* (Munich: G. H. Beck, 1973).

40. See Vacher de Lapouge, *Les Sélections Sociales*; and Otto Ammon, *Die Gesellschaftsordnung und ihre natürliche Grundlagen* (Jena, 1916).

41. Ludwig Gumplowicz, *Rassenkampf* (1883)

social relations. Any survey of history immediately reveals that the vast majority of great social and cultural transformations in the past were not a function of racial or ethnic phenomena. From this viewpoint, racialism implies an unacceptable naturalization of social phenomena. In the conclusion of his *Essai*, Gobineau explicitly sets his goal to “bring history into the domain of the natural sciences.” This project is revealing. He overlooks the fact that human societies are also living systems, or that man is also an animal. Rather, he systematically erases everything typical of the human phenomenon. Race and society are then related causally. The “racial” signifies the “social” which, apart from the racial, is no more than an incomprehensible epiphenomenon. The human is exclusively reduced to the merely living, and sociology is reduced to zoology. Similarly, recourse to race functions as an absolute justification, i.e., as a substitute for theological justification. What is rejected is the capacity of human beings, based on their natural hereditary makeup, to constitute themselves through choices and lived experiences. Similarly, education becomes nothing more than the training of a pre-programmed personality. Free will disappears. Ultimately, social life is something operating independently of any real persons.

One frequently observes in racist ideology an essentialist obsession with *naturalness*. This obsession relates closely to the emergence of a new concept of *nature*, steadily drawn away from the biological sphere and toward the socio-political one. In racist discourse, an expression such as “a naturally inferior people” conveys, at one and the same time, the idea of *biological* and *definitive* inferiority. Biology becomes a substitute for, or a representation of *fate*: thus, a “natural” inferiority is a permanent inferiority (“for all time,” “forever”), not susceptible to corrections or modifications by any means. Racialism degenerates into essentialism when it defines race as an invariable *ideal type*, independent of the historical, social or cultural circumstances to be found, to some degree or another, affecting the various members of a social group. From this perspective which, paradoxically, becomes subtly egalitarian, all individuals become equivalent and even interchangeable: they are first of all, and uniquely, the representatives of a group with “general” characteristics. Thus, acceptance of any member of the group will lead, sooner or later, to acceptance of all others. In this sense, the value of the individual becomes synonymous with the value of his race. The appeal to “nature,” particularly to biological nature, functions then to legitimate the perpetuation of that race as it is, doing away with any contingencies: everything is fixed once and for all; they are not subject to revision. *A priori* judgments become

simultaneously *eternalized* and *generalized*. Racist thought also *does not allow for exceptions*,⁴² and in this way prejudice is born and nurtured.

To brand this “essentialism” racist, Colette Guillaumin uses the expression *saisie spatialisante*. By suspending time, diachronic reality is reorganized synchronically. Spatial continuity takes absolute precedence over temporal discontinuity.⁴³ The blending of the concepts of culture and nature has led some Marxist writers such as Lukács, Mannheim and Korsch to point out the anti-dialectical nature of racism. Thus, there is a tendency to “reify” categories, i.e., to think in terms of *things*, as well as an inclination to emphasize the fundamental stability of data which, despite their permanent and lasting aspects, ought to be apprehended in terms of relations and dynamic change. This approach is interesting, even if only because it clearly reveals the limits of the *rapprochement* currently being attempted between Darwinism (social or otherwise) and racism. If racism is an essentialism, an ideology where the concept of *nature* is regarded as an unchanging “essence,” there is a problem, then, drawing on a theory of evolution whose central thesis implies transformation and change. It should be pointed out, however, that “essentialist” modes of thought are not unique to racism (or even to racialism). Rather, “essentialist” thinking seems to correspond to a certain propensity of the human mind, and it is easy to cite many other examples of such thinking. The gaze (which engenders representation), be it the gaze of the racist or of his victim, distinguishes only with great difficulty a single element from the whole to which it belongs. Thus, Raymond Aron speaks of the “inverted essentialism” of those who “tend to depict all colonizers, anti-Semites, southern whites (in the US), as *essentially* defined by their disdain for indigenous peoples, their hatred for Jews, their desire for segregation.” Such an approach, he adds, leads to “a depiction of the colonizer, the anti-Semite, or the southern white, which is as coherent and comprehensive as the stereotype of Jews, indigenous peoples, or blacks.”⁴⁴

“Race” functions in racist ideology in the same way “class” functions

42. This is why it is improper to dismiss as “racist” the numerous recent studies concerning racial differences in results to psychometrical testing. They are just *mean* results. No psychologist has ever claimed that all Asians are superior to whites in terms of I.Q., or that all blacks are inferior to whites. Thus, in the US, hiring practices based exclusively on IQ scores would result in firms becoming *more* multiracial than they are today.

43. Colette Guillaume, “Caractères Spécifiques de l’Idéologie Raciste,” in *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, Vol. III (1972), p. 165.

44. Raymond Aron, *Les Désillusions du Progrès. Essai sur la Dialectique de la Modernité* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1969).

in Marxist ideology. This *rapprochement* is justified by those writers who claim that membership in social class is as decisive and universal a determinant as belonging to a given race (although, obviously, it is less easy to change one's race than to change one's social class). A similar parallel can be drawn between the Marxist theory of the class struggle and Gumpowicz' almost contemporary theory of the *Rassenkampf*. In both cases, a particular antagonism becomes what explains all human history. (According to Marx and Engels, "The history of all societies that have existed up to now is the history of class struggle"). In both cases, perhaps under the influence of Darwin's "survival of the fittest" and the "struggle for life,"⁴⁵ the proposed vision is largely one of a war: certain classes *must* be eliminated (Marxism); certain races *can be* done away with (racism). Racial war, on the one hand, and general civil war, on the other: in each case, theory legitimates the separation or elimination of the Other by conjuring up a pejorative and frightening image of the Other (the bourgeoisie as "exploitative," people of color as "threatening"). In both cases, the fundamental concept is endowed with an absolute operational rigidity: class and race become quasi-metaphysical entities one can appeal to in order to definitively understand *essential* reality which, always and everywhere, is at work under epiphenomena and "superstructures." The fact that racist action frequently results in domination, while, on the contrary, "class" action is supposed to, in theory at least, end exploitation, in no way changes this fundamental structural similarity.

Surprisingly, there is a relative conceptual interchangeability between the two ideas. Both race and class can play the same explanatory role. According to certain proponents of racialism, ethnicity explains "class differences." In his *Essai sur la Noblesse* (1732), Henry de Boulainvilliers set out to explore the history of France in light of an antagonism between the "Frankish race," which generated the nobility, and the "Gallic race," from which the common people come. This theory, which identifies the French aristocracy with "German" or "Franc" ancestors, and the common people as descendants of the "Gauls" or the "Gallo-Romans," enjoyed considerable popularity in the 18th and 19th

45. The relation between Marx and Darwin is ambiguous. See Marcel Prenant, *Darwin* (Paris: éd. Sociales Internationales, 1937); Bernard Naccache, *Marx critique de Darwin* (J. Vrin, 1980); Yves Christen, *Marx et Darwin. Le Grand Affrontement* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1981); Pierre Thuillier, *Darwin et Cie* (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1981). See also Nathaniel Weyl, *Karl Marx: Racist* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1979).

centuries. It also explained past social tensions by the uneasy cohabitation of “two peoples” within a single “nation.” This theory was refuted by Bonald and Benjamin Constant, but it reemerges with Courtet de l’Isle, Augustin Thierry, and even Guizot and Montlosier.⁴⁶ It is the same: for racist theoreticians, class struggle is to be interpreted in racial terms, for Marxist theoreticians, it is racial struggle which is to be interpreted in terms of class. Thus, before WWII, Georges Politzer accused Nazism of misleading proletarian consciousness by replacing “class consciousness” with “the idea of racial belonging.” More recently, the Soviet anthropologist Mikhail Nestourkh has written: “Reactionary scholars commit a major error by replacing the doctrine of class struggle with the pseudo-theory of racial conflict as the driving force in the development of the human race.”⁴⁷

As for belief in racial inequality, clearly it is based on ethnocentrism which, most of the time, is not understood as such and, therefore, becomes universally accepted as “fact.” Specific characteristics are seen as universal truths, which themselves are seen as referring to specific characteristics. To create a racial hierarchy from the viewpoint of culture and civilization implies the existence of a *criterion*, which is not the projection of any one culture but which would permit ranking all of them *objectively*. Such a criterion, however, does not exist. The very idea of a socio-cultural criterion independent of any particular society or culture, which could be taken as a unique first principle and a universal norm, is based on a contradiction. Any criterion used to outline a cultural hierarchy can be derived only from the extrapolation of norms or social values proper to a given culture. By itself it cannot provide any understanding as to why it is an appropriate norm, nor any objective evidence as to why it should be adopted universally. To establish a hierarchy of racial inequality necessitates evaluating on the basis of both the behavior and the accomplishments of one of the races, most often of the race establishing the hierarchy. In order to explain this approach, there is no need to impute bad intentions or even an invincible desire for domination or profit. It is

46. Cf. Renée Simon, *Henry de Boulainvilliers, Historien, Politique, Philosophe, Astrologue, 1658-1722* (Gap: Boivin & Cie, 1940); *Un Révolté du Grand Siècle: Henry de Boulainvilliers* (Garches: Nouvel humanisme, 1948); André Devyver, *Le Sang Épuré. Les Préjugés de Race chez les Gentilshommes Français de l’Ancien Régime, 1560-1720* (Brussels: University of Brussels, 1973).

47. Mikhail Nestourkh, *L’Origine de l’Homme* (Moscow: Éd. du Progrès, 1960). For another recent example, see Maurice Cukierman, “Derrière l’Apartheid, la Lutte des Classes,” in *Cahiers du Communisme* (September 1985), pp. 82-92.

simply the result of the tendency of the human mind to consider itself the “norm,” in relation to which the Other can and must be judged.

In fact, the “value” of a culture can only be evaluated in the context of that culture and in terms of how its members perceive what it does for them. One of the fundamental principles of cultural relativism is that judgments formulated on the basis of the experiences of individual members of a culture can be interpreted only with reference to their own cultural milieu.⁴⁸ In the same way, a culture “performs” more or less well in relation to its own norms or according to the objectives it has set for itself, most notably with reference to adaptability. Thus, at most, what can be said is that each people is “superior” to other peoples by being true to itself, by being whatever it is, and that all races are equally capable of being whatever they are. This reasoning, of course, is purely tautological.

The lack of a paradigm encapsulating all cultures and allowing absolute judgments challenges the racist belief in the statutory inequality of peoples and races. It also undermines the better intentioned but equally ethnocentric belief that “primitive” peoples are somehow “backward” and that it is appropriate to *acculturate* them according to a model upheld by those who are “more advanced.” As already indicated, this belief has inspired the politics of assimilation of colonial imperialism, and today it is still presupposed by certain “logics of economic development.” From this viewpoint, the spatial configuration is *temporalized*: so-called primitive peoples are supposed to evoke images of the Western “past,” while being offered a vision of their “future.” The West is once again proposed as an exemplary model of the kind of social ideal to be attained. The result is not much different from that of classical racist strategy: it treats local social structures as inferior, obliterates collective identities and differentiated life-styles, encourages behavioral imitation of established models, and the institutionalizing a *de facto* inequality.

The philosophical sources of racist ideology are more numerous than one would think. The West’s monotheism has not been conducive to tolerance. For a long time, the idea that there is only one God, one truth and thus implicitly one model of civilization has legitimated racially intolerant behavior. To suppress allegedly “bloodthirsty” pagan cults was to eradicate evil and save souls — even at the price of the lives of those

48. See Melville J. Herskovits, *Les Bases de l'Anthropologie Culturelle* (Paris: Payot, 1967); *Cultural Relativism. Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism* (New York: Random House, 1972); Pierre Bungener, “Approche du Relativisme Culturel,” in *Parole et Société*, No. 3 (1972), pp. 247-259.

whose souls were being saved. In some instances, this led to the disappearance of entire populations. The typical example is that of Latin American natives. For a time theologians even debated whether they had a soul. The Bible sanctions the execution of “idolaters” as a sacred duty.⁴⁹ One of the canons adopted at the Lateran Council of 1215 declared: “Those who kill heretics are not guilty of murder (*homicidas non esse qui heretici trucidant*).” Scholastic rationalism privileged classifications. The school of ontological realism proposed the idea of a natural essence, which later turned into the idea of biological “nature.” But empiricism, with its concept of the *tabula rasa* and the all-determining role of the environment, has not exercised a more positive influence. Locke, who was anti-essentialist, insisted strongly that all human characteristics are rooted in a first substance: it thus became possible to speak of human essence in a way Cartesianism could not. The idea that “man” is infinitely malleable may appear “preferable” to the theory of biological determinism, but the idea of an infinitely changing mankind poses considerable problems concerning the legitimacy of “conditioning,” the validity of the criteria and of the chosen models. Thus there is the danger of falling back into ethnocentrism.⁵⁰

In view of all this, it is clear that it is not an easy task to define racist ideology. To the extent that they deal with particulars, most definitions raise serious questions and allow for too many exceptions. A useful definition of racism in terms of ideology should be applicable to all cases. A careful examination of racist discourse, however, reveals only one constant: belief in the inequality of the human races, which implies, as a logical consequence, the inequality of cultures and civilizations. From this, racist ideology: (a) may or *may not* seek in biology an explanation for the inequality it believes it perceives; (b) may or *may not* adhere to racialism, i.e., the theory according to which race is the fundamental given in history; (c) may or *may not* legitimate domination or, on the contrary, exclusion and isolation; (d) may or *may not* rule out miscegenation; (e) may or *may not* hold that the inequality it postulates is unchangeable or, on the contrary, that it is possible to reverse inequality by acculturating “Others” by means of an implicitly ethnocentric model.

49. Cf. Deut. 13, 1-18.

50. For a critique of latent racism in Locke, see Harry M. Bracken, *Mind and Language Essays on Descartes and Chomsky* (Dordrecht-Cinnaminson: Foris Publ., 1984), Chap. 2, “Essence, Accident, and Race,” pp. 39-50; Chap. 3, “Philosophy and Racism,” pp. 51-66.

II

During the last decades, there have been various efforts to redefine racism. One of these, not very rigorous, consists in *generalizing* “racism” to include any attitude of intolerance, aggressiveness of belief, or *a priori* rejection of any group. Thus, “racism” becomes synonymous with phobias of any “Other,” e.g., ageism, misogyny, anti-young, anti-police, anti-workers, anti-unmarried people, etc. This usage seems to be based on a quasi-pleonasm, with “racism” functioning, in extreme cases, as a duplication of “anti.” Here, “racism” extends far beyond its traditionally understood limits. In May, 1985, the French Parliament adopted a law extending “racism” to include “sexism.” For his part, Christian Delacampagne, who saw the broadening of “racism” as resulting from “the widespread diffusion in Western societies of the technocratic age, of guilt feelings resulting from the various genocides carried out by Westerners since the outset of the 20th century,”⁵¹ today admits that “in certain situations, *any type of conflict* can take on a racist connotation,” e.g., male/female or labor/management antagonisms.⁵² From this perspective, “racism” would mean “going to extremes,” to radicalize hostilities and to encourage dogmatic judgments based on stereotypes and prejudices.

This use of “racism” is questionable, and the reasoning behind it specious. At first sight, branding a hostile position as racist could seem to benefit those who use this tactic by heaping on adversaries the disapproval the term “racism” entails. In fact, the result may be the exact opposite. If all aggressive behavior is “racist,” “racism” becomes as “normal” as ordinary feelings of hostility, hatred, aggression — feelings present at all times and in every society. If everyone is racist, no one is racist: *dilution* leads to *trivialization* — diluting responsibility is a classical tactic for relieving the guilty of their guilt! Moreover, such a definition of “racism” would give the laws against racism such a scope that they would become unenforceable.⁵³

A more serious redefinition is that any belief or claim that there are human races is *already* racist, independent of any evaluation of these races. For Delacampagne, a racist is anyone who believes in the existence of races “*even* if one refuses to make value judgments concerning them or

51. Christian Delacampagne, *Figures de l'Oppression* (Paris: PUF, 1977), p. 151.

52. Christian Delacampagne, *L'Invention du Racisme. Antiquité et Moyen Age* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), p. 46.

53. Thus, according to Colette Guillaumin: “To introduce into racism such things as group hostilities, whose characteristics, conscious and unconscious, are totally alien to the concept of race, is to deny racism, to eradicate it by trivializing the term.” See *L'Idéologie Raciste. Genèse et Langage Actuel* (The Hague: Mouton, 1972), p. 71.

to establish a hierarchy among them.”⁵⁴ This is a relatively recent position; it would not even have occurred to the most committed anti-racists several decades ago. It is supported by a concomitant claim that “current science disproves the existence of races.” It marks an important turning point in the evolution of anti-racist discourse, which traditionally has wavered between two contradictory ideas: first, that biology is *insignificant* in relation to social phenomena; and, second, that biology *disproves* racist claims. This new position, i.e., that it is racist to hold that races even exist, has a semblance of coherence about it: racist ideology uses the existence of different races as its point of departure for arguing for their inequality; if races could be shown not to exist, then racist ideology would fall apart. But construing racist ideology as pure discourse is an over-intellectualization: by eliminating the word, one hopes to eliminate the thing!

Aside from this position’s undeniably ideological motivations,⁵⁵ the view is based on the fact that, since the end of the 1950s, because of the emergence of “population genetics,” in the scientific community the term “race” has been increasingly replaced by that of “population.” Research on gene frequencies and genetic pools have displaced traditional morphological studies of phenotypes. Writers such as A. E. Mourant or Jacques Ruffié have played an important role in this evolution — an evolution encouraged by recent progress in immunology and geographic hematology, by the discovery of numerous new blood groups, of “genetic markers,” of the HL-A system, etc. Some population geneticists have suggested that the study of genetic modulations and “distances” between genetic pools do not support the concept of “traditional” races; that variations within a “race” are more important as differences between various “races.” Clearly, races have more characteristics in common than those distinguishing them, and there is no clearly defined boundaries between them, not only due to the fact of interracial reproduction, but also because one finds between these various, traditional “racial types” all sorts of “intermediary types.” This has led some to conclude that races “do not exist.” Deprived of its operational value and of its objective biological

54. Delacampagne, *L’Invention du Racisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

55. Albert Jacquard poses the question as follows: “When one considers all the biological implications as well as all the doctrinal and political theories indelibly attached to the word ‘race,’ would it not be prudent to eliminate the word, as one would dispose of a dangerous or useless tool?” See his “A la Recherche d’un Contenu pour le Mot ‘Race’,” in Maurice Olender, éd., *op. cit.*, p. 39. See also Ashley Montagu, ed., *The Concept of Race* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1964), which suggests that a good reason for abandoning the word “race” is that it produces in the layman “emotionally confused reactions” (p. 24).

basis, the notion of race becomes pure fiction.

This dismissal of the idea of race is accompanied by claims concerning the benefits, or at least the biological harmlessness, of miscegenation. Such a viewpoint, rare in the past, has some precedents. In the 19th century this position was held by Michelet (who devoted a chapter of his 1833 *Histoire de France* to “The Unhappy Destiny of Those Races Which Have Remained Pure”), as well as by Armand de Quatrefages (1810-1892), according to whom “the future belongs to races which have intermarried.” This position has also been vigorously advocated by Jacques Ruffié⁵⁶ in respect to the intermarriage of whites and blacks. The point here is not to examine this viewpoint, which is the result of a profound change of outlook,⁵⁷ but to note that it arises from a double paradox. On the one hand, if races do not exist, it is strange to suggest that they can intermarry. (The same applies to multiracial societies: it is difficult for races to be many and non-existent at the same time.) On the other hand, it is no less paradoxical to claim that the question of miscegenation is “settled” since it poses no biological problem, while rightly emphasizing that in human society, socio-cultural factors are far more important and decisive than biological ones. In fact, hostility to miscegenation may very well be inspired by cultural or religious considerations having nothing to do with racism.⁵⁸ Moreover, it is well known that in societies where there are many interracial marriages, the social status of these married couples depends, to a large extent, on their closeness to the dominant racial phenotype — all of which impacts on the marriage and on genetic selection.

The thesis according to which “science considers the idea of race

56. See Jacques Ruffie, *De la Biologie à la Culture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1976); *Traité du Vivant* (Paris: Fayard, 1982). On miscegenation, see K. F. Dyes, *The Biology of Racial Integration* (Bristol: Scientechnica, 1974), p. 446.

57. See W. B. Provine, “Geneticists and the Biology of Race Crossing,” in *Science*, No. 182 (1973), p. 790, which discusses the role played by political and ideological factors.

58. In *Information Juive* (April, 1985), one finds the following: “It seems inappropriate to place the issue of mixed marriages within the framework of racism. Opposition to a mixed marriage is not necessarily motivated by racism and often has nothing to do with racism. We Jews know that mixed marriages frequently entail troubling consequences that affect relations between married couples, the unity and future of their family life, their children’s education, the continuation of our traditions, our religion, even the survival of our people. Who can deny that often the result of this type of marriage, in addition to cultural conflict, is the weakening, even the disappearance of certain minorities?” Regine Lehmann writes: “One who recognizes differences between individuals is not a racist, but rather a racist is someone who claims to be superior to another because of difference. The rejection of mixed marriages is not a manifestation of racism, but reveals, rather, the desire to maintain Jewish identity.” “L’Enfant et l’Antisémitisme,” in *Hamoré* (January 1981), p. 9.

inoperative” (non-existent, without foundation, etc.) and maintains that it would be racist to hold the opposite, runs into numerous problems. First of all, this thesis treats “science” as a field of knowledge where positions are unanimous, which is certainly not the case. It is striking that, on the issue of the existence or non-existence of races, the non-existence of races is most firmly proposed by scholars whose disciplines are the farthest removed from anthropology. Scholarly certitude on this issue seems to increase with the distance of one’s discipline from anthropology: a large number of journalists, a considerable number of sociologists and psychologists, a few population geneticists, but very few anthropologists. To that group may be added politically involved scholars (Albert Jacquard, Ashley Montagu, Steven Rose, Leon Kamin, Richard Lewontin, et al.), whose motivations are probably complex. Clearly, however, there is no unanimity on the issue, and this is confirmed by recent anthropological publications which continue, now more than ever, to use the concept of race and in no way question the existence nor the operational validity of racial realities.⁵⁹

In the course of a UNESCO colloquium in Athens (March 30-April 3, 1981) meant to denounce the “various pseudo-scientific theories invoked to justify racism and racial discrimination,” the three following (contradictory) positions were proposed: that the concept of race “in the human species does not correspond to any reality that could be objectively defined”

59. In a volume published by UNESCO against racism, L. C. Dunn writes: “I believe that we need the term ‘race’ to designate a biological category which, however difficult to define, nonetheless constitutes a very real element in the structure of human populations on earth. It seems preferable to define this term, to explain its use, and to extricate it from its harmful or erroneous reception, rather than to push it aside, purely and simply; thus refusing to resolve the problem.” See L. C. Dunn, “Race et Biologie,” in *Le Racisme devant la Science* (Paris: Unesco-Gallimard, 1960), p. 291. The author reaffirms his position in a later edition (Paris: Unesco, 1973), pp. 103-104. The geneticist Theodosius Dobzhansky asks: “Is it not preferable to explain to people the nature of racial differences rather than to pretend that they do not exist?” See his *Le Droit à l’Intelligence. Génétique et Égalité* (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1978), p. 63. The anthropologist Andor Thoma takes on those who, he says, “would like to make physical anthropology disappear in favor of population genetics.” Maintaining that “mathematicians become charlatans when they begin to speak as if they were geneticists,” he takes strong exception to any effort, purely ideological in his opinion, to “make race invisible.” “After the abuses of a Hitler,” he writes, “this goal (to make race invisible) was humanly understandable, but it was in no way scientific. Today, the failure of blood taxonomy is admitted by all the experts . . . The supposed contradiction between morphological anthropology and hematology is artificial.” See *L’Anthropologie*, Vol. LXXXIV (1981), p. 130. See also Albert Jacquard response in *L’Anthropologie*, Vol. LXXXV (1982), pp. 700-701.

(Albert Jacquard);⁶⁰ that, for humans, race is a “biological reality” (Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi);⁶¹ and that the theory of the non-existence of races is “a false ideology” (Eviatar Nevo).⁶² Thus, there is no agreement, even among scholars with a similar orientation and outlook. Sometimes similar contradictions can be found even within the work of a single author!⁶³ In fact, the idea of race is almost as old as humanity itself. The first racial classification can be found in the Bible, in the passage dealing with “Noah’s lineage.”⁶⁴ Since then the word “race” has been employed in a metaphorical sense, as a synonym for “nation,” “people,” “lineage,” “stock,” “house,” “extraction,” etc. In the 18th, and especially in the 19th century, the flowering of the exact sciences facilitated cutting back on these many meanings, which only caused confusion and encouraged more rigorous definitions. For modern writers races are populations, differing from one another according to the incidence of certain genes⁶⁵ and according to the frequency of certain hereditary traits whose phenotypic appearance more or less allows one to recognize visually their members.⁶⁶ Among all the definitions proposed, the following is Gloor’s: “Race is a variety of the species *Homo sapiens L.*, constituted by a group of human beings distinguishable from other groups by a complex of hereditary characteristics: anatomical and physiological (and probably also psychological), all observed over several generations, to the exclusion of all characteristics acquired through education, tradition, or social influence.”⁶⁷

Moreover, some population geneticists’ arguments in support of the

60. See *Racisme, Science et Pseudo-science* (Paris: Unesco, 1982), p. 32.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

63. In his various publications, Albert Jacquard insists that the concept of race does not correspond “to any objectively definable reality.” However, in *L’Anthropologie, op. cit.*, he writes: “It would be absurd, in the name of antiracism, to try to demonstrate that races do not exist.” And he adds: “In view of four billion and a half human beings, it is, to the contrary, quite natural to try to classify them into groups which are biologically homogenous. Such research is in no way racist, as long as it does not attempt to establish a preferential hierarchy between these groups.”

64. *Genesis* 9-10. A number of racist authors, particularly in the American Protestant tradition, have argued from the curse of Cham (Hâm) and his descendents by Noah as justification for segregation (“Cursed be Canaan. The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers,” *Genesis*, 9, 25). There has been a long-standing tradition, for some, of seeing in Canaan (Kena’ân) the ancestor of black peoples.

65. Dobzhansky, *op. cit.*; W. C. Boyd, *op. cit.*

66. A. M. Brues, *op. cit.*

67. Pierre-André Gloor, “A propos de la Xénophobie et du Racisme,” in *L’Anthropologie*, Vol. LXXXIV (1980), No. 4, p. 586.

claim for the “non-existence” of races seem questionable. Consider the one based on the continuity between racial groups, found as early as 1843 in J. C. Prichard’s *Histoire Naturelle de l’Homme*. It is based on the continuity of genetic matter and human morphology and on the vast extent of intraracial variations. Thus, Jacques Ruffié writes: there is no “biologically empty space” between the races; on the contrary, there is one continuous strand. Well, this is obvious! Whoever claimed that there is not a common genetic thread running between all races? The presence of intermediaries has never been an argument against the “extremes” and the existence of intermediate ethnic groups does not discredit the idea of race any more than the idea of “intermediaries” between the young and elderly, between the dwarf and the giant, between hot and cold discredits the ideas of age, height, or temperature. “The Alps and the Apennines are linked by mountains of low altitude,” observes Andor Thoa, “but the Alps exist, as do the Apennines.” Dobzhansky writes: “To take the position that races do not exist because they do not constitute strictly defined groups is a return to the worst typological errors. It is almost as logical as claiming that cities do not exist because the countryside which separates them is not totally uninhabited.”⁶⁸ Moreover, the same reasoning could be used to prove that the definition of species, indeed even of genus, is just as conventional and arbitrary as that of race. . .⁶⁹

Emphasizing the importance of intraracial variation and the relative absence of “genetic distance” between the major racial groups does not lead much further. Recent research suggests that about 10% of racial differences can be attributed to biological variations within the human species.⁷⁰ The significance of these statistics seems very weak when one realizes that “genetic distance” between man and some higher primates is also very limited. Solely in terms of genetic frequencies, there is a greater “proximity” between man and the chimpanzee than between the

68. *Op. cit.*, p. 67.

69. In some instances, the attribution of the qualifier *Homo* in paleontology is controversial (such as *Homo Abilis*), just as is the qualifier *Sapiens* (e.g., in the case of the Neanderthals).

70. See M. Nei and A. K. Roychoudhury, “Genetic Variations Within and Between the Three Major Races of Man: Caucasoids, Negroids, and Mongoloids,” in *American Journal of Human Genetics*, No. 26 (1974), pp. 421-423. This article studies variations between the chemical components found in the blood codons of the three major races. The results obtained confirm those of Latter (1980) and Lewontin (1972). J. B. Mitton, “Genetic Differentiation of Races of Man, as Judged by Single-Locus and Multilocus Analysis,” in *American Naturalist*, Vol. CXI (1977), pp. 203-212, revises downward Lewontin’s estimates on the scope of interracial variation.

chimpanzee and the gorilla — or even between certain human groups and others!⁷¹ Moreover, most human blood types are found in the monkey, along with blood types unique to simians.⁷² The organization of chromosomes in man and the chimpanzee is so close that it is almost impossible to explain their phenotypic differences based only on chromosomes.⁷³

Lack of agreement between some population geneticists and bio-anthropologists (or physical anthropologists) stems from the fact that the two disciplines do not share the same starting point. Geneticists take into consideration only characteristics whose genetic hereditary nature has been established beyond question (the amount of melanin, the presence of lactose, the rhesus system and the seriological properties of the blood, the HL-A immune system, etc.). Starting with these, geneticists establish the existence of genetic pools which, very often, do not correspond to racial groups. On the other hand, anthropologists start with existing populations and their actual phenotypes to identify and classify characteristic morphological types, defined by apparently hereditary characteristics, even if the mode of genetic transmission of these characteristics has not yet been identified or if it is not yet possible to quantify the genetic distance for these characteristics as regards individuals and groups (a classic example: eye color). In other words, anthropologists start with common perception, while population geneticists “construct” populations which do not necessarily correspond to this understanding. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the idea of race, while operative for the one group, is not for the other: thus the sometimes tumultuous relations between the two disciplines.

At any rate, population geneticists tend to underestimate recent advances in biotypology (Czekanowsky, Wanke) and in paleoanthropology (Yves Coppens, Henry de Lumley, Andor Thoma, Poulianos, Vlcek); nor do they take into account the fact that contemporary bio-anthropology is tending more and more to abandon the Linnean concept,

71. Immunological and sequential comparisons carried out on 12 proteins and involving a total of 2,633 amino acids have revealed that only 19 amino acids “separate” man from the chimpanzee. See Marie-Claire King and A. C. Wilson, in *Science*, No. 188 (1975), p. 107, who estimated at 0.62 the genetic “distance” between man and the chimpanzee.

72. See Wladyslaw W. Socha and Jan Moor-Jankowski, “Blood Groups of Anthropoid Apes and their Relationship to Human Blood Groups,” in *Journal of Human Evolution*, No. 9 (1979), pp. 453-465.

73. See Jorge J. Yunis, Jeffrey R. Swayer and Kelly Dunham, “The Striking Resemblance of High-Resolution G-Banded Chromosomes of Man and Chimpanzee,” in *Science* (June 6, 1980), pp. 1145-1148.

based solely on resemblance from which an ideal type or prototype was deduced, in favor of Victor Bunak's approach, which sees race as a unity of phylogenetic derivation, recognizable by a small number of objective criteria.⁷⁴ Of course, this is not to deny the merits of population genetics, but only to point out its limitations. A study of the geographical distribution of gene frequencies would not exhaust what can be known about human populations. Moreover a number of immunological properties are not unique to the human species. Many of them cannot to this day be organized into a coherent system.⁷⁵ Population genetics thus risk creating "artificial" populations which do not correspond to populations as commonly understood.⁷⁶ It should also be remembered that the goal of scientific knowledge is, above all, to explain, clarify, and deepen common understanding — not to mask it or to transform it into an optical illusion.

Aware of the complexity of the issue, André Langaney has adopted a middle course: "It is no more reasonable to ignore morphological data to create 'a purely genetic' history of man than to dismiss 'so-called genetic anthropology' as do classical anthropologists. It would be better to seek out the sources of conflict between the two types of data, by studying the bias of each."⁷⁷ Furthermore, recent studies have shown that the results obtained by population genetics, when properly interpreted, in

74. Thus, there are as many races as there are geographical combinations of morphological characteristics. This is close to the method of taxonomy called "cladistic": racial relations are linked to the identification of common derived characteristics, and not primitive common ones. See Andor Thoma, "Taxinomie, Phylogénèse et Génétique," in *Bulletin et Mémoires de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris*, Vol. XIII, No. 5 (1978), pp. 287-294.

75. R. Riquet writes: "The results from blood typing appear to be inferior to those of classical anthropology with reference to the study of human groups. Anyone can, individually, recognize a Malaysian, a Melanesian, a black, or a Moï, but blood typing is incapable of doing so. However, the study of population dynamics and of hybridization cannot be carried out without blood typing, as was proven by D. F. Roberts in reference to African blacks, by J. Benoist in the Antilles, and by the school of Ruffié in Indochina. Blood typing should not be discouraged, but it needs to give up its pretension of replacing current anthropology." See his "History of Anthropology in Europe," in *Journal of Human Evolution*, No. 7 (1978), p. 461.

76. As Wiercinski has stressed: "One must not forget that population genetics is merely based on models and that those models applied to the study of race by geneticists are extremely simplified, reminding one of a dark cloud, composed of dust particles assembled by chance, masking the real characteristics of each human individual." Wiercinski, in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (1963), p. 203.

77. André Langaney "Diversité et Histoire Humaines," in *Population*, No. 6 (1979), p. 999.

no way contradict the findings of a traditional bio-anthropological approach and sometimes they even support the results obtained by more traditional approaches.⁷⁸

On a more practical level, to the extent that it mimics militant antiracism, the theory of the non-existence of races may betray a certain naiveté. Does anyone really believe it possible to make racism disappear by *fictionalizing* race? While the “genetic distance” between a Breton and a Senegalese may well be less than that between a Breton and a Picard, even knowing this the Breton will surely feel “closer” to the Picard than to the African black. This is due to what might be called common perception. Geneticists may well stress that genetic pools do not necessarily correspond to phenotypes, but it is not genetic pools that the average person meets on the street. Racists observe the existence of populations which appear, rightly or wrongly, as clearly different at every level (physical, social, cultural, etc.), and from this they draw the wrong conclusions as to the presumed “superiority” or “inferiority” of the ones or the others. It is unlikely they will change their attitude upon learning that “races do not exist” and that somehow they have been the victims of an illusion. According to Dobzhansky, there is the risk “that such a denial of race will only diminish the credibility of those scientists who uphold such a position.”⁷⁹

Ultimately, the issue for the militant antiracist is not so much whether races exist or not, but to understand that, in any event, races are *perceived as existing*, and that what is important is that hierarchical and denigrating conclusions are no longer reached. The difficulty with this is that a racist reaction does not begin merely with the perception of bio-anthropological difference, but also (and perhaps primarily) with the perception of socio-cultural difference. Significantly, anti-Arab xenophobia is much more widespread in France than anti-black xenophobia, although the “racial distance” is much less between the French and Arabs than between the French and black Africans. One must also take into consideration the essential role that the *imaginary* plays in the process of denigrating symbolization which governs much of racist reaction. As Guillaumin writes: “race” is, above all, a signifier; the suggested non-existence of race as a signified will make no difference

78. See, e.g., Sanghvi, “Comparison of Genetical and Morphological Methods for a Study of Biological Differences,” in *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, Vol. XI (1953), p. 3. See also Jean Bernard, *Le Sang des Hommes* (Paris: Buchet-Chastel, 1981).

79. Theodosius Dobzhansky, *Le Regard Éloigné* (Paris: Plon, 1983), p. 63.

whatsoever as regards racist reactions. “Imagined races and real races play the same role in the social process and are thus identical as regards their function. This is the crux of the sociological problem. It is important to understand the sociological reality of ‘race’ precisely at that point where real and imagined races take their place in the larger social process. Trying to determine what is concretely true or objectively false in racial perception is inadequate: it settles for a *status-quo* of racial realities. Merely studying the bases for current racial realities does not address the sociological problem.”⁸⁰

There is a final and very different objection to the claim according to which “science refutes the existence of races.” Even if this is wrong, the meaning of the word “refutes” needs to be examined. In other words, does racist ideology operate on the level of “proving” and “disproving,” or, rather, more on the level of interpretation? Further, is it possible, without falling into the most banal scientism, to turn to “science” to establish the truth or falsity of various ideologies? To claim that, in the past, racist theories have only been upheld on “pseudo-scientific” grounds may comfort the devout antiracist, but it is not true. From Linné and Blumenbach to Otmar von Verschuer, as well as to Vacher de Lapouge and many others, the “scientific” qualifications of a number of racist authors are beyond doubt. It would be mistaken to believe, with many racists, that racism is firmly grounded in science, or to believe, with some antiracists, that the authors in question are only “pseudo-scientists.”

One problem is that “scientists” are no less vulnerable than others to propaganda and ideologies; if the history of science teaches anything, it is that knowledge has never protected anyone from erring.⁸¹ More fundamentally, the problem is that science only operates in the *descriptive* mode. As Nietzsche put it: “Science never creates values.”⁸² When science “says” that one cannot found a racist theory scientifically, it does not refute racism any more than it upholds antiracism. It only refutes one thing: that one can provide a scientific basis for anything having to do with ideological preference — be it racism or antiracism. According to Jean-Pierre Dupuy: “Science has paid a price for basing itself on a single operational mode (to which it has owed and still owes its prodigious success). The price has been

80. Guillaumin, *L'Idéologie Raciste*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

81. The literature on this topic is extensive. See especially Thuillier, *Darwin & Cie*, *op. cit.*; Michael Billig, *Ideology and Social Psychology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

82. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Généalogie de la Morale*, in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. VII (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 339.

that it has nothing to say about desirable behavior in human affairs.”⁸³ Celestin Bougle also insisted on this at the outset of the 20th century: by nature science is mute on the necessity or inappropriateness of hierarchies, simply because it excludes, by virtue of the type of knowledge it establishes, all reference to values. As such, science has nothing to say for or against equality or inequality.”⁸⁴

By definition, science is contingent and subject to revisions: the work of science is never finished, but always evolving. From this viewpoint, to base antiracist arguments on science is, inevitably, to leave them *in a state of suspension*. More seriously, such a strategy would imply, *volens volens*, that the racism “condemned” today by science could, in the future, cease to be so. As Thuillier notes: “When it is a question of determining our practical attitude towards blacks, Arabs, or Indians, it is dangerous to give a decisive role to so-called scientific data. To angle for a ‘yes’ from the experts, whether one intends it or not, is to allow that their negative response could make acceptable or even legitimate certain forms of segregation, racism, etc.”⁸⁵ In fact, “scientific racism” is the mirror image of “scientific antiracism”: both stem from, if not scientism, at least from a misunderstanding of science.

Ultimately, the claim that the simple observation of the existence of races stems from “racism” is untenable. It implies, bizarrely, that perception of races can only lead to negative evaluations. More seriously, it burdens well-reasoned antiracism with a belief that risks compromising its credibility. In the end, the denial of the reality of race is reminiscent of the Sartrean theory of “for the Other,” according to which the Other (the black, the Jew, the woman, etc.) only exists as such in the mind of the perceiver, and through the bias of the gaze. This position runs into the same difficulties as Sartre’s denial of the actual existence of the Other and resolves nothing. One cannot eliminate a shared perception, even in the name of “science,” by branding it as an “illusion.” Rather, it is more reasonable to follow current thinking, which sees racism as beginning with a *value judgment*, i.e., with a shift from *description* to *evaluation* (and to the *objectification* of that evaluation). Jean Rostand

83. Jean-Pierre Dupuy, “Role de la Différenciation dans les Structures Sociales,” in *Différences et Inégalités*, (Différences, 1984), p. 58.

84. Ernst Mayr writes: “Equality is a social and ethical concept but not a biological one.” See *Populations, Espèces et Évolution* (Paris: Hermann, 1974), p. 440).

85. Pierre Thuillier, “Les Scientifiques et le Racisme,” in *La Recherche*, No. 45 (May 1974), p. 459.

has distinguished “racial truths” from “racist lies”: “To be antiracist does not imply denying the existence and endurance of racial differences — which would be scientific naiveté. Rather, antiracism implies denying that in the human species there are races which are superior to others. Most of all, racism implies denying . . . that certain races may abrogate to themselves the right to mistreat or even disdain other races.”⁸⁶ Memmi has expressed a similar view: “Racism only begins with the interpretation of differences.”⁸⁷ This is also the position of most of those who have studied the question seriously.⁸⁸

The idea that some mental or behavioral traits can be inherited or that a particular genotype can condition the expression of these traits is no more “racist” than the “belief” in the existence of races. The opposite position, according to which cerebral activity is exempt from any biological determination, stems from a theory of acquired traits — a position today universally discredited. Or it can stem from a metaphysical position upholding the Cartesian distinction between body and mind. Today, however, the old debate over the innate and the acquired appears a bit obsolete. Biological determination of certain psychological characteristics never implies more than potentiality, which leaves room for the influence of social conditioning; the former does not rule out the latter.⁸⁹ On the other hand, to regard biological factors as a realm of fatalism and socio-cultural ones as the domain of freedom is to fall once again into the racist reasoning which starts by naturalizing and biologizing social realities and ends up claiming the inevitability of inequality. The environment is no more influential than the potential abilities the

86. Jean Rostand et Andrée Tétry, *L'Homme. Initiation à la Biologie*, Vol 2 (Paris: Larousse, 1972), p 319.

87. Memmi, *Le Racisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

88. François de Fontette writes: “The existence of human races as such does not have to be questioned; racism is not bred by the mere admission of the existence of races.” See *Le Racisme*, 4th edition (Paris: PUF, 1981), p. 7. The population geneticist, Jean Marie Legay writes: “As for the existence of races (which can, in fact, lead to the celebration of difference), or the (more subtle) existence of population groups (which, when acknowledged, can lead to most interesting medical or agronomical measures), it is neither of these which leads to racism. Rather, it is a *value* judgment made by *someone other* that leads to racism.” See “Pour une Sociobiologie,” in *Révolution* (February 1, 1985). According to the Institute of Jewish Affairs: “Acknowledging that races exist, or even venturing an opinion on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of their mingling, does not constitute racism.” See *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4 (October, 1984).

89. Ernst Mayr has observed: “It is the partisans of environment theory who claim that behavior owes nothing to heredity. The partisans of heredity have always maintained that both factors play their role.” Interview with the journal *Omni* (February 1983), p. 119.

individual inherits at birth, and the environment is no more easily modified. Man is a unified whole, body and mind: he shapes himself, starting with inherited materials, and through actual social relations and lived experiences, different for each person.

Kriegel is right in criticizing those who hold that “antiracism” implies impugning the concept of “hereditary behavior.”⁹⁰ In this regard, he shares the viewpoint of all those who argue systematically in terms of interaction⁹¹ or co-evolution.⁹² Aron has written that “intellectual skills are conditioned, not determined, by the genetic patrimony.”⁹³ Today, it is commonly held that heredity determines, not culture, but the ability to acquire culture.⁹⁴ Lévi-Strauss has reversed the equation, claiming that race is a function of culture: “Each culture selects genetic aptitudes which, by retroactive effect, influence the culture which had first contributed to their development.” The result is that “human evolution is not a by-product of biological evolution, nor is it completely distinct from it,” so that “collaboration becomes possible between racial and cultural studies.”⁹⁵

There remains the task of examining a last attempt at redefining racism by improperly and excessively broadening the term. This is Taguieff’s work, which has skillfully set about establishing the parameters of what he calls “*racisme différentialiste*” (or “*racisme identitaire*”).⁹⁶ By this designation, Taguieff describes discourse which proceeds by focusing on the theme of *difference* and *identity*, with emphasis on the essential role of difference. Through semantic maneuvering, difference is established as an

90. Kriegel, *op. cit.*

91. See J. Benoist, “Du Social au Biologique: Étude de Quelques Interactions,” in *L’Homme*, Vol. VI (1966), p. 1.

92. See Napoleon A. Chagnon and William Irons, eds., *Evolutionary Biology and Human Social Behavior. An Anthropological Perspective* (North Scituate: Duxbury Press, 1979); Charles J. Lumsden and Edward O. Wilson, *Genes, Mind, and Culture. The Coevolutionary Process* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981).

93. Aron, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

94. Dobzhansky writes: “Human genes permit man to acquire a culture with relative ease, but contrary to the belief of most racists, human genes do not determine which culture he is going to acquire.” See *Heredity and the Nature of Man* (London, 1964), p. 143.

95. Lévi-Strauss, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.

96. See especially Pierre-André Taguieff, “Le Néo-racisme Différentialiste. Sur l’Ambiguïté d’une Évidence Commune et ses Effets Pervers: l’Éloge de la Différence,” in *Langage et Société*, No. 34 (December 1985), pp. 69-98. Cf. also “Les Présuppositions Définitionnelles d’un Indéfinissable: ‘le Racisme’,” *op. cit.*, pp. 96-117; “L’Identité Française au Miroir du Racisme Différentialiste,” in Jacques Tarnero and Martine Storti, eds., *L’Identité Française* (Paris: Tierce, 1985), pp. 96-117.

absolute, a “closed totality.” It is claimed that this “*racisme différentialist*” differs from inegalitarian racism — from “ordinary racism” — just as “difference of nature differs from difference of degree.” This form of racism does not make negative value judgments about other races. Rather, it is essentially *heterophile*. Thus, it is depicted as “a racism which masquerades as intelligent antiracism.” This masking of its true nature is not easily understood, because it uses a vocabulary which suggests neither rejection nor denigration. Therefore, it manages to put “classical” antiracism on the spot since it is then supposed to undertake its own “*aggiornamento*” and subsequently to abandon its “defense of difference.” At this point, heterophilia and heterophobia meet in a “zone of almost total equivocation.” Impelled, not by a fear of equalizing everything and everyone, but by a dread of any “*mélange*,” differential racism is considered worse in some respect than inegalitarian racism, because by treating races as entities that cannot really understand each other, it implies the impossibility of communicating between cultures and, inevitably, the acceptance of forms of *apartheid*.

Methodologically, one may wonder to what an extent the “reading” in “differentialist discourse” is not based solely on the reader’s intention. Here the emphasis is on “ruses,” “camouflages,” and other strategies of diversion, of euphemisms, or of semantic substitution — all of which are used and abused by this discourse. These are processes which allegedly are “hardly noticeable to the uninitiated” and thus demand a “close critical textual reading.” In short, such a reading demands the skills of those who know how to read between the lines. All of this inevitably leads one to question the validity of the entire process. Differentialist discourse, properly understood, demands attentive critical reading, because it is supposed to mean *something other than it actually seems to claim* (the intended audience of the message is presumed to be able to *decode* the message without being misled by the previously discussed strategies). But does this not risk falling into circular reasoning such as: “the proof that they are racist is that they maintain that they are not racist” (the approach of confirmation by denial)? Because such reasoning is present in the analyst’s mind, does it follow that the same thoughts are really those of the person whose discourse is being analyzed? As Taguieff has pointed out, this theory of a differentialist racism raises a fundamental objection: the very concept of “difference as an absolute” is a contradiction. To posit *difference* implies the possibility of comparing commensurable entities. One can only differ *in relation* to an Other, perceived as

different. A difference established as an absolute is no longer a difference. The contradiction is evident: either difference is not absolute (in which case differential racism falls apart) or difference is an absolute, in which case there is no longer any real “difference” — nor any “differential discourse.” As for apartheid, it is too easily forgotten that what characterized it was not a separation willed by one party or the other, but a separation *imposed* and accompanied by *domination*.

Finally, the hypothesis of a “differential racism” has the disadvantage of putting antiracism in a bind. If racism can be considered as either heterophile (or raciophile) *or* as heterophobic (or raciophobic), then the very definition of *antiracism* becomes problematic. As Taguieff puts it: it is caught between the contradictory imperatives of fighting, at one and the same time, against phobia of the Other, and against an excessive apology on behalf of difference. The antiracist must walk a narrow path that bears all the appearances of a double bind. Then what should the antiracist advocate? Silence? Indifference? The elimination of collective identities (but that would not seem to respect the Other)? Taguieff proposes a “universalism without the proposal of a single model.” That however, seems akin to proposing a square circle.

There are certainly ways of speaking about “differences,” which turn difference into a fundamental obstacle to all communication. Similarly, discourse can be used for “strategic” purposes and serve intentions other than those explicitly expressed. But that is true for all discourse — and the discourse of suspicion can itself become suspect! On the other hand, when the right to difference is clearly presented as a *right* (of peoples to maintain their identities) and is not seen as an obligation imposed (by whom? in whose name?); when difference is also presented as what it is, and not as an absolute (in which case it would cease to be a difference); when the principle of difference is vigorously defended to the benefit of all groups, and not only to the advantage of some; when, moreover, difference is not based on biological, ethnic, or racial data, then one fails to understand how so-called “differentialist” discourse could be considered “racist,” unless, of course, one considers “racism” as the source for a “drive” so general, so universal, as the desire of whole groups to perpetuate themselves in the future without loss of their past identity.

In truth, it is the diversity of the human race which creates its richness, just as it is diversity which makes communication possible and gives it value. Diversity of peoples and cultures exist, however, only because, in the past, these various peoples and cultures were *relatively isolated* from

one another. According to Lévi-Strauss, one cannot both uphold diversity and be unaware of the fact that “this diversity results, in large part, from the desire of each culture to be different from all those peoples nearby, to distinguish themselves from them, and, in short, to be themselves.”⁹⁷ It follows that total “transparency” in human relations would lead to the same result as total closure. In other words, communication can only be *imperfect*. Without this imperfection, it would lose its *raison d’être* and its very possibility of existing. Again, Levi-Strauss writes: “One cannot, at one and the same time, lose oneself in the enjoyment of the Other, identify with him, and maintain oneself as different. Total, integral communication compromises, in the short or the long term, both one’s fundamental integrity and that of the Other. The great creative epochs were those when communication had become sufficient so that various groups, though apart, stimulated each other, without the interaction being so frequent and easy that obstacles, which are indispensable between individuals, as they are between groups, dwindle to the point that interaction becomes so facile as to neutralize and nullify their diversity.”⁹⁸

The dialectic of Self and Other goes back to Plato’s *Sophist*. Following the example of many contemporary movements (one need only think of neo-feminism), antiracism has fluctuated between “respect for differences” and “egalitarianism.” There is a racism which absolutizes the Other in order to create a Totally Other with whom no one can have anything in common. There is another, more perverse racism which absolutizes the Same and, in the name of Same, challenges the very idea of difference. The Other can then be denied twice: either one destroys the Other’s very difference or, in a more subtle way, one denies that there is an Other. The approaches are different, but they come to the same results: the suppression of difference, whether by acting in such a way that difference no longer exists, or by acting as if difference never did exist. According to Henri Lefebvre, this is an age when the forces for “homogeneity” confront the powers opting for “separation,” and the struggle is titanic.⁹⁹ In such an age, antiracism should struggle, head on, with these two approaches. This implies learning the value of difference as the prerequisite for a dialogue respectful of each group’s identity. It also implies understanding that it is not so much the perception of differences which provokes racism, as the feeling of the disintegration of identities, which

97. Lévi-Strauss, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

99. Henri Lefebvre, *Le Manifeste Différentialiste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

then leads to recreating identities in pathological ways and from the perspective of racial xenophobia.

“It is time,” wrote Guy Michaud,¹⁰⁰ “to develop a strategy for interethnic and intercultural relations, based not only on respect and understanding, but on the reality of differences.” This is also Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt’s view: “One often hears the argument that only a single worldwide civilization, with a total mixture of all races, would resolve the tensions and conflicts between groups. That does not appear to me necessary or desirable. If one could teach man to be tolerant, i.e., to be ready to understand and accept other life-styles both within civilizations and between various peoples, then ethnocentrism will find itself defused without it being necessary for groups to surrender their cultural uniqueness nor pride in their own civilization. Establishing peace among peoples need not be accomplished over the dead bodies of civilizations and races.”¹⁰¹

100. Guy Michaud, “L’Ethnotype comme Système de Significations,” in Guy Michaud, eds., *Identités Collectives et Relations Interculturelles* (Bruxelles, Complexe, 1978), p. 33.

101. Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, *Par delà nos Différences* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979).