

REVIEW ARTICLE

Race, J.R. Baker, London. Oxford U.P. 1974. xviii, 625pp., illus.
 £6.50.

When a publishing house of the prestige of O.U.P. produces a volume of this size, it is a notable event in the history of the subject covered. Baker, a cytologist by profession, has spent many years culling the literature for evidence of significant differences between what zoologists and others call the races of mankind. His conclusion may be summarised fairly simply. The "Sanids" (variously known elsewhere as "Khoisan", "Capoid" or "Bushmen and Hottentots") as a race retain certain infantile physical characteristics into adulthood. The "Australids" (Australian aborigines) possess certain significant physical features which are "primitive" in the sense that they are more like ancestral man and the Pongids (anthropoid apes like the chimpanzee and gorilla) than are those same physical features in the "Europids". Significantly, those "races" were, until colonised, still following a way of life essentially pre-neolithic, having made none of the technological or philosophical advances made by the "more advanced" races. Similar in their failure to advance technologically and intellectually were the "Negrids" in their various African cultures, and although in their case definitive morphological characteristics of inferiority are not readily identifiable, evidence shows that their cognitive capacities are inferior to those of the Europids and the Mongolids.

The evidence to support these hypotheses is initially awe-inspiring in its breadth. 1181 references are to be found in the bibliography and rare indeed is a page which does not cite half a dozen of them. But as one skims through the bibliography one is struck by the unusually large proportion of references to pre-1940 works. The text soon makes the reason clear. The historical survey of the analyses of racial differences ends with Hitler, for, after his attempts to apply his analysis, Baker remarks that an academic taboo is placed upon the subject. Similarly, his discussion of the characteristics and culture of the Africans living in the "secluded area" of sub-Saharan Africa i.e. that part presumed to be unaffected by cultural borrowing from the Middle East, is based almost wholly upon the reports of European explorers and missionaries who traversed the continent between 1824 and 1871. These accounts are preferred to the accounts of professional anthropologists of subsequent generations as Baker feels that they were not written from "a point of view". The classification of the races and sub-races of mankind that Baker treats as definitive was compiled in Germany and published there in 1933 and 1937. This is not made clear by the references in the text itself, which are numbers referring to the bibliography, but not to the page referred to. Thus when twenty-eight references are cited on one issue (p.206) it is necessary to read through the bibliography to discover that half of them are to works published before 1914 and a prodigious effort is needed to discover whether they support the writer's point of view.

As is perhaps inevitable in a work which attempts to encompass highly technical and controversial material in the fields of history, zoology and comparative anatomy, genetics, psychology and social

anthropology, there is some unevenness in the quality of the scholarship. There is, however, no doubt as to where the sympathies of the author lie as he quotes with approval Thomas Huxley's assertion "the problems of ethnology are simply those which are presented to the zoologist by every widely distributed animal he studies." (p. 3) The confusion between biological groupings and cultural groupings is thus established in the minds of the author from the outset, and much of the following chapters is merely confusion worse confounded.

The first three chapters are devoted primarily to a summary of the views expressed by a wide range of persons whose works were published up to the time of Hitler. The primary qualification for inclusion appears to have been that the writers believed that significant differences existed between "ethnic taxa", although many were distinguished in other fields. Thus "Kant considered that no other uncivilised people showed such a high degree of intelligence as those of North America." (p. 19), Linnaeus called Europeans "quick witted" but the "Negrid and Khoisanid", "crafty, lazy, careless." (p. 24) One can only ask of such a presentation, what is the value of the opinions of men, however distinguished they may be, who have little or no first-hand knowledge of the peoples whose qualities they compare?

In summarising the views of the specialists in more recent times, his concern is "with the growth of ideas that favoured the belief in the inequality of ethnic taxa, or are supposed - rightly or wrongly - to have favoured such belief." (p. 33) No attempt is made to assess the validity of their views, nor to present the alternative viewpoints - although we learn that "leftists" can readily hold views of racial equality. Referring to "the Jewish problem" we may be grateful to learn that "Only one of the (thirteen) authors, Lapouge, strongly condemns the Jews; Treitschke is moderately anti-Jewish; Chamberlain, Grant and Stoddard mildly so; Gobineau is equivocal." (p. 59) Hitler's account of how the Jews managed to gain control of the dominant institutions in German society is summarised without comment, save to question Hitler's judgement that the Jews were insincere in their espousal of trade union interests. Baker dissociates himself only from certain "exaggerated, untrue and purely abusive remarks that appeal especially to low-grade, vindictive minds." (p. 60)

Thus for Baker, the "historical approach" is to recount without comment (except in the case noted above), the claims, however disreputable their academic pedigree, which have supported the hypothesis of the inequality of "ethnic taxa", regardless of the precision of definition of those categories, the quality of the research or the political aims of the author. If the historical presentation tells us anything to illuminate the "ethnic problem" it is that the "Nordids" have produced from their ranks several pseudo-scientific apologists for prejudice and for oppression on the basis of allegedly measurable physical criteria associated with immeasurable qualities of personality.

When he shifts his focus away from "history" and into his own field of expertise, Baker finds himself on safer ground, and the non-scientific reader, reared in a tradition which assumes a very high degree of precision in the natural sciences may be somewhat bemused to learn that the definition of what constitutes a "species" in a number of cases is by no means unquestionable or simple. Perhaps here it is the emphasis upon taxonomy that is the undoing of the zoologist who tries to argue by analogy and comparison from various other creatures to man. Thus we are invited to note the tendency towards infertility among hybrids of diverse stocks (p. 94) from examples outside man and offered a somewhat tendentious hypothesis to explain the apparent failure of this "tendency" in man. Chapter 6 makes a case for human "ethnic taxa" being categorised as different species on the grounds that the morphological or genetic differences between certain individuals of different ethnic taxa are greater than those between animals which are seen as being of different species and which under natural conditions reject each other as mates, although possibly through domestication, captivity or "straggling" may hybridise. But all men are "domesticated", and given the opportunity, breed across their taxonomic divisions with considerable if varying degrees of success. The argument by analogy from animal to human groups becomes even less credible, to the layman at least, when genetic imprinting of behavioural characteristics among deer, mice and bees is used to justify a hypothesis about environmental preferences and language in man (pp.116-117).

Even a layman might further question the argument that "the ancestral pre-human condition (is) represented today (in a much modified form) by the apes and monkeys" (p. 171). If, as seems generally accepted in academic circles, man (hominids) and the anthropoid apes (pongids) indeed have a common ancestor several million years back, both groups will have evolved for an equal length of time and in differing directions, from the common ancestor. Vagueness is inevitable in view of the broken lines of ancestry in all cases and doubts as to which, if any, of the prehistoric apes hitherto identified might have been that common ancestor. For Baker the argument is important however, and acceptable, for it is by such means that he is able to identify the Australids as having marked "primitive" characteristics. (Ch.16)

Since Baker's argument is based upon assumptions of the validity of taxonomic classification - that each category or item can be fitted into a more inclusive category at a higher level of generalisation in an unambiguous manner - it is appropriate to ask whether, in the case of a taxon (man) whose sub-groups (races and sub-races) are not only capable of interbreeding but have, by common consent, interbred successfully in the biological sense over a very long period of time, the taxonomic approach is not inadequate to explain groupings or categorisation. The paradigm, which identifies precisely the range of qualities associated with each individual or homogeneous group, suggests itself as a more appropriate analytical tool if the object of the exercise is to describe precisely the differences between individuals and groups of men. If, however, the purpose of the exercise is to make a case for a hypothesis, rather than testing that hypothesis, then a taxonomy, with the evidence selected to fit, is the appropriate analytical tool as it is capable of providing the taxonomist with the sort of answer that he wants.

The reader is then led through fairly detailed explanations as to why the Celts and the Jews are not really "sub-races" in the zoological sense, and on to the analysis of the physical or morphological peculiarities of the "Sanids" and "Australids". The explanation of how or why the racial differences have come about, which is fairly basic to Baker's analysis of their significance depends upon an unsubstantiated theory in genetics pertaining to "polygenés". Having confessed that the evidence for this theory comes from a study of flies carried out in 1949 and that "an ingenious start" was made in substantiating the theory in 1953 (p. 111) no further evidence is provided in support of it, but the existence and significance of the "polygenes" is assumed and treated as an unquestionable fact.

It is when Baker reaches his accounts of the "Negrids" that his analysis, arguable as long as he is sticking closely to his professional area, deteriorates into a tradition of "scholarship" which smacks of the most obscene racism. Evidence of the relative sizes of "Europid" and "Negrid" penises is provided for Baker from "Negresses who had co-habited with both Negrids and Europids" (p. 331). He suggests "Pan 1,2,3,4," as suitable abbreviations for the four sub-races of "Palaeonegrids" that he identifies (need one add that *Pan satyrus* is the zoological term for the chimpanzee) (p. 333). We are told that "The Kalahari Desert.....stood between the Europeans of the Cape and the Negrids of Central Africa" (p. 340), having already learned that the Hottentots at the Cape when Van Riebeeck arrived were "stragglers" from their race (p. 97). He goes to some length to show that even if domesticated animals existed in the "secluded" part of Africa for thousands of years before colonial penetration, there is no chance that the Africans domesticated them - but he has no difficulty in accepting a 19th century claim that slavery was indigenous to that region, without any reference to possible Egyptian, Arabic or European influence upon that institution (Ch. 19). The superficiality of his 19th century sources, to say nothing of their Victorian prejudices, is manifested in endless examples. "Circular huts were generally grouped without system" (p. 370).

"Although apparently there was nowhere any formulated ethical system transmitted to congregations by persons corresponding to clergymen, bound together as ministers of a church, yet moral ideas must somehow have been inculcated in most of the tribes" (p. 384). Cannibalism is found in various places - among the Azande, for example, according to a report taken from a neighbouring group (p. 392). Baker does not appear to have checked this allegation against Evans-Pritchard's detailed ethnography - which would tend to contradict it. When referring to their cannibalism, the "Monbuttu" (Mangbetu) are clearly "Negrid", but within a few pages, when reference is made to their unusually high intelligence, they are found to have an alleged "Europid" element in their make up (p. 393).

The final section of the book is devoted to an attempt to demonstrate the association between "race" and "cognitive ability" - an exercise which presents no great difficulty if one is intent on presenting such a case. Alas, obstinate facts continue to obtrude, demanding that the simplistic theory advanced by Baker shall be modified far beyond Baker's own interest or ability. The initial weakness is immediately apparent. "It is not to be supposed that genes conferring

genuine 'superiority' of any sort, if such exist, would be easily susceptible to genetic analysis" (p. 426) - but that qualification does not lead Baker to question the thesis of "racial" superiority. "Mongolid" children apparently have less ability in mathematics than "Europids" in their early years at school, but subsequently develop a superior ability. American "Negrid" girls appear to have a higher I.Q. than boys of the same "ethnic taxon", while exceptionally gifted young "Negrids" failed to fulfil the academic expectations of them later in life (p. 499). The elusive "polygenes" which govern intelligence appear to have remarkable political qualities - telling different stories at different times! Even language, that most subtle and complex of intellectual systems, is called in to support the thesis of Europid superiority: "the full and correct use of these (prepositions) is a good indication of intelligence in speakers of the Romance and English languages" (p. 502). The confusion between race and culture could be presented no better than Baker thus presents it. The conclusion of the section smacks of a more calculated dishonesty "....the character of organisms....are the result of interplay between genetic and environmental causes, and (that) in some cases (e.g. eye colour and cognitive ability) the former prevails in a wide variety of circumstances" (p. 503). The association between genes and eye colour is unquestionable, and Baker knows it. The association between "polygenes" and "cognitive ability" depends upon the validity of an unsubstantiated hypothesis and the manner in which "cognitive ability" is defined and measured. To associate eye colour and cognitive ability in the manner in which he has done so in the quotation above, cannot be viewed, from Baker's own explanation of genetics, to be anything other than a calculated effort to deceive.

Baker's final effort to convince us of the superiority of the Europids involves him in a naive acceptance of Victorian social evolutionism as spelled out by L.H. Morgan. "Civilisation" is defined in terms of those aspects of material culture, technology, social organisation, intellectual and artistic traditions associated with late liberal Victorianism and all other societies can then be evaluated in terms of how far they conform to the "civilised" ideal. The less desirable concomitants of "civilisation", such as gross economic inequality and exploitation, militant imperialism and genocide are not included in the list of aspects of civilised society.

One is left at the end of the volume with the sort of questions that might be left with the readers of this review. Why should a reputable zoologist take it upon himself to trespass in fields right outside his competence and so crown his career with notoriety rather than the sober respect of his colleagues? Why should a reputable publisher handle a work so riddled with inaccuracy and prejudice? Why should a reviewer take trouble to refute such nonsense? Perhaps the answer lies in that dialogue which Hitler brought to a temporary end by seizing the political power necessary to translate the theories into practice. The drive to compete, to dominate, to prove oneself superior, is an aspect of much of the northern European culture which is educated into those who have espoused it. For a few generations it seemed to provide the bearers of that culture with major competitive advantages over the rest of mankind. Individuals, social systems, resources, were destroyed with a reckless abandon in pursuit of those cultural goals, and for the winners it was fun - the golden age of European imperialism,

joyous Edwardian decadence for those with the resources to enjoy it. But it is over now, save perhaps in isolated parts of what were the great colonial empires and in parts of southern Africa. Those who seek to maintain or revive the ideological justification for that cultural tradition, however academically innocent their profession, must be aware of what they are doing and the hostility that they will arouse among the victims of that tradition. The hostility should not, of course, deter scholars from making their studies, nor publishers from disseminating them, but the scholarship demanded from those engaged in such exercises must be of the very highest order. Race falls far short of such a demand and reflects ill upon the responsibility of the publishing house as well as upon the integrity of the author.

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