



# REVISTA DE FILOSOFÍA

... JOSÉ ALVARADO: Horizontes de la ética medioambiental: consideraciones intergeneracionales ... GABRIEL ANDRADE: How Anti-Racism Became Irrational: A Philosophical Analysis ... ELSA PULIDO, ALONSO FUENMAYOR Y DORIS GUTIÉRREZ: Orígenes de la ciudadanía. Una interpretación al texto de Lewis Morgan ... GERARDO VALERO: El problema moral en García Lorca: una lectura desde la filosofía de Nietzsche ... JUAN P. ZAMBRANO T.: Los derechos de las minorías culturales en el liberalismo: una comparación entre Will Kymlicka y Joseph Raz ... OSVALDO A. HERNÁNDEZ M.: La conformación de los derechos humanos a través de la escucha dialógica en el Estado democrático ... SALVADOR CAZZATO DÁVILA: Consideraciones sobre los conceptos de historia, comprensión y proceso en la obra de Hannah Arendt. ...

Universidad del Zulia  
Facultad de Humanidades y Educación  
Centro de Estudios Filosóficos  
"Adolfo García Díaz"  
Maracaibo - Venezuela

Nº 91  
2019 - 1  
Enero - Abril

Revista de Filosofía, N° 91, 2019-1, pp.25-40

## How Anti-Racism Became Irrational: A Philosophical Analysis

*Sobre cómo el antirracismo se volvió irracional:  
un análisis filosófico*

**Gabriel Andrade.**

*Ajman University (Universidad Ajman)  
United Arab Emirates (Emiratos Árabes Unidos)*

### Abstract

Although anti-racism proved to be very worthwhile in the refutation of racist theories, in more recent times, many of its varieties in Academia have become themselves irrational. This article critically examines three of those irrational varieties: 1) Cultural relativism (the idea that all cultures have the same worth); 2) Black supremacy (the idea that blacks are biologically superior to whites); 3) IQ inadequacy and IAT adequacy (the idea that IQ tests are inadequate whereas IAT tests are adequate).

**Key Words:** Racism, Antiracism, Cultural Relativism, Black Supremacy, IQ, IAT

## Resumen

A pesar de que el antirracismo demostró ser valioso en la refutación de teorías racistas, en tiempos más recientes, muchas de sus variedades se han vuelto irracionales. Este artículo examina críticamente tres de esas variedades irracionales: 1) El relativismo cultural (la idea de que todas las culturas valen lo mismo); 2) La supremacía negra (la idea de que los negros son biológicamente superior a los blancos); 3) El rechazo al CI y la aceptación del Test de Asociación Implícita (la idea de que los exámenes de CI son inadecuados, mientras que los exámenes de Asociación Implícita son adecuados).

**Palabras clave:** racismo; antirracismo; relativismo cultural; supremacía negra; CI; test de asociación implícita.

## Introduction

One may be tempted to think that racism is inherent to the human condition, and for that reason, it is futile to oppose it. Human beings will always find ways of distinguishing one group from another, most frequently on the basis of visible physical traits, and they will inevitably favor their own. Therefore, instead of trying to oppose racism, we should instead the dire truth, live with it, and find meaningful ways to manage this reality.

This is an argument favored by authors such as Frank Salter<sup>1</sup> and J.P. Rushton<sup>2</sup>. In their view, we have a genetic predisposition to favor our own genetic interests, and that implies that we will privilege people of our own race (as, presumably, we share a greater proportion of genes with them). They claim that their theory is based on William Hamilton's inclusive fitness theory, according to which, the closer one individual is genetically to another, the stronger the altruism. Therefore, in Salter's view, functional societies need to be ethnically homogenous, as diversity runs the risk of fragmentation and societal collapse.

Salter and Rushton's views have been extensively criticized<sup>3</sup>. Hamilton's inclusive fitness theory is firmly supported by scientific evidence, but it is doubtful

1 SALTER, Frank. *On Genetic Interests*. London: Transaction. 2006.

2 RUSHTON, J.P. Genetic similarity theory, ethnocentrism, and group selection. In: Eibl-Eibesfeldt, I & Salter, F. (Eds.), *Indoctrinability, warfare, and ideology: Evolutionary perspectives*. Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2001, 369-388.

3 ARCHER, John. "Why help friends when you can help sisters and brothers?" *Behavioral and Brain*

that Salter and Rushton are applying it adequately, when they extrapolate it to analysis of ethnic relations. Human beings are perfectly capable of establishing harmonious and solidary relations with individuals who may not be necessarily genetically close. Or, at any rate, assimilation through socialization is always possible, so genetic dissimilarity is not an obstacle to integration.

We may thus reject the idea that we are forever doomed to being racists. In fact, we know that racism has a surprisingly short history. There has always been xenophobia, but the idea that some foreigner is to be mistrusted because of particular physical features, is relatively modern. For example, Frank Snowden documents extensively that in the Ancient World, there was no prejudice on the basis of skin color. Foreigners could always be assimilated, and their different physical features were not concerning<sup>4</sup>.

To anti-racists, that is good news. For, Snowden's scholarship proves that racism is not inherent to human nature. And, if there was a time when racism did not really exist, then someday we may overcome racism. This keeps motivating opponents of racism.

World War II was a decisive point in this dynamic. It was so brutal, and race seemed to be so central in that conflict, that the tide against racism turned dramatically. In 1950, the United Nations issued a document, *The Race Question*, in which a number of academic authorities laid out their view emphasizing that "... available scientific knowledge provides no basis for believing that the groups of mankind differ in their innate capacity for intellectual and emotional development"<sup>5</sup>.

This set an important precedent. Despite anomalous historical experiences such as South Africa's apartheid regime, and persistent popular attitudes in many countries, racism is indisputably in decline, at least in comparison to the preceding centuries. Nobody can safely argue in favor of openly racist views, and those who do (as eminent Nobel laureate James Watson has frequently done<sup>6</sup>) are severely admonished. This has been in large measure due to the courageous and persistent efforts of anti-racist campaigners who, to a significant degree, have succeeded in educating audiences about the biological unity of the human species.

*Sciences*. 12 (3): 519. 1989

4 SNOWDEN, Frank. *Before Color Prejudice*. Harvard University Press. 1983

5 UNESCO. *The Race Question*. 1950. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000128291>

6 BELLUZ, Julia. DNA scientist James Watson has a remarkably long history of sexist, racist public comments. *Vox*. Jan 15, 2019. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/2019/1/15/18182530/james-watson-racist>

Yet, it is also a disturbing fact that, in the history of anti-racism, liberation movements may easily turn into irrational vindictive approaches. For example, Haiti's revolution unfortunately did not just stop in the liberation of slaves and the eradication of racist institutions; ultimately, it also included the massacre of the overwhelming majority of Haiti's white population in 1804. In Uganda, Idi Amin in 1972 expelled citizens of Indian origin, under the excuse of black liberation, to "give Uganda back to ethnic Ugandans". Likewise, as part of his post-apartheid "liberation" moves, in Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe turned to significant persecution against whites. And, while reports of persecution of post-apartheid whites in South Africa have been exaggerated, "Kill the Boer" is more than just a mere chant<sup>7</sup>.

This irrationality has also extended to academia. Although racism grew out of slavery in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and persisted in the attitudes of European populations, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was given some academic support under the name of "scientific racism" by pseudoscientific authors. Anti-racists offered a great intellectual service by countering these irrational theories. Yet, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, some of these academic affronts against racism became irrational themselves, many of them even vindictive.

In what follows, I shall examine some of the irrational turns of anti-racism in Academia. Given that academic discussions about racism have mostly taken place in the United States, I will focus on irrational approaches to anti-racism that are especially frequent in that country's academic scene: cultural relativism, black supremacy, and attacks against IQ tests and defenses of IAT tests. While these concepts encompass very different phenomena, and their level of irrationality varies (black supremacy being the most irrational, defense of IAT tests being the least irrational), they can all be considered to be part of some irrational trends, especially in campuses.

## 1. Cultural relativism

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century was the heyday of so-called "social science". Racists would no longer be satisfied with simply expressing the view that particular races were inferior; they would seek to prove it with empirical data. One frequent way of doing it was by measuring and comparing skulls coming from individuals of different races.

In these endeavors, size was something of great importance. One particular scientist, Samuel George Morton, believed (in opposition to orthodox Christian teaching) that humanity did not necessarily have one unified ancestry in Adam and

7 FRANKENTALL, Sally & SICHONE, Owen. *South Africa's Diverse Peoples*. Oxford: ABC Clio, 2005, 219

Eve, but rather, that God created different races separately<sup>8</sup>. His view was thus called polygenism. In order to prove polygenism, Morton sought to measure the size of skulls from different races.

Inasmuch as it was already known that there was some relation between the brain and mental states, Morton assumed that a bigger brain implied greater intelligence. By comparing skulls, Morton asserted that the white race was superior to any other, because its skull capacity was greater.

Morton was not an open defender of slavery, but some of his contemporaries, such as Josiah Nott and Louis Agassiz, did measure skulls on their own, and very much as Morton, concluded that the white race was superior. Yet, both Nott and Agassiz went beyond, by arguing that these skull differences did justify slavery, inasmuch as people of the black race did not have the mental capacity to care for themselves, and thus needed the protection of white masters.

One particular anthropologist, Franz Boas, put a stop to all this nonsense<sup>9</sup>. Boas himself was a German Jewish immigrant in the United States, and he experienced first-hand some of the prejudices against immigrants, on the basis of these racial theories.

Boas studied the children of immigrants that had been born and educated in the United States, and he discovered that, in terms of behavior, these children resembled more other American children, than their own parents. As Boas saw it, this was a strong indication that behavior is not entirely rooted in skull size, but rather, in education and socialization.

Boas also investigated differences in size and shape of skulls, and in order to do that, he again studied immigrants and their descendants. He discovered that the generation of immigrants presented different skull size and cephalic index (a measure of the form of the skull) than their parents. Boas thus concluded that the shape of the skull is subject to environmental factors. This implied that, even if skull size were relevant in things like intelligence (it is rather doubtful), that in itself is subject to environmental influences, and hence it cannot be argued that some races are naturally superior to others.

This was a significant rebuttal of racist pretensions. Boas' experiment proved that environmental influences play a big role in the outcome of groups' performances. And in that regard, he competently opposed any notion that given racial traits (skin color, hair texture, nose shape, etc.) can be considered superior to others.

8 FABIAN, Ann. *The Skull Collectors*. The University of Chicago Press. 2010.

9 BARKAN, Eleazar. *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*. Cambridge University Press. 1992, 76.

This, to be sure, was a very rational approach. However, Boas went beyond that, and unfortunately, did enter irrational terrain. He argued, not only that there are no superior races (in biological terms), but also that all cultures have equal value. He thus introduced in anthropology (a nascent field in his time) the notion of cultural relativism<sup>10</sup>. He emphasized that cultures can only be evaluated in terms of their own standards. The logical implication of this (one that Boas did not frequently make explicit) is that there is no possibility of comparison between cultures.

Boas himself did not punish this relativism too far, but he was a very influential figure in American academia, and he managed to attract anthropology students (Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, Melville Herskovits) who would later become even more influential than Boas, and would push relativism far beyond Boas' initial views.

This new relativism would soon have a moral aspect. In these anthropologists' accounts, we have no authority to morally condemn other cultures' practices, because, again, they can only be judged from within. These relativistic claims were made appealing to tolerance, as in a famous passage of *Benedict's Patterns of Culture*: "We shall arrive then at a more realistic social faith, accepting as grounds of hope and as new bases for tolerance the coexisting and equally valid patterns of life which mankind has created for itself from the raw materials of existence"<sup>11</sup>.

Melville Herskovits (another of Boas' famous students) was part of an American Anthropologist commission that ultimately produced a document thus stating: "Worldwide standards of freedom and justice, based on the principle that man is free only when he lives as his society defines freedom, that his rights are those he recognizes as a member of his society, must be basic"<sup>12</sup>. This implied that in a society with slavery, the slave is truly free, because that society defines freedom as such. Moral relativism thus excuses all sorts of abuses, all in the name of tolerance and anti-racism.

Although there have been modifications to statements such as these, the agglomeration of antiracism and cultural (especially moral) relativism still persists. Anybody who dares criticize cannibalism, female genital mutilation, *sati*, Islamic patriarchy, and so on, will all-too-often be accused of being a racist. To assume that, say, *sati* is immoral, is to assume that Hindu moral codes are inferior to Western moral codes. And that pretension to cultural and moral superiority, so the argument goes, is

10 GAIRDNER, William. *The Book of Absolutes: A Critique of Relativism and a Defence of Universals*. McGill-Queens University Press. 2008, 278

11 BENEDICT, Ruth. *Patterns of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1935, 201.

12 AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION. *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 49, No. 4, Part 1 (Oct. - Dec., 1947), pp. 539-543

the same kind of pretension of anyone who claims that white skin is superior to black skin.

Although ever since Boas, relativism and antiracism have seemed to go hand-in-hand, they are logically at odds. One cannot be consistently an antiracist and a relativist at the same. Ruth Macklin perfectly explains why: "... to adopt a moral stance against racism and at the same time to espouse ethical relativism embodies a contradiction. The judgment that racism is an ethical judgment, one that antiracists believe has universal moral validity... Can an ethical relativist reject the appropriateness of making moral judgments about other cultures and at the same time maintain that racism practiced in those cultures is wrong?"<sup>13</sup>.

Many antiracists thus have made a category mistake. They believe that inasmuch as there are demonstrably no superior races, there are no superior cultures. In their account, all cultures are equally praise-worthy, because they all respond equally well to their ecological circumstances. Different cultures may have different patterns, but ultimately, they all adapt successfully. To argue otherwise would be, in their account, racist.

This is an illusion. While it is true that there are no significant biological differences amongst humans in terms of race, it is simply not true that all cultures adapt equally well. Some (not necessarily due to biological factors) adapt better than others, and in that regard, there are indeed cultures that are superior to others. Anthropologist Robert Edgerton documents in his decisive refutation of cultural relativism, *Sick Societies*, an extensive list of instances in which societies have failed to adapt, from Tasmanian natives to the Kisii of Kenya<sup>14</sup>. There may be disagreement over how, exactly, the success and worth of a culture is to be measured, but in the face of so many dysfunctional societies, and so many other societies that do provide optimal solutions to many problems, we must surely acknowledge that cultures are not equal. Antiracists frequently obscure this fact, and hence, become irrational.

## 2. Black supremacy

Some antiracists have come to understand that relativism is untenable, and that the proposition that all cultures are equal, is incoherent and logically impedes any possibility of condemning racism (antiracists, after all, need to admit that non-

13 MACKLIN, Ruth. *Against Relativism: Cultural Diversity and the Search for Ethical Universals in Medicine*. Oxford University Press. 1999, 250

14 EDGERTON, Robert. *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth of Primitive Harmony*. New York: The Free Press. 1992.



racist cultures are morally superior to racist cultures). But these antiracists are still not prepared to admit that Western culture may be superior to other cultures. There is nothing deeply irrational or controversial in this stand. Western civilization has much to repent for (slavery, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, inequality, ecological destruction, and so on), and the case could indeed be made that Western civilization is not as superior as it believes it is, or for that matter, that it is not superior at all.

However, instead of focusing on these specific legitimate criticisms of Western civilization, some antiracists have opted to argue for the superiority of other cultures, on completely irrational grounds. Given that Africans have been the people that have suffered most the harmful effects of racism, some antiracists have attempted a vindication of Africa and its people, in some cases by even making the racist claim that Africans are biologically (not just culturally) superior to any other race. In other cases, antiracists opt not to make the case for the racial superiority of Africa, but do opt to vindicate Africa by inventing a past that is contrary to all evidence, and therefore, they make wildly irrational claims.

As part of the antiracist movement, a new narrative was built: Afrocentrism. According to this theory, ancient Egyptians were black Africans, and Europeans stole from black Africans all the glorious things for which they get historical credit. Afrocentrism was in large measure a reaction to Eurocentrism and colonialist education. Amongst antiracists, there was the perception that Western imperial powers degraded Africa by representing it as the “dark continent”, or as a character in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* calls it, “the blankest of blank spaces”. Enlightenment philosophers and historians were fond of presenting European history as the apex of human progress, thus provoking serious damage to the self-esteem of colonized nations who were left without any regard for their own histories.

Antiracists have of course been right in protesting this European account of history, and competent historians such as Jack Goody have aptly documented that many of the alleged European inventions had non-European origins<sup>15</sup>. Yet, instead of presenting rational arguments and persuasive historical data, proponents of Afrocentrism have opted for quasi-mystical notions and completely bogus histories about African historical greatness.

Afrocentrism was born in the midst of a 20<sup>th</sup> Century movement to unite the African Diaspora into one single people, by instilling in them (as European nationalist movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century had done) a sense of national pride that relied on a glorious past. Very much as its European counterparts of the previous century, this nationalism was in itself a much-racialized notion. As Tunde Adeleke argues in *The*

15 GOODY, Jack. *The Theft of History*. Cambridge University Press. 2006

*Case Against Afrocentrism*, the African Diaspora is extremely diverse, and cannot be reduced to some essence that, somehow, permeates all people of African origin<sup>16</sup>.

For example, in the name of black liberation, Leopold Senghor proposed that all Africans are part of *Negritude*, a mysterious essence that gives blacks some of the virtuous that Europeans are lacking: holism, spirituality, passion, rhythm, intuition<sup>17</sup>. Inadvertently, Senghor was attributing to Africans the very same stereotypes that European colonialism attributed to blacks, in order to contrast them with the rationality of whites. Furthermore, inasmuch as Senghor conceived of these traits as being part of the *essence* of black people, he was ultimately implying that somehow these traits were inherent to their biology, exactly the same biological determinist claim that racists typically make.

These essentialist notions were picked up by Cheikh Anta Diop, who advanced the idea that Africa was the origin human civilizations<sup>18</sup>. He was particularly interested in Egyptians, of whom he was convinced that they were as black as Sub-Saharan Africans. In Diop's account, ancient black Egyptians exhibited all the great qualities of *negritude*, thus echoing the biological determinist assumption of racists. He also added the geographical determinism (so typical of Aristotle, Montesquieu or Hegel) that has been frequently been used in racist arguments: because Egypt was warm, that allowed black Egyptians to be mild and happy in their personality, as opposed to the coldness and brutality of Europeans and Asians, on account of their frigid weather.

Another Afrocentrist, Molefi Kete Asante, expanded this narrative<sup>19</sup>. He was particularly adamant on the conspiracy theory, according to which, white Europeans stole from black Africans (Egyptians, in this account) their great civilizational achievements in arts, poetry and philosophy, and ultimately conspired to hide these facts from Africans, thus instilling in them a sense of cultural inferiority. Asante was very active in lobbying for educational reform, so that this version of History would be taught to black children in American schools.

16 ADELEKE, Tunde. *The Case Against Afrocentrism*. University Press of Mississippi. 2009.

17 HARNEY, Elizabeth. *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960–1995*. Duke University Press. 2004.

18 DIOP, Cheikh Anta. *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth Or Reality*. Chicago: Lawrence Hill. 1955.

19 ASANTE, Molefi Kete. *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance*. Cambridge: Polity Press. 2007.

As fantastic as they may seem, these theories were further supported by a more respected scholar of Antiquity, Martin Bernal, with slightly more plausible arguments<sup>20</sup>. Yet, they remain deeply problematic, to the point of being irrational.

One particular scholar, Mary Lefkowitz, has gone to great lengths in deconstructing the irrational claims made by Afrocentrists<sup>21</sup>. For example, Afrocentrists claim that Aristotle stole books from the Library of Alexandria. Lefkowitz proves that this library was built well after Aristotle's death. Afrocentrists claim that there were mystery cults in Egypt, well before the Greeks. Lefkowitz proves that the descriptions of these mystery cults really refer to Greco-Roman cults. In fact, Lefkowitz also proves that all these distorted ideas about Egypt were not even invented by Afrocentrists, but rather, by one particular European writer of the 18th Century, Abbe Jean Terrasson. As for the race of Ancient Egyptians, it may be agreed that Hollywood and western imagination has whitened Cleopatra and other such historical figures, but Lefkowitz adequately argues that race was irrelevant for the Egyptians themselves, and if anything, Cleopatra was herself of Greek origin, and likely did not look like Sub-Saharan Africans do.

As proponents of irrationality often do, instead of countering Lefkowitz's views with reasoned arguments, many antiracists, even while acknowledging the absurdities of Afrocentrism, cannot tolerate that a white woman deconstructs this fabricated history. And hence, Lefkowitz has often been unfairly accused of racism<sup>22</sup>, simply for being historically objective. As we shall further see below, this has unfortunately become another irrational tendency amongst many antiracists. As opposed to the state of affairs in the preceding centuries, racism is today so intellectually discredited (rightly so, of course), that when cornered with a particular argument, it has become all-too-easy for scholars to accuse their intellectual adversaries of being racist, and thus claim victory in the dispute. This has led to the unfortunate circumstance that many rational arguments are now just called "racist", when in fact, they are not.

Truly racist, however, are some of the claims made by proponents of other movements related to Afrocentrism, again, all in the name of antiracism. In the 1990s, a group of scholars led by Leonard Jeffries, Wade Nobles, Hunter Adams and Frances Welsing, came up with the so-called "melanin theory"<sup>23</sup>. According to this theory,

20 BERNAL, Martin. *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*. New York: Vintage. 1991.

21 LEFKOWITZ, Mary. *Not Out of Africa*. New York: Basic Books. 1998.

22 MARTIN, Tony. *The Jewish Onslaught: Despatches from the Wellesley Battlefield* Dover: New York: The Majority Press, 1993,30.

23 ORTIZ DE MONTELLANO, Bernard. Magic Melanin: Spreading Scientific Illiteracy Among Minorities. *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*. VOLUME 16.2. 1992. AVAILABLE AT: [HTTPS://WWW.CSICOP.ORG/SI/SHOW/](https://www.cscicop.org/si/show/)

melanin (the chemical that naturally pigments skin) has many properties that make black people racially superior.

In their account, melanin absorbs electromagnetic frequencies, and this allows darker-skinned people to process information in a much more efficient manner, almost as a computer. Originally humans were black, and whites are simply mutants or albinos, a degenerate race that has lost the vigor that comes with melanin. Nobles claims that whites only evolved their nervous system into the Central Nervous System, but blacks have gone beyond, by evolving their brain into an “Essential Melanic System”. As with any other pseudoscience, this melanin theory relies on scientific-sounding names that are nothing but mumbo-jumbo.

The theory even has a homophobic stench (combined with absurd psychoanalytic notions), as made explicit by Welsing’s explanation of why homosexuality is more prevalent amongst whites: “[homosexuality is] a symbolic attempt to incorporate into the white male body more male substance.... [Thus] the self-debasing white male may fantasize that he can produce a product of color, albeit that the product of color is fecal matter. This fantasy is significant for white males, because the males who can produce skin color are viewed as the real men”<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, antiracism has unfortunately often had some homophobic connotations, as homosexuality has been viewed as a form of white decadence by various antiracist and black nationalist groups<sup>25</sup>.

### 3. IQ and IAT

In 1994, Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray published *The Bell Curve*. The basic argument of that book is that blacks score lower than whites in IQ tests, IQ has genetic origins, therefore, blacks are naturally less intelligent than whites, and the State should base policies on this fact<sup>26</sup>.

This is of course a strongly racist view, and *The Bell Curve* met with deserved criticism on many fronts. Yet, many antiracists refused to acknowledge that some of the things argued in that book were right indeed. These antiracists acknowledged that blacks do have lower IQ scores than whites. However, they argued that human

MAGIC\_MELANIN\_SPREADING\_SCIENTIFIC\_ILLITERACY\_AMONG\_MINORITIES

24 WELSING, Frances Cress. *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors* Chicago: Third World Press, 1991, 47

25 SUMMERS, Martin. “This Immoral Practice”: The Prehistory of Homophobia in Black Nationalist Thought. In: Lester, Tony (Ed.). *Gender, Nonconformity, Race and Sexuality*: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002, 21-44.

26 HERNSTEIN, Richard & MURRAY, Charles. *The Bell Curve*. New York: Free Press. 1994

behavior is not determined by genes, and that IQ tests are not good measures of intelligence.

Whether or not human behavior is determined by genes, is a matter of debate. Some antiracists, in their egalitarian zeal, end up assuming a blank slate view of the human mind, in which genes play no role in human behavior. This view is clearly wrong, as it has been sufficiently documented that many behavioral traits have strong genetic heritability. Yet, although intelligence does seem to have strong genetic heritability, environmental factors also play a role, and it may still be true that group differences in IQ are more due to a result of environmental factors (discrimination, poor schooling, poor pregnancy conditions, etc.) than genetic factors.

However, to claim that IQ tests are not good measures of intelligence, is simply wrong. This claim is usually made with a twist of racial paranoia, because many of the antiracists who oppose IQ tests claim that these tests are biased against minorities, thus once again confirming the idea that the whole system is racist.

Again, this paranoia is understandable, given the history of IQ tests. In the early 20th Century, Charles Spearman designed IQ tests purely for educational purposes (to determine what children may need special education), but very soon, these tests were used for more perverse social policies: they were used to discriminate immigrants in the United States. Most of the time, immigrants would not be given translated versions of these tests, naturally getting lower scores. Even when translated, these tests would still have strong cultural references that immigrants would not understand, given that they came from different cultural contexts. Thus, many antiracists believe that current IQ tests are biased.

Yet, while understandable, this paranoia is irrational. For, psychologists have long acknowledged the early bias of IQ tests, and have gone to great lengths in order to correct it. For example, in order to avoid any cultural references, one form of IQ tests is Raven's Progressive Matrices, in which subjects have to find patterns in the progression of particular abstract geometrical shapes, devoid of any cultural context.

Despite these corrective measures, many antiracists still claim that IQ tests are biased, simply because minorities get lower scores<sup>27</sup>. In their definition, a test is unbiased only if it has "the same pattern of scores when administered to different groups of people". This is a wildly irrational definition of bias. This definition assumes that, by default, all groups need to have the same results in a given test. Again, the irrationality of this brand of antiracism can be easily linked to the irrationality of cultural relativism. Once it is assumed that all cultures must necessarily have the

27 LILIENFELD, Scott; Lynn, Steven; Ruscio, John & Beyerstein, Barry. *50 Great Myths of Popular Psychology*. New York: Blackwell, 2010, 85

same worth, then any measure in which some groups do better than other groups, is believed to be biased. But this is nonsense. Men are, on average, taller than women. Does that mean that height measures are biased in favor of men? Of course not. We simply assume that some groups are indeed taller than others. There is no reason to refuse to believe that some groups may be more intelligent than others (once again, that difference in intelligence is not necessarily biological in origin; hence this view cannot be counted as racist).

Apart from claiming that IQ tests are biased against minorities, many antiracists also claim that these tests do not really measure intelligence, and is hence an arbitrary measure. Or, as it is often worded, IQ measures the ability to get high IQ scores. Again, this is simply not true.

Psychometrics has long proposed that a test is good when it has both reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the capacity of the test to get consistent results when it is applied over and over again. Beyond doubt, IQ tests are reliable, as the results are invariably consistent. Validity refers to the capacity of the test to measure what it claims to measure. IQ tests also have good validity, because it does seem to measure intelligence. Contrary to popular belief, intelligence is *not* an ill-defined concept. Rather, as the consensus of psychologists has it, intelligence is “a very general mental capability that, among other things, involves the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly and learn from experience. It is not merely book learning, a narrow academic skill, or test-taking smarts. Rather, it reflects a broader and deeper capability for comprehending our surroundings—“catching on,” “making sense” of things, or “figuring out” what to do”<sup>28</sup>.

We know that IQ tests are valid and do measure these dimensions of intelligence, because there are strong correlations of IQ scores with most of the skills that fall under the rubric of intelligence<sup>29</sup>. IQ scores are a good predictor of success in many areas of life that require intelligence for good performance. Thus many antiracists, in their zeal to uphold the relativist idea that all cultures are equal, misguide their efforts in an irrational manner. They concentrate on disregarding IQ tests as biased, instead on focusing on particular initiatives (educational reforms, etc.) in order to improve

28 GOTTTFREDSON, L. S.. Mainstream science on intelligence: An editorial with 52 signatories, history, and bibliography. *Intelligence*, 24, 13–23. 1997.

29 SACKETT, P. R., SCHMITT, N., ELLINGSON, J. E., & KABIN, M. B. High-stakes testing in employment, credentialing, and higher education: Prospects in a post-affirmative-action world. *American Psychologist*, 56, 302–318. 2001; Sackett, P. R., Borneman, M. J., & Connelly, B. J. High-stakes testing in higher education and employment: Appraising the evidence for validity and fairness. *American Psychologist*, 63, 2008, 215–227.

IQ scores of minorities. By killing the messenger, they fail to take care of the real problem.

Despite its strong reliability and validity, many antiracists oppose IQ tests. Yet, they uphold another psychological test that has very poor reliability and validity, the so-called Implicit Association Test (henceforth IAT). Given that this test seems to prove that most people are racists, many antiracists embrace it as an indication that racism is systemic, thus again confirming their initial preconceptions. And, very much as Bonilla-Silva does, some antiracists believe that whoever presents reasonable objections to IAT, are racists themselves, thus further confirming their belief that racism is everywhere. Jesse Singal, one such critic of IAT, has reported that, in private emails Mahzarin Banaji (one of the designers of the test) has strongly implied that skeptics of IAT are necessarily racists<sup>30</sup>.

In this test, subjects are asked to associate black faces with positive words versus white faces with positive words. In the first round of the test, subjects are instructed to press a particular key if a positive word like “joy” or “beautiful” appears on the screen of a computer, and then to press the same key if a white face appears; likewise, they are asked to press another particular key if a negative word like “sadness” or “ugly” appears, and then press that same key if a black face appears. Then, in another round, the test will ask subjects to press the key if black faces and positive words appear, or white faces and negative words<sup>31</sup>.

Basically, the test tries to measure how quickly subjects are able to associate white with good (or black with bad), and black with good (or white with bad). If there is a reaction time difference between both rounds, then that suggests an implicit bias in the subject, given that, unconsciously, subjects may have more difficulty associating a particular race with good things. The test has been applied to a huge number of subjects, and the results come out showing that the overwhelming majority are quicker associating white faces with good things.

Very much as Bonilla-Silva, the original designers of this test, Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji, purport to show that racism in countries such as the United States may not be explicit, but it is nevertheless incisive, and therefore systemic. For, people who claim not to be racists and who do not hold particularly racist views, are still *unconsciously* racist with implicit bias, and this is why racial inequalities persist in society.

30 SINGAL, Jesse. The Creators of the Implicit Association Test Should Get Their Story Straight. *New York*. Dec 5, 2017. Available at: <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/12/iat-behavior-problem.html>

31 BANAJI, Mahzarin & GREENWALD, Anthony. *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People*. New York: Random House. 2016

There are good reasons to be skeptical of these claims. As previously mentioned, the IAT has neither reliability nor validity. IAT has notoriously been *not* replicable: when subjects retake the test, they get different results. Results can be dependent on many variables (mood<sup>32</sup>, blood sugar and circadian rhythms<sup>33</sup>) that go beyond mere intrinsic implicit bias, which may account for its lack of replicability. If the same subjects vary significantly when they take the same test at different times, then clearly that test is not a good measure of whether or not someone is racist.

As for validity, IAT does not have much predictive power, so it is doubtful that it truly measures biased behavior. As Hal Arkes and Philip Tetlock argue<sup>34</sup>, it could very well be that people who are more familiar with particular ethnic stereotypes come out having higher implicit bias in the IAT, but not necessarily endorse those stereotypes unconsciously. At most, the IAT would measure the awareness of stereotypes in someone's mind, but not the real presence of those stereotypes in the subject's mind.

Greenwald and Banaji themselves even admit that we cannot assume that IAT scores reflect the degree to which an individual will or will not discriminate in the future<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, meta-analyses reveal that the correlation of measures of implicit bias and measures of actual discrimination is very small, and not sufficiently significant<sup>36</sup>.

Thus, many antiracists have irrationally been too quick to embrace the results of a test that, in truth, does not really measure anything relevant. The test is ingenious and may tell us something interesting, but whatever it tells us, it is certainly not that a particular society is systemically racist, as many of the test's upholders assume.

On the basis of the IAT, many antiracists have also strongly pushed for companies to implement so-called "Diversity Training". This has become an industry of its own: it is estimated that, annually, around US\$ 8 billion are made by firms and consultants

32 GEMAR, M.C.; SEGAL, Z.V.; SAGRATI, S& KENNEDY, S.J. Mood-induced changes on the Implicit Association Test in recovered depressed patients. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*. May;110(2):282-9. 2001.

33 ZEDRA, Jonathan &PROFFITT, Dennis. Implicit Associations Have a Circadian Rhythm. *Plos One*. 9(11): e110149. 2014

34 ARKES, Hal &TETLOCK, Philip. Attributions of Implicit Prejudice, or "Would Jesse Jackson 'Fail' the Implicit Association Test?" *Psychological Enquiry*. Vol. 15, No. 4, 257–278. 2004

35 GREENWALD, A.; BANAJI, M &NOSEK, B. Statistically small effects of the Implicit Association Test can have societally large effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Apr;108(4):553-61. 2015

36 OSWALD, Frederick;MITCHELL, Gregory;BLANTON, Hart;JACCARD, James&TETLOCK, Philip., Predicting Ethnic and Racial Discrimination with the IAT: Small Effect Sizes of Unknown Societal Significance, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 562-571, 2015.



that teach employees how to overcome their alleged racist bias. Participants are taught about the IAT, and then are instructed about some techniques to overcome their bias.

Apart from the dubious premises that these training sessions rely on, it has been well established by research that Diversity Training often has counterproductive effects, actually making participants *more* racist than what they otherwise would have been. After studying a large number of cases, Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev conclude that Diversity Training does not increase the proportion of minorities in companies, and in fact, may decrease it<sup>37</sup>. These sessions, which employers often make mandatory on their employees, have an uncanny totalitarian aspect that, in many participants' mind, ultimately resembles forced reeducation camps. Participants often end up resenting the minorities they were supposed to feel closer to, after the session, because they feel that the whole affair has been an attempt at thought control. Furthermore, it is not difficult to foresee that once employees have been told that they are unconsciously racist on the basis of the IAT, the prophecy becomes self-fulfilled. Diversity Training sessions that rely on the IAT may easily create a more hostile environment, given that now everyone suspects everyone else of being racist. This atmosphere of mistrust can result in enhancement of prejudices, as has been demonstrated in some studies<sup>38</sup>.

Furthermore, most likely, many participants are not mindful of ethnic differences *until* they are made overly aware of them by Diversity Training, and once they become aware of them, release their hostility towards those they identify as not belonging to their group. The same criticism regarding Bonilla-Silva's color-conscious approach to society also applies here: the more efficient way of ending racism cannot possibly be an enhancement of racial identities.

37 DOBBIN, Frank & KALEY, Alexandra. Why Diversity Programs Fail. *Harvard Business Review*. July 2016.

38 LEGAULTS, Lisa; GUTSELL, Jennifer & INZLICHT, Michael. Ironic Effects of Antiprejudice Messages: How Motivational Interventions Can Reduce (but Also Increase) Prejudice. *Psychological Science*. November 28, 2011



UNIVERSIDAD  
DEL ZULIA

---

# REVISTA DE FILOSOFÍA

Nº 91-1 \_\_\_\_\_

*Esta revista fue editada en formato digital y publicada  
en diciembre de 2019, por el Fondo Editorial Serbiluz,  
Universidad del Zulia. Maracaibo-Venezuela*

[www.luz.edu.ve](http://www.luz.edu.ve)  
[www.serbi.luz.edu.ve](http://www.serbi.luz.edu.ve)  
[produccioncientifica.luz.edu.ve](http://produccioncientifica.luz.edu.ve)