The Philosophical Basis of Eighteenth-Century Racism*

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Historians of Philosophy are just beginning to become aware that many of the philosophical heroes of the Enlightenment, such as Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Voltaire, Franklin, Jefferson, and Kant, expressed views that sound shockingly racist today. When I have given lectures on modern racism, and have quoted the following note which Hume added to his essay "Of National Characters," philosophers, for whom Hume is the major intellectual hero before Russell and Wittgenstein, have been shocked and dismayed:

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences. On the other hand, the most rude and barbarous of the whites, such as the ancient Germans, the present Tartars, have still something eminent about them, in their valour, form of government, or some other particular. Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men. Not to mention our colonies, there are Negroes slaves dispersed all over Europe, of which none ever discovered any symptoms of inge-

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nuty, tho' low people, without education, will start up amongst us, and distinguish themselves in every profession. In JAMAICA indeed they talk of one negro as a man of parts and learning; but 'tis likely he is admired for very slender accomplishments like a parrot, who speaks a few words plainly.¹

The immediate tendency has been to assume that this quotation represents an aberrant prejudice, and has nothing to do with Hume's philosophy in general. People remember that Hume also made prejudicial remarks about the Irish, about Catholics, about religious people in general, and they conclude that he was just being human when he expressed his anti-colored view. But when one investigates Hume's position in the totality of his essay, and in his philosophy in general, including his role as Under-Secretary of State (wherein he dealt in part with colonial affairs), and the influence of his essay "Of National Characters," his view about non-whites cannot be dismissed as a fleeting observation. It is intimately related to his thought, and to one of the problems of eighteenth-century thought—the justification of European superiority over the rest of mankind.

Historians of philosophy are, I believe, obliged to rethink and reevaluate the development of theories about the nature of man in the eighteenth century. As soon as one is willing to look into this, and compare the theories with the data concerning what prominent intellectuals of the Enlightenment said about non-whites, Jews, Irish, etc., one is faced with a paradox. The dominant theories about the nature of man in modern times, from Montaigne onward, including those of Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, Malebranche, Locke, Leibniz, Bayle, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant, are all universalistic. They all define man in terms of mental and psychological characteristics. Size, skin color, religious beliefs, etc. do not enter into the question of whether a given individual is to be considered human, and whether he is to be treated in certain ways which differentiate him from animals or machines. However, the same people in the Enlightenment who could develop these theories of human nature could also provide the bases for theories claiming that some individuals, in fact millions of them, were less than men because they were dark, or accepted the wrong religion. How can one explain this phenomenon?

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It seems to me that the theories outlining what Hume called the science of man were transformed to meet eighteenth-century conditions. (This duplicates to some extent a similar transformation that occurred in the sixteenth century to justify giving the American Indians an inferior status.) Four major views were offered during the Enlightenment. The first was that the mental life of non-whites, especially Indians and Africans, is significantly different from that of whites (Hume, Linnaeus, etc.). The second was that being non-white is a sign of sickness or degeneracy: the normal, natural condition of man is that of whiteness, but due to unfortunate environmental factors, some people have lost their whiteness and with this, part of their human nature (Buffon, Blumenbach, etc.). A third theory was that some beings that look human are really not so, but are lower on the great chain of being and represent a link between man and apes (Edward Long). And the fourth theory was that there were separate creations of mankind, the Caucasian being the best; the others, the pre-Adamite creations, never contained the stuff of genuine men.² For the purposes of this study, I will ignore racist theories based on the Bible, since for Enlightenment thinkers such religiously based views played a small role.

I think that one could show that the root theory in each of these cases was universalistic, benign, and neutral, but that each went through a transformation during the eighteenth century so that it became a basis for a racist ideology. In the first case, it was argued that Indians and Africans could have no abstract ideas, could not engage in prudent reasoning, or, in the worst claims, could not understand or appreciate true religion. Their lack of adequate mental life justified the way they were treated.

Bartolomé de las Casas had attacked this view by insisting,

All the people of the world are men . . . all have understanding and volition, all have the five exterior senses and the four interior senses, and are moved by the objects of these, all take satisfaction in goodness and feel pleasure with happy and delicious things, all regret and abhor evil.³

Pope Paul III agreed with him, and in the Bull "Sublimus Deus" declared, "We . . . consider, however, that the Indians are truly

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men and that they are not only capable of understanding the Catholic faith, but, according to our information, they desire exceedingly to receive it." Las Casas believed that Indians, if properly instructed by Spaniards (the right ones), would show their potentiality to be better Europeans than Europeans.

The opposition was trying to prove that the Indians were the people Aristotle had described as being by nature slaves, and that therefore, God bless them, they ought to be enslaved. Sixteenth-century Spanish and Portuguese literature by advocates of the enslavement of the Indians is full of claims that the Indians do not meet Aristotle's definition of man—a rational animal. In a complete reversal of Christian history, in which the pagans and infidels could participate in Christian society by understanding or accepting the Revelation, some were claiming they now had found "people" incapable of sufficient rationality for such participation. As Winthrop Jordan has shown, the same point was made in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America.

During the Enlightenment, the lack of proper intellectual equipment among non-whites became a major basis for judging them inferior in terms of their "philosophy" and "way of life." Linnaeus' classification of kinds of man clearly indicates this.

1. Homo
   Diurnal; varying by education and situation.

2. Four-footed, mute, hairy.

3. Copper-coloured, choleric, erect.
   *Hair* black, straight, thick; *nose* wide, *face* harsh; *beard* scanty; *obstinate*, content free. *Paints* himself with fine red lines. *Regulated* by customs.

4. Fair, sanguine, brawny.
   *Hair* yellow brown, flowing; *eyes* blue; *gentle*, acute, inventive. *Covered* with close vestments. *Governed* by laws.

5. Sooty, melancholy, rigid.
   *Hair* black; *eyes* dark; *severe*, haughty, covetous. *Covered* with loose garments. *Governed* by opinions.

   *Hair* black, frizzled; *skin* silky; *nose* flat; *lips* tumid; *crafty*, indolent, negligent. *Anoints* himself with grease. *Governed* by caprice.

The studies of languages in the eighteenth century often deal with the inadequacy of the structure and content of Indian and African languages, among others, to express crucial intellectual notions.

Hume's blanket claim, which Edward Long took as established, that no non-whites had contributed to civilization, to the arts and sciences, confirmed that in terms of mental factors, the dumbest white was closer to the philosophical definition of man than the "wisest" black, red, swarthy, or sooty individual. The articles "Americans," "Complexion," and "Negroes" in the first American edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* are in this vein; the article on "Negroes" begins:

NEGO, *Homo pelli nigra*, a name given to a variety of the human species, who are entirely black, and are found in the Torrid zone, especially in that part of Africa which lies within the tropics. In the complexion of negroes we meet with various shades; but they likewise differ far from other men in all the features of their face. Round cheeks, high cheek-bones, a forehead somewhat elevated, a short, broad, flat nose, thick lips, small ears, ugliness, and irregularity of shape, characterize their external appearance. The negro women have the loins greatly depressed, and very large buttocks, which give the back the shape of a saddle. Vices the most notorious seem to be the portion of this unhappy race: idleness, treachery, revenge, cruelty, impudence, stealing, lying, profanity, debauchery, nastiness and intemperance, are said to have extinguished the principles of natural law, and to have silenced the reproofs of conscience. They are strangers to every sentiment of compassion, and are an awful example of the corruption of man when left to himself.

Though man was defined universalistically, in terms of his mental properties, blacks, Indians, etc. were said to lack these properties. If so, then the revolutionary ideas of the philosophers from Montaigne to Kant as to how men should be treated did not have to apply to people who might meet Buffon's criterion for belonging to the human species; that is, that they could copulate with other members of the species and produce fertile offspring. This view as to the lack of mental equipment or ability allowed a kind of transformation from universalism to racism, or it was itself the basis of one form of racism.
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Part of the burden of the abbé Henri Grégoire's counterattack against eighteenth-century racism was the argument first that Jews had the proper mental equipment and had made contributions to "civilization," and later, in his De la littérature des Nègres, that there actually were black writers, scientists, professors, etc. The Jewish case, on this level, was easy, with everyone from Philo and Maimonides to Moses Mendelssohn to throw into the argument. The gist of many Enlightenment theories was not that Jews were by nature stupid, but that their religious tradition and practices had deadened their minds and kept them from knowing the achievements of modern thought.

It is interesting that Mendelssohn, whose role in European thought was enormous, was regarded as both a freak case and as a proof that the Jews, no matter how bad they might be, had the potentiality to be fully human intellectually. It is instructive in this regard that as soon as Mendelssohn made his mark in the intellectual world as a serious contributor to philosophical discussion, he was asked why, if he was so bright, he did not become a Christian. The same thing happened to Hume's one Jewish friend, Isaac de Pinto, the chairman of the Board of Directors of the Amsterdam Synagogue (Hume referred to him as a good man "tho a Jew"), who was one of the first to advance the economic theory of modern capitalism. A decade before Mendelssohn's startling success, de Pinto tangled with Voltaire over whether the Jews were Untermenschen, and de Pinto pointed to all of the glorious achievements of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews as contributors to culture and to the intellectual world. Voltaire then asked de Pinto why, if he was so bright, he did not give up Judaism and become a philosophe. De Pinto's reply was to the effect that he was un philosophe juif, which to Voltaire was like a square circle. To many Enlightenment theoreticians, like Jefferson, un philosophe noir, or un philosophe indien would have been even more incredible or impossible: the people of color just did not have the right things going on in their heads to qualify as men in the philosophical sense.

Count Buffon, in his analysis of the human scene, could show the state of affairs and offer an elaborate explanation of it. People were once all equal (and white), but owing to unfortunate factors, like climate, diet, and culture, they had become sick and degenerated. The present condition of the less-than-white could be accounted for, and maybe overcome, if they could be moved to better climates, fed French food, and given a European education. Lord Kames, Oliver Goldsmith, and J. F. Blumenbach elaborated on Buffon's theory. They might all agree that people were once equal mentally and morally, but that something terrible had happened. Most people had degenerated, so that, as Buffon declared, the true idea of humanity could only be gained from those who live in a belt from the Caucasus mountains to Paris.

The most temperate climate lies between the 40th and 50th degree of latitude, and it produces the most handsome and beautiful men. It is from this climate that the ideas of the genuine colour of mankind, and of the various degrees of beauty, ought to be derived. The two extremes are equally remote from truth and from beauty. The civilized countries, situated under this zone, are Georgia, Circassia, the Ukraine, Turkey in Europe, Hungary, the south of Germany, Italy, Switzerland, France, and the northern part of Spain. The natives of these territories are the most handsome and most beautiful people in the world.

Thus, the universalistic idea of human nature could be reconciled with the diversity of human types. And, the types could then be classified so that some (in fact, the non-whites) could be regarded as less than human in mental life.

This is one transformation that became a basis for modern racism; perhaps a more startling one is the development of the pre-Adamite theory. In the attempt to explain the origins of the American Indians, all sorts of proposals were offered—that they were the Lost Tribes of Israel, they were Arabs, Phoenicians, Asians, Norwegians, etc. In the midst of these conjectures, the modern pre-Adamite theory was proposed, first by Paracelsus, that the Indians did not have a source in common with the other peoples of the world. Paracelsus' theory, stated in 1520, might be called racist. He classified the Indians with mermaids, griffins, nymphs, sirens, and salamanders, all as beings without souls.
The crucial statement of the pre-Adamite theory was that of Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676), a most benign view. La Peyrère held that Adam was the first Jew, but not the first man. In La Peyrère's version of the polygenetic theory, all people except Jews were pre-Adamites, including Europeans, Eskimos, American Indians, Africans, and Asians. But, as he insisted, everyone, Adamite and pre-Adamite, was made of the same biological matter, the same blood and the same flesh. Even more important, everyone—pre-Adamite, Adamite, and post-Adamite, would share in the world to come and would be saved no matter what they believed. The only racist aspect of La Peyrère's view is his claim that Adamite (that is, Jewish) bodies will resurrect better than non-Adamite (that is, Gentile) bodies.

La Peyrère's theory was based on a Messianic vision of what was supposed to happen to the Adamites in the seventeenth century, namely, the Recall of the Jews. His pre-Adamite theory was rejected by almost everybody at the time. The theory slowly got revived during the eighteenth century, and flowered in the nineteenth. The revival involved a radical and racist transformation. The virtue of the theory, seen through Enlightenment eyes, was that it explained the evidence of the diversity of mankind and allowed for an evaluation of the diversity.

All through the eighteenth century, owing to the discoveries in geology, the work on fossils, and archeological and anthropological findings, the pre-Adamite theory kept being revived. The antiquity of Mexico, China, Peru, Mount Vesuvius, the Indian scriptures, pre-historic axes, etc., kept pointing to a mankind older than 4000 B.C. Every time somebody realized this, they rediscovered La Peyrère and his pre-Adamite theory. The theory has had amazing explanatory force in that, if one is willing to sacrifice the Biblical story, it can account for the empirical evidence about man, animals, and nature. In the eighteenth century, thinkers began to realize the racist value of the theory. The separate origins of different groups of mankind allowed for the possibility that some groups were, from their creation, inferior to others. The theory of the diverse origins of mankind began to emerge in the late eighteenth century as a better basis for making normative judgments about presently existing mankind. Lord Kames could see that if the American Indians and the Europeans had different origins, then the superiority of the Europeans could be assured. Edward Long could claim that it was so obvious "that none but the blind can doubt it" that Negroes and whites were separate species. The revival and development of pre-Adamism in nineteenth-century America clearly showed how the theory could provide the basis for racism and slavery. The work of Dr. Samuel Morton and his disciples, and the articles on La Peyrère in the early anthropological journals are adequate testimony to what had happened. The opponents of racism had to fight for the unity of the human species, while pre-Adamism continued up to Alexander Winchell's Pre-Adamites in 1880, with photographs, to be a fertile source of justification of the inferiority of men of color compared to the Caucasians.

La Peyrère's Messianic humanism had been transformed into scientific racism and a basic justification of slavery. The pre-Adamite racists were amused that their source was an off-beat theologian, and they ignored his humanistic theology while making him the Galileo of anthropology, the man who dared to state the original diversity of the races and suffered accordingly.

If these two examples, the fate of the view that man is a rational animal, and the fate of the pre-Adamite theory, indicate that what happened intellectually was not that various eminent thinkers had aberrational racist views, but that they were transforming the basic explanations of human diversity from neutral to normative ones, then I hope that historians of philosophy will follow in detail how these transformations took place. I personally am working on the history of the pre-Adamite theory from its beginning to its end in the early twentieth century. Studies of what happened to each of the other explanations may reveal to us the intellectual events that have led to our present racist ideologies.

But, one wonders why this all happened. Why the explanations of human diversity did not remain neutral, without evaluations of the diversities? I suspect that the abbé Grégoire was essentially right when he diagnosed the situation in his De la littérature des Nègres. People had given up Biblical humanism, and with it the
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conviction that everyone, no matter what he looked like, was an image of God. Secondly, naturalistic explanations of human nature allowed for normative evaluations. And, thirdly, and most important, there was an economic need to justify African slavery and the rape of America. The last factor, no doubt, played the greatest role in the theorizing that went on. And, to nobody's surprise, the theorists from Locke to Blumenbach managed to find that people with "wrong," or "inferior" mental properties just happened to have the wrong skin color, or the wrong religious beliefs and practices. In finding this out, the philosophers and natural philosophers were not being aberrational; they were acting as the theoreticians for a major stream of thought that was transforming the universalistic conception of man into a view of the gradations of mankind, a transformation that could justify what was occurring.

While considering how this happened, I believe we also have to study the counter-movement, to see what alternative theories of man were offered to oppose the growing racism of the Enlightenment, and to propose a view of man without invidious gradations and evaluations. The two major figures who need restudy are, I think, the abbé Grégoire and Alexander von Humboldt. Professor Necheles has set us on the way to realizing Grégoire's importance as the great egalitarian of the era. His conception of man, born of a Biblical humanism and Messianism (partly fueled by La Peyrère), made him insist on the potential equality of all mankind, no matter what their present conditions might be. Von Humboldt, especially after his encounter with the American racists, Dr. Morton and his disciples, insisted not only on the unity of the human species, but more important, on the view that no matter how human beings differed in civilization, culture, or achievement, no nations are "in themselves nobler than others." Grégoire's egalitarianism and von Humboldt's total cultural relativism may provide a viable theory of man for our present era.

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9. For instance, see James Harris, Hermes: or a Philosophical Inquiry concerning Language and Universal Grammar (London, 1751), pp. 407–26. Harris claimed that "the wisest Nations, having the most and the best Ideas, will consequently have the best and most copious Languages," p. 408.

James Burnet, Lord Monboddo, in his Of the Origin and Progress of Language, Vol. I (London, 1775), in accounting for the inferiority of the languages of barbarous nations, said "for, as it is well known, savages are very indolent, at least with respect to any exercise of the mind, and are hardly excited to action by any curiosity, or desire of learning" (p. 182).

Johann Gottfried von Herder, after explaining the wonderful features of the languages of the Greeks, Romans, Germans, and Gauls, then turned to that of the Africans, and announced "the slothful African stammers brokenly and droopingly." Herders sämtliche Werke, ed. Bernhard Suphan (Berlin, 1877–1913), I, 1–2.

I am most grateful to Mr. James Groves of California State University, San Diego for pointing out these citations to me. He is preparing a dissertation on late eighteenth-century language theories.

10. At least as regards Africans. Cf. Edward Long, The History of Jamaica (London, 1774), Vol. II, Book III, chap. I, "Negroes," pp. 351–76. Long was willing to credit the Chinese, Mexicans, and North American Indians with some intellectual ability, but the Negroes with none. Speaking of the black slaves in America, he said, "We find them marked with the same béstial manners, stupidity, and vices, which debase their brethren on the continent, who seem to be distinguished from the rest of mankind, not in person only, but in possessing, in abstract, every species of inherent turpitude, that is to be found dispersed at large among the rest of the human creation, with scarce a single virtue to extinguish this shade of character, differing in this particular from all other men; for, in other countries, the most abandoned villain we ever heard of has rarely, if ever, been known unportioned with some good quality at least in his composition. It is astonishing, that although they have been acquainted with Europeans, and their manufactures, for so many hundred years, they have, in all this series of time, manifested so little taste for arts, or a genius either inventive or imitative. Among so great a number of provinces on this extensive continent, and among so many millions of people, we have heard but of one or two insignificant tribes, who comprehend any thing of mechanic arts, or manufacture; and even these, for the most part, are said to perform their work in a very bungling and slovenly manner, perhaps not better than an orangoutang might, with little pains, be brought to do” (pp. 354–55). In discussing Hume's claim, Long refined it to be just a condemnation of Africans: "Mr. Hume presumes, from his observations upon the native Africans, to conclude, that they are inferior to the rest of the species, and utterly incapable of all the higher attainments of the human mind" (p. 376). James Beattie's answer to Hume is dismissed because he mixes cases of Mexican Indians and Negroes together.

11. Encyclopedia Britannica, 3rd edition (Philadelphia, 1798), XII, 794. The Encyclopædia Britannica continued expounding this sort of view into the twentieth century. In the 9th edition (New York 1884), Vol. XVII, s.v. "Negro," Prof. A. H. Keane of University College, London, explained that the cranial sutures of Negroes close much earlier than in other races. "To this premature ossification of the skull, preventing all further development of the brain, many pathologists have attributed the inherent mental inferiority of the blacks, an inferiority which is even more marked than their physical differences. Nearly all observers admit that the Negro child is on the whole quite as intelligent as those of other human varieties, but that on arriving at puberty all further progress seems to be arrested" (p. 317). "It is more correct to say of the Negro that he is non-moral than immoral" (p. 317). "No fuller proof of the Negro has ever been distinguished as a man of science, a poet or an artist, and the fundamental equality claimed for him by ignorant philanthropists is belied by the whole history of the race throughout the historic period" (p. 318 [New York, 1911]).

In the famous 11th edition of the Britannica the article "Negro" by Thomas Athol Joyce repeats the same theory about the skull development of Negroes, taking it from the same source, Filippo Manetta's La razza negra nel suo stato selvaggio (Turin, 1864). The article then says, "This explanation is reasonable and even probable as a contributing cause [of the mental inferiority of Negroes to whites]; but evidence is lacking on the subject and the arrest or even deterioration in mental development is no doubt very largely due to the fact that after puberty sexual matters take the first place in the negro's life and thought... But though the mental inferiority of the negro to the white or yellow races is a fact, it has often been exaggerated: the negro is largely the creature of his environment" (XIX, 344).

The 15th edition gives a neutral account of how Negroes differ from other races, and then in the section on "Negro, American," discusses
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Negroes who made a significant impression on American life, from Phyllis Wheatley to the present.


13. The Swiss physiognomist and theologian Johann Caspar Lavater challenged Mendelssohn in 1769 either to demonstrate the falsity of Christianity or convert to it. The French translator of Mendelssohn's *Phédon*, Juncker, was so impressed by Mendelssohn, "Un peu si extraordinaire né & élevé dans le sein d’une Nation [the Jews] qui croupit dans une crasse ignorance," that he also translated his answer to Lavater. Cf. Moses Mendelssohn, *Phédon, ou Entretiens sur la spiritualité et l’immortalité de l’âme* (Paris and Bayeux, 1772), Avertissement. It is interesting that Herder supported Mendelssohn in the dispute.

14. David Hume, letter to Thomas Rous, August 28, 1767, unpublished, India Office, Miscellaneous Letters Received, E/1/49, fol. 66. Hume wrote "Allow me to recommend to your patronage, M. Pinto, whom I venture to call my friend, tho’ a Jew." The English ambassador in the Hague, Sir Joseph Yorke, used the same phrase in his letter introducing de Pinto to Yorke’s brother, the Earl of Hardwicke (British Museum Ms. 33568, Hardwicke Papers XX, fol. 207v, letter of June 23, 1767). In a forthcoming article on Hume and de Pinto, I will publish several manuscript letters of Hume, plus other hitherto unpublished materials. On Hume’s relations to de Pinto, see R. H. Popkin, "Hume and Isaac de Pinto," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, XII (1970), 417-30.

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23. La Peyrère, Systema Theologicum, Lib. V, especially cap. 9.
24. Isaac La Peyrère, Du Rappel des Juifs ([Paris], 1643), Livre II, p. 65; "les Corps des Juifs sont capables de plus de Grace & de plus de Gloire que les corps des Gentils" when they are resurrected and made immortal.
25. La Peyrère's pre-Adamite theory was originally the prologue to Du Rappel des Juifs. Richelieu forbade the publication of the work on pre-Adamism, and a revised version was published twelve years later in 1655. After this, the work was condemned, and La Peyrère was forced to recant. He spent his last years trying to redraft his Rappel des Juifs and to publish a new version; he could not get permission. La Peyrère's Messianism will be dealt with in a paper I have in preparation, "The Marrano Theology of Isaac La Peyrère."
26. The theory was condemned by both Catholics and Protestants. La Peyrère complained that all the rabbis also rejected his view. Refutations were written by many theologians in England, France, Holland, and Germany at the time, and the theory kept being refuted through the eighteenth century. The only contemporaries who admitted accepting it were Claude Saumaise and Juan de Prado. Spinoza, who borrowed much from La Peyrère, seems to tacitly accept it.
27. Charles Blount, in The Oracle of Reason (London, 1693), advanced the theory. Voltaire introduced it occasionally in the Dictionnaire philosophique. Edward Long, in his History of Jamaica, Book II, chap. 13, pp. 336-37, advocated it and reported that "A certain philosopher [unnamed] of the present age confidently avers that 'none but the blind can doubt it'" (p. 337). Long was, of course, trying to establish that white and Negroes were of different species.
28. See for instance P. Brydone, A Tour through Sicily and Malta, in a Series of Letters to William Beckford (London, 1773), I, 131-32, where Brydone discussed the evidence that Mount Vesuvius had been erupting for at least 14,000 years. "Recuper [his guide] tells me he is exceedingly embarrassed, by these discoveries, in writing the history of the mountain. — That Moses hangs like a dead weight upon him, and blunts his zeal for inquiry; for that really he has not the conscience to make his mountain so young, as that prophet makes the world" (p. 132). François Xavier Burtin tried to account for fossil evidence by claiming there were non-human rational creatures before Adam. The Monthly Review, III (1790), in its discussion of his Réponse à la Question physique proposée par la Société de Teyler sur les Revolutions generales, qu'a subies la surface de la Terre, et sur l'ancienneté de notre globe (Haarlem, 1789), said that "provided he excepts the human species, he may believe rational animals to have existed on the earth before Adam, without being guilty of this terrible heresy, for which, about the middle of the last century, poor Isaac de la Peyrère was so roughly handled by the Inquisition" (p. 543). On the next page the Monthly Review dealt with a Dr. Van Marum who had found an unidentified jawbone: "Hence we have some suspicion of its having been a Pre-Adamite, perhaps the owner, if not the maker, of the wonderful hatchet discovered near Brussels" (p. 544).
29. The first translator of the Hindu scriptures, Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, was overwhelmed by the claims of Hindu chronology, going back 7,205,000 years. The evidence seemed convincing to him that the Hindu scriptures predicted the Biblical world. Halhed finally insisted it had to be a matter of faith, based on Divine Revelation, that the Mosaic account is accurate, since it cannot be reconciled with the Indian materials. See his preface to A Code of Gentoo Laws, or Ordinations of the Pandits, from a Persian Translation, made from the Original, written in the Shanscrit Language, (London, 1776), esp. pp. xxxvii-xlv. "If we admit more than one act of creation, even the appearance of difficulty from reiteration of acts, totally vanisheth. . . . every rational conjecture leans to a separate creation" (p. 240).
30. Edward Long, History of Jamaica, II, 337. In his racist analysis in Book III, chap. I, "Negroes," Long asked, "When we reflect on the nature of these men, and their dissimilarity to the rest of mankind, must we not conclude that they are a different species of the same genus?" (p. 356). Then, instead of the polygenetic explanation he had favored earlier, he advocated the view that Negroes were lower on the great chain of being than the rest of mankind, and were closer to orangutangs than to other men.
31. Two recent studies deal in detail with the work of Dr. Samuel Morton and his disciples; George M. Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind (New York, 1971), chap. 3; and William Stanton, The Leopard's Spots (Chicago and London, 1960). The Anthropological Review, II (1864), has an article by Philalethes entitled, "Peyreus and Theological Criticism," pp. 109-16. La Peyrère was discussed in many of the articles in the early anthropological journals in England, France, and America. A student of mine at McGill University, Mr. Norbert Hornstein, has written an interesting paper that I hope will be published, arguing that if one judged solely on the basis of evidence in the argument between the polygenists and the monogenists before Darwin, the polygenists had the better scientific case.
32. Alexander Winchell, Preadamites; or a Demonstration of the Existence of Man before Adam (Chicago, 1880). The photographs are of a Dravidian, a Mongoloid, a Negro, an Eskimo, a Hottentot, a Papuan, and an Australian aborigine. Winchell was professor of geology and paleontology at the University of Michigan.
33. Henry S. Patterson, "Memoir of the Life and Scientific Labors of Samuel George Morton," in Josiah C. Nott and George R. Glidden, Types of Mankind, or Ethnological Researches based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures and Cranias of Races, and upon their Nat-
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ural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History (Philadelphia, 1854), pp. xliii-xliv: "The celebrated book of Peyreri on the pre-Adamites was written to solve certain difficulties in biblical exegesis . . . for the writer was a mere scholastic theologian. He met the fate of all who ventured to defy the hierarchy; . . . at a day when they had the civil power at their back . . . they had their fagots in the Place de Grève, and as they could not catch Peyreri, the Sorbonne ordered his book publicly burned by the common hangman."

Alexander White, A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom (New York, 1960) (the first edition was in 1896), I, 255: "In some parts of Europe a man holding new views on chronology was by no means safe from bodily harm. As an example of the extreme pressure exerted by the old theological system at times on honest scholars, we may take the case of La Peyrère. . . . He was taken in hand at once: great theologians rushed forward to attack him from all parts of Europe . . . the Parliament of Paris burned the book, and the Grand Vicar of the Archdiocese of Mechlin threw him into prison, and kept him there until he was forced, not only to retract his statements, but to adjure his Protestantism."

Most histories of anthropology give La Peyrère an honorific and heroic place in the early development of the subject.


35. It must be recognized that many of those developing the theory of different grades of mankind opposed slavery. Their theories were used by the proslavery advocates nonetheless. For example, Buffon in his "Of the Varieties of the Human Species," strongly attacked the dreadful treatment of slaves (see pp. 152–53). However, Buffon's views on why many people were non-white were taken, in whole or part, by the racists to justify slavery.


37. Alexander von Humboldt, Cosmos, I, 368: "While we maintain the unity of the human species, we at the same time repel the depressing assumption and inferior races of men. There are nations more susceptible of cultivation, more highly civilized—but none in themselves nobler than others."

Patterson's "Memoir of Samuel George Morton" pointed out that when von Humboldt was writing Cosmos he sent Dr. Morton a letter praising the latter's researches on crania, (pp. xxxiv–xxxv). When the racist implications of Morton's polygenetic views became apparent, von Humboldt rejected them. Morton and his disciples insisted they were just being scientific, and that moral evaluation should not enter into scientific research (pp. li–liii). The dispute between von Humboldt and Morton much resembles the present argument over the claim by Stokely, Herrenstein, and others that there is a genetic basis for black intellectual inferiority.

Feijoo and the Problem of Ethiopian Color

A. Owen Aldridge

Sometimes in the history of ideas, certain authors are associated with major concepts even though these concepts may not be original with them or even particularly significant to the totality of their literary work. A good example is the theory of the influence of climate upon human character, which has been universally associated with Montesquieu; yet it was not originated by the author of L'Esprit des lois, he did not develop it in any significant manner, and he actually referred to it only briefly and casually in his great treatise on government. The concept played a much greater role in the work of the learned Spanish ecclesiastic Benito Jerónimo Feijoo (1676–1754). Indeed he was in his Mapa intelectual y cotejo de naciones the very first of all the many authors who discussed this question to distinguish between theory and fact in regard to climate.1 As a result Feijoo rejected the theory that climate has the power of influencing human character. Most of the psychological, biological, and metaphysical concepts treated by the French philosophes in the first half of the eighteenth century are also discussed or touched upon in Feijoo's Teatro crítico, which could just as appropriately have been entitled, like one of the works of Voltaire, a Dictionnaire philosophique.

I have chosen Feijoo as the focus of my discussion not because of his preeminence as a writer or thinker, but on the contrary because he is relatively obscure. Even though he may possibly be classed as the foremost author of eighteenth-century Spain, he was of minimum consequence in the European Enlightenment as a whole. He serves as a better medium for illustrating the history.