



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A
ARTS & HUMANITIES - PSYCHOLOGY
Volume 22 Issue 9 Version 1.0 Year 2022
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Scientific Racism: The History and Limitations of Naturalistic Ethics

By Joseph R. Miller
Grand Canyon University

Abstract- Racism within the biological sciences offers an example of how personal racism became institutionalized in the West. This observation invokes three critical questions for ethicists; 1) how and why did scientific racism become the consensus view?, 2) how do we know racism is wrong?, and 3) if the majority of people accept racism as a potential good, on what foundation can ethicists build a case against this societal norm? In answer to these questions, this article is broken down into three parts. First I explore the historical context which fostered the practice of scientific racism. Second, I survey several contemporary ethical theories of human personhood to show how these naturalistic frameworks fail to provide a normative foundation for social action against systems of discrimination. Finally, I argue that the most coherent foundation for rejecting racism and advancing the trans-cultural norm of human equality lies in the study of ethical theories grounded in some form of theism.

Keywords: *scientific racism, naturalism, human origins, evolution, theism, and personhood.*

GJHSS-A Classification: *DDC Code: 305.8 LCC Code: HT1521*



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



© 2022. Joseph R. Miller. This research/review article is distributed under the terms of the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). You must give appropriate credit to authors and reference this article if parts of the article are reproduced in any manner. Applicable licensing terms are at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Scientific Racism: The History and Limitations of Naturalistic Ethics

Joseph R. Miller

Abstract- Racism within the biological sciences offers an example of how personal racism became institutionalized in the West. This observation invokes three critical questions for ethicists; 1) how and why did scientific racism become the consensus view?, 2) how do we know racism is wrong?, and 3) if the majority of people accept racism as a potential good, on what foundation can ethicists build a case against this societal norm? In answer to these questions, this article is broken down into three parts. First I explore the historical context which fostered the practice of scientific racism. Second, I survey several contemporary ethical theories of human personhood to show how these naturalistic frameworks fail to provide a normative foundation for social action against systems of discrimination. Finally, I argue that the most coherent foundation for rejecting racism and advancing the trans-cultural norm of human equality lies in the study of ethical theories grounded in some form of theism. Specially, I argue that the plausibility of Adam and Eve as the first and sole progenitors of all humans offers one potential starting point for the theistic argument against racialized hierarchies, an objective definition of personhood that safeguards human sacredness, and a way to uphold the individual rights of every human person.

Keywords: *scientific racism, naturalism, human origins, evolution, theism, and personhood.*

I. THE PROBLEM OF SCIENTIFIC RACISM

What is racism? “While there is no single accepted definition of racism, most sociologists agree that racism entails an ideology of racial inferiority that generates or reproduces racial domination and exploitation.”¹ Within this broad framework, the traditional definition of racism emphasizes the aspect of personal prejudice rooted in one’s self-perceived or culturally assigned racial group. Given this definition, racism is the dehumanization of one group of people—accompanied by the assumed superiority of another group—predicated on a selection of external (phenotypical) characteristics such as skin color, skull shape, distinctive facial features, or ancestral origins. While present in non-Western cultures, racism manifested itself in the West through the ignoble assumption that indigenous peoples across the world such as Africans, Asians, and even Southern Europeans

Author: *Assistant Professor, Christian Worldview On-ground Lead, College of Theology, Grand Canyon University, United States. e-mail: jmillier@mbs.edu*

¹ Jasmine Olivier, Matthew Clair, and Jeffrey S. Denis, “Racism,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. George Ritzer and Chris Rojek (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2021), 2.

were biologically and culturally inferior to the higher European races. Yet, racism is not limited to the realm of personal attitudes or behaviors.

Institutional racism was a term coined in 1967 by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton. In the field of sociology, personal racism and institutional racism play a similar role in dehumanizing certain groups. Institutional racism, however, is defined as a corporate act which occurs when the prejudice of many individuals is embraced by the dominant culture and used to justify cultural bias, unjust laws, or bigoted regulations. The distinction between personal and institutional racism must be clarified. It is understood that people may be racist in their hatred, bigotry, or mistreatment of others, yet not possess the power to embed their beliefs into the socio-political structures in a way that leads to greater harm. Despite the potential of personal and institutional racism to operate independently, both aspects are relevant to understanding the deleterious impact of racism on the larger society. Personal racism becomes institutionalized when the worldview embraced by those in power perceive racism as an acceptable means of social control. Racism within the biological sciences offers us one clear example of how personal racism became institutionalized. The editors at the journal *Nature*, express well this concern:

Racism in science is endemic because the systems that produce and teach scientific knowledge have, for centuries, misrepresented, marginalized and mistreated people of colour and under-represented communities. The research system has justified racism — and, too often, scientists in positions of power have benefited from it... Ending systemic racism will therefore require those in the system, including *Nature*, to collectively acknowledge and study these facts, and to ask: how and why did this happen?²

The final question of this quote, “how and why did this happen?,” is historically relevant in our effort to answer several ethical questions. First, how do we know racism is wrong? Second, if the cultural consensus affirms racism as a potential good, on what foundation can ethicists build their case against this societal norm? Finally, these first two questions lead to a third challenge, if the majority of people accept racism as a potential good, on what foundation can ethicists build a case against this societal norm? In this article, I offer

² “Tackling Systemic Racism Requires the System of Science to Change,” *Nature* 593, no. 313 (May 19, 2021), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-01312-4>.

answers to each of these probative questions. First, I will explore the historical context which fostered the practice of scientific racism. Second, I will examine various ethical theories and demonstrate how these naturalistic frameworks fail to provide a normative foundation for knowing racism is wrong. Finally, I offer a recommendation for further study into the trans-cultural norm of human sacredness which, if grounded in theism, may provide the most coherent foundation for rejecting racism.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

We live at a time when there is a growing awareness of scientific racism. In recent months, several universities have removed the names of Charles Darwin and T.H. Huxely from their buildings. This response to racialized science was not always the cultural norm in the United States or Europe. It was not long ago when polite well-educated men could speak openly about their belief in the superiority of whites and inferiority of blacks. It was not long ago when officials at the highest levels of government and educators at the helm of America's most respected universities could speak openly about their belief in the inherent inferiority of the so-called black race. Men and women of African descent who were brought to the Western world through the slave trade were given no opportunity to exist alongside whites as equals, no power to protect their basic civil rights, and no chance to enjoy the same liberties as those accepted as white by the dominant culture.

During the nineteenth century, belief in white superiority—at one time grounded in philosophy and religion—was reinforced by the scientific consensus of animal to human evolution and subsequently used to justify slavery. Based on the consensus science, it was believed that blacks must be managed like children. Many twentieth century institutions such as Planned Parenthood were created by white supremacists to limit the reproductive success of unwanted people groups including the poor and minorities.³ It is within

³ Nancy Ordovery, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 213. Ordovery's analysis is useful because she is sympathetic to the mission of reproductive rights, yet understands the role Sanger played as a bridge between scientific racism and the birth control movement. Prior to 2021 Planned Parenthood denied the harm done by Sanger, but their President and CEO now acknowledges, "In the name of political expedience, she [Sanger] chose to engage white supremacists to further her cause. In doing that, she devalued and dehumanized people of color. We will no longer make excuses or apologize for Margaret Sanger's actions. But we can't simply call her racist, scrub her from our history, and move on. We must examine how we have perpetuated her harms over the last century—as an organization, an institution, and as individuals." Alexis McGill Johnson, "I'm the Head of Planned Parenthood. We're Done Making Excuses for Our Founder," *New York Times*, April 17, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/17/opinion/planned-parenthood-margaret-sanger.html>.

this historic context that the system of Western chattel slavery serves to illustrate the power of worldview to dehumanize, discriminate, and further advance the cause of racism.

Wesley John Gaines was a man born into American slavery. Gaines knew firsthand that beyond the obvious physical and mental abuse, the centuries-old system of chattel slavery did violence to both the master and the slave who were dehumanized by this practice which destroyed the brotherhood of all humankind. At grave risk to their own lives, abolitionists, President Abraham Lincoln, heroes of the American Civil War, Republicans, and a small minority of Democrats in Congress—alongside the men, women, and children ensnared by slavery—allied to complete the long journey toward emancipation. Once this freedom was won, Gaines believed that if given the same opportunity as whites, blacks would prove they were "worthy to stand shoulder to shoulder with their white brothers on any field of enterprise and achievement."⁴ For others, the hope of black equality was a battle against nature that could never be won. Most whites—including many abolitionists like Lincoln—believed that blacks could never overcome their so-called inborn disadvantages, or effectively assimilate into Western civilization.⁵ Carter G Woodson, considered the father of black history, summarized well the worldview which shaped the racial narrative during the post-Civil War era. In his 1933 book, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, he observed:

The freedmen [freed slaves] who were to be enlightened were given little thought, for the best friends of the race, ill-taught themselves, followed the traditional curricula of the times which did not take the Negro into consideration except to condemn or pity him.

In geography the races were described in conformity with the program of the usual propaganda to engender in whites a race hate of the Negro, and in the Negroes contempt for themselves. A poet of distinction was selected to illustrate the physical features of the white race, a bedecked chief of a group those of the red a proud warrior the brown, a prince the yellow, and a savage with a ring in his nose, and of course, the Negro stood at the foot of the social ladder.⁶

Despite his legal status as a free man, the miseducation of both blacks and whites meant that Gaines experienced discrimination from all those who refused to accept him as a human of sacred worth. In

⁴ W. J. Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man* (Philadelphia: A. M. E. Publishing House, 1897), 13.

⁵ Lincoln's belief that blacks could not assimilate was reflected in his various proposal to colonize emancipated blacks in places like Liberia or Central America. Leonard L. Richards, *Who Freed the Slaves?: The Fight Over the Thirteenth Amendment* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 78, Adobe Digital Edition.

⁶ Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Book Tree, 2009), 12. The quote from Woodson is particularly salient to this paper as the connection between geography and racial perceptions observed by Woodson dates to the Middle Ages and the map making of Isidore of Seville. For a fuller discussion see page.

his 1897 book, *The Negro and the White Man*, Gaines hoped to inspire his own people to rise above hatred, seek a stronger faith in God, and embrace their brotherhood with white people. To achieve this goal, Gaines recognized the need for a massive shift in the theology of many Christians who believed blacks were forever inferior to whites because they did not descend from the race of Adam.⁷ This necessary shift in theology, however, was only one hurdle along the path to racial equality. The abolition of slavery was simply not enough to end the power of scientific racism.

The system of slavery was a common practice throughout human history and existed in some form or another, among every people group and in every society from ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome to the empires of the indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America.⁸ Throughout the centuries, however, the system of slavery was not centered on racial categories. From ancient times through the Middle Ages, slave and slave owner often shared the same skin color or ethnic identity. In contrast, the Enlightenment consensus among nineteenth century historians that whites were culturally superior to the other races created a new and powerful obstacle to abolishing slavery and for accepting the full humanity of Gaines and other peoples of African descent.⁹

In 1835, George McDuffie took up the cause of slavery before the South Carolina legislature. His speech, notes Mortimer Adler, marked a turning point in Southern thinking which no longer construed slavery as a lamentable evil—necessary to meet the economic demands of the South—but as a positive good, which gave blacks the best chance for happiness.¹⁰ In his remarks, McDuffie condemned the religious activism and biblical anthropology that inspired the abolitionists. McDuffie saw these advocates of black liberation as “enemies of the human race” and petitioned that all opponents of slavery, including clergy, should be punished by death for their insurrection against the South.¹¹ Domestic slavery, McDuffie opined, was the manifestation of God’s will and designed for the happiness of the black race. Even more, McDuffie argued, nature and reason make clear that slavery was inborn to the African peoples. The inferiority of the black race, McDuffie proclaimed, was indelibly “marked on the

face, stamped on the skin, and evinced by the intellectual inferiority and natural improvidence of this race.”¹²

In the decades that followed, the belief that hard labor was the true savior of the slave was captured well in the article, *Cotton and Negroes*, written by W.W. Wright.

It is owing to cotton that the Negroes have so multiplied in the United States; nay, is probably owing to cut and that they have not been exterminated like all savage tribes, who wither away when placed in equal competition with civilized men, no matter what effort may be used to preserve them.¹³

This perception of slavery as a social and moral good was only reinforced by medical doctors like Samuel A. Cartwright who believed the hard labor of slavery helped preserve the “primitive Negro mind” from reverting to its naturally lower animal state.¹⁴ For physicians like Cartwright, the foolish notion among abolitionists that the “negro is only a lampblack white man” was a denial of the evidence espoused by both the Bible and the great scientists of his day.¹⁵ John Haller makes clear the significance of this scientific consensus:

Southern physicians were almost invariably united in their belief that the free black population, as well as the mulatto, suffered from a much higher death and disease rate. The censuses taken from 1840 to 1860 pointed to the greater physical and moral deterioration of these two groups. The statistical history of the free black in ante-bellum America became the frequent basis upon which physicians argued for the justification of the slave system. The ‘unparalleled deterioration [of the free blacks], their frequent insanity, dementia, blindness, deafness, pauperism, premature death, their decrease, or minimized ratio of increase, their physical degeneration and tendency to extinction,’ made slavery an ethical as well as medical necessity in the eyes of the Southern physician.¹⁶

Southern physicians took the lead in convincing many whites that blacks needed the institution of slavery for their own mental, physical, and social well-being. Twenty-four years after McDuffie’s speech, and within the context of this religious, philosophical, and medical consensus, came Charles Darwin’s two seminal works: *On the Origin of Species, by Means of Natural Selection; Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* and *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Though Darwin himself was an abolitionist, his racialized theory of animal to human evolution empowered men like McDuffie and Cartwright to win the scientific debate against the abolitionists and reinforced

⁷ Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man*, 125.

⁸ For a discussion of the early modern history of slavery see, Robert C. Davis, *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800*, Early Modern History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁹ In Chapter 1 of this book, Gaines attempts to counter the perception of racial inferiority by emphasizing the history of the black races as culturally advanced. Gaines, *The Negro and the White Man*, 9 cf.

¹⁰ George McDuffie, “The Natural Slavery of the Negro,” in *Slaves and Masters 1567–1854*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler, *The Negro in American History* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corp, 1969), 230.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ W. W. Wright, “Cotton and Negroes,” *Debow’s Review* 29, no. 2 (August, 1860), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/acg1336.1-29.002/133>.

¹⁴ John S. Haller, “The Negro and the Southern Physician: A Study of Medical and Racial Attitudes 1800–1860,” *Medical History* 16, no. 3 (1972): 248.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 252–253.

the belief that blacks bear the indelible mark of nature's disfavor. At the core of this debate rested two questions critical to those who advocate a naturalistic ethic. First, to what extent are humans reducible to their ancestry? Second, if primate ancestry makes all humans primates, does slave ancestry make all blacks slaves?

Darwin's theory of variation through natural selection illustrates the naturalist's dilemma. Darwin himself opposed slavery, but his theory of natural selection reduced humans to nothing more than an advanced porpoise or civilized ape along the great chain of evolution. Given this foundation, the enslavement of black peoples was, at best, a regrettable part of humankind's struggle to survive. In the competition for earth's limited resources, the stronger races would naturally prey upon weaker ones and, over time, displace them. At its worst, Darwin's racialized theory could reasonably be used to justify slavery as a benevolent paternalism, exercised on behalf of those races who lacked the ability to flourish on their own.

Reinforced by the cultural narrative that blacks were of inferior breeding stock, T.H. Huxley was confident Darwin's racialized hierarchy was a fact of science. In his 1865 essay, *Emancipation—Black and White*, he wrote:

It may be quite true that some negroes are better than some white men; but *no rational man, cognisant of the facts, believes that the average Negro is the equal, still less the superior, of the white man.* And, if this be true, it is simply incredible that, when all his disabilities are removed, and our prognathus relative has a fair field and no favour, as well as no oppressor, he will be able to compete successfully with his bigger-brained and smaller jawed rival, in a contest which is to be carried on by thoughts and not by bites. The highest places in the hierarchy of civilisation will assuredly not be within the reach of our dusky cousins, though it is by no means necessary that they should be restricted to the lowest [*emphasis mine*].¹⁷

Huxley envisioned race as a biological trait evidenced in the phenotypic structures of the skull. Alongside his allies, Huxley was perceived by many as a man of pure science who stood bravely against the religious ignorance of the Christian abolitionists. In the guise of dispassionate biology, Huxley's allies were convinced that the Darwinian worldview would sound "a death-knell to the old views of human origins" and usher in evolution's brave new ethic grounded in naturalism.¹⁸

In nature's incremental march forward, Huxley argued that ethics—like biology—was an evolving standard unbound by the religious creeds and cultural traditions. It was a mistake, argued Huxley, to think that

the 'ethic of evolution' was a struggle toward perfection. Darwin's theory of 'survival of the fittest,' he warned, was often misunderstood because "fitness" is not a fixed standard, but one that changes based upon the environment.¹⁹ If conditions were right "the struggle for survival of the fittest might bring about, in the vegetable kingdom, a population of more and more stunted and humbler and more humbler organisms."²⁰ Given the right environmental conditions, even the less advanced species could adapt and, therefore, become more fit to survive. This definition of evolutionary fitness holds true among human societies where the 'less fit' are not defined by biological superiority, but by the ability to adapt and overcome. Goodness or virtue, therefore, could not be defined by biological progress or measured in terms of humankind's cooperation with the ruthless nature of cosmic evolution, but his duty to serve the common good. Huxley opined:

In place of ruthless self-assertion it [evolution] demands self-restraint; in place of thrusting aside, or treading down, all competitors, it requires that the individual shall not merely respect, but shall help his fellows; its influence is directed, not so much to the survival of the fittest, as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive.²¹

Implicit in Huxley's argument was the need to divest nature from morality and free science from moral accountability.²² If true, then Huxley's call for a Malthusian 'civilized struggle' for survival may be interpreted, not as a fight to protect the rights of every person, but as a call to balance the good of society against the rights of the individual. The opaque logic of his ethical reasonings notwithstanding, Huxley remained Darwin's Bulldog. Huxley's ideals undercut the ability of naturalists to argue against those who embraced the collective pursuit of a greater civilization.²³ David Goslee concludes:

Yet by holding this vision open as simultaneously Utopian and reachable, not yet and already in operation, individually activated and socially constructed, Huxley has refined into oblivion the dilemmas surrounding social norms and human agency within a naturalistic universe. With both altruistic idealism and laissez-faire self-interest pilloried as pragmatically and hence theoretically flawed, Huxley envisions a society so finely tuned that these extremes

¹⁷ Thomas H. Huxley, *Science and Education Essays* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899), 66–67.

¹⁸ Note, Wells cites this historic change with aplomb and is pleased that religious abolitionists like William Wilberforce were silenced, and paints Darwin as the true abolitionist. Spencer Wells, *The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey*, Princeton Science Library (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 4–8.

¹⁹ Thomas Henry Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1893), 31–32. Darwin was an admirer of Huxley's early work. In a letter regarding Huxley's book, *Man's Place*, Darwin wrote, "I never fail to admire the clearness & condensed vigour of your style,—as one calls it, but really of your thought.— I have no criticisms; nor is it likely that I could have." See, Charles Darwin, "Letter number 4013 to T. H. Huxley," Darwin Correspondence Project, Cambridge University Library, 1863, <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-4013.xml>.

²⁰ Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*, 32.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²² Paul White, *Thomas Huxley: Making the 'Man of Science'*, Cambridge Science Biographies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 167–168.

²³ Huxley, *Evolution and Ethics*, 37.

coalesce into one another, cooperating with evolution even as they transform it, shaping it even as they are shaped by it.²⁴

Without question, Huxley's ethic of social advance was the natural progression of Darwin's thought. Even in the defense of Darwin, Peter Bowler concedes, "Few historians now doubt that the ideology of laissez-faire individualism was built into the foundations of his [Darwin's] thinking, if only through the influence of Malthus."²⁵ Within Huxley's vision of a naturalized reality, goodness then is defined by social self-governance. Like weeds in a garden, Huxley wrote, the unfit must be controlled. Just as humans supervise the breeding of domesticated animals, humans must also supervise their own breeding. Huxley, it is reported, once said of the unfit, "We are sorry for you, we will do our best for you (and in so doing we elevate ourselves, since mercy blesses him that gives and him that takes), but we deny you the right to parentage. You may live, but you must not propagate."²⁶ And while the quote itself is difficult to verify, it demonstrates the core of Huxley's ethic from people sympathetic to his cause. To serve the greater good of humanity, those considered lower (less adaptable) on the scale of fitness must not be allowed to procreate. And, as many abolitionists feared, for many people in the West this so-called 'lack of fitness' was empirically observed in the black race. This short survey answers the question of how scientific racism came to dominate the West. How then, we must ask ourselves, is this history of scientific racism relevant our modern ethic? Despite the virtual consensus that racism is wrong, regardless of the new scientific consensus against biological racism, the question remains—is the naturalistic ethic, grounded in the science of unguided natural selection, sufficient to safeguard the rights of every person?

III. THE LIMITS OF NATURALISTIC ETHICS

While much of the science has changed since Darwin's time, the core theory that humans evolved from other less complex animals has remained the same. This belief in unguided animal to human evolution is defined by two key concepts: universal common descent and descent with modification. The theory of universal common descent is the explanatory model which, among other commitments, accepts that humans—no matter how diverse—descended from an ancient group of hominids. Descent with modification

describe the purely naturalistic, undirected, and testable process through which nature selects from various positive genetic mutations and—over long ages—produce new and unique organisms. Descent with modification covers a range of possible mechanisms such as natural selection which operate external to each organism and induces an internal change to create new species. Hereafter, the two ideas of universal common descent and descent with modification will be referred to as macroevolution. The interplay between these two principles is summarized well by the website *Understanding Evolution* which is hosted by the University of California at Berkeley:

The central idea of biological evolution is that all life on Earth shares a common ancestor, just as you and your cousins share a common grandmother.

Through the process of descent with modification, the common ancestor of life on Earth gave rise to the fantastic diversity that we see documented in the fossil record and around us today. Evolution means that we're all distant cousins: humans and oak trees, hummingbirds, and whales.²⁷

Despite the broad scientific consensus that macroevolution fully explains human origins, there remains an ongoing debate in the field of ethics regarding the social construct of human dignity; specifically, if such a thing exists, how should it be protected?

James Rachels was convinced that human dignity does not exist. Darwin's theory, he claimed, destroyed the religious foundation for the false belief that humans have an inherent or sacred moral value. He wrote:

Darwinism undermines both the idea that man is made in the image of God and the idea that man is a uniquely rational being. Furthermore, if Darwinism is correct, it is unlikely that any other support for the idea of human dignity will be found. The idea of human dignity turns out, therefore, to be the moral effluvia of a discredited metaphysics.²⁸

In place of human dignity, Rachels argued for what he called moral individualism. Simply being human, he insisted, does not guarantee a specific set of moral rights. Instead, moral obligation is in direct relationship to each person's characteristics. Practically speaking, once the false notions of "superstitious awe" are removed, human life can be properly evaluated on a person-by-person case, and the value of non-human life can be elevated. According to Rachels, sometimes scientists need to run an experiment which requires killing the subject for further study of the body. Should a chimpanzee be used simply because he is non-human?

²⁴ David Goslee, "Evolution, Ethics, and Equivocation: T H Huxley's Conflicted Legacy," *Zygon* 39, no. 1 (2004): 154.

²⁵ Peter J. Bowler, *Darwin Deleted: Imagining a World Without Darwin* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 242.

²⁶ "The Science of Breeding Better Men," *Scientific American* 104, no. 23 (1911): 562, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26008833>. It is unclear when Huxley made these remarks. This quote, however, was not reported by detractors, but fondly by acolytes of Huxley who believed this sentiment reflected the ideal approach to eugenics.

²⁷ Crissy Huffard et al., "Understanding Evolution," *Evolution* 101, University of California Museum of Paleontology and National Center for Science Education, https://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/evo_02.

²⁸ James Rachels, *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 5.

Should a human not be used simply because she is human? For Rachels, the answer was no. "If Darwin is correct," he wrote, "there are no absolute differences between humans and the members of all other species."²⁹ Therefore, the moral justification for killing any subject, human or otherwise, depends fully on the capacities and relevant differences each one offers.

In assessing Rachels' moral system, one is left to wonder what—for him—constitutes a 'relevant difference' or capacity. Rachels offers his own opinion about evaluating capacities on a person-by-person case, but never explains why the subjective evaluation of personal qualities should be used over any other set of differentiators. If, for example, rationality is merely the random product of an impersonal cosmos, why should people value this feature of the individual person or animal, over any other natural feature? Why not value species? Why not value height? Why not value hairiness? Why not value skin color?

Twenty-seven years after Rachels' book was published, Jeff McMahan argued that individual suffering caused by meat eaters is the most 'relevant difference' and therefore meat eaters—such as humans—must be eliminated. Like Rachels, McMahan believes that his claim should not be conflated with the moral notion that the human species has inherent value. McMahan writes:

What, after all, are species? According to Darwin, they "are merely artificial combinations made for convenience." They are collections of individuals distinguished by biologists that shade into one another over time and sometimes blur together even among contemporaneous individuals, as in the case of ring species. There are no universally agreed criteria for their individuation.³⁰

In other words, because humanity is ever evolving, there is no persistent definition of 'human' and, therefore, no universal value can be ascribed to the individual person. McMahan's argument, which reflects the basic naturalistic worldview, is summarized in the argument below:

Premise 1: Evolving biological systems are the natural explanation for human personhood

Premise 2: Evolving biological systems are indeterminate

Conclusion: Therefore, human personhood is indeterminate

Grounded in his view of unguided animal to human evolution, McMahan concludes, "The claim that existing animal species are sacred or irreplaceable is subverted by the moral irrelevance of the criteria for individuating animal species. I am therefore inclined to

embrace the heretical conclusion that we have reason to desire the extinction of all carnivorous species."³¹ The criteria used by McMahan to justify eliminating one group in favor of another is entirely arbitrary. Even more so, the incoherence of McMahan's argument, and justification for devaluing some sub-group of the human population, is jarring. If no animal—including the human animal—has inherent value, then why would eating other animals be wrong in the first place?

In line with McMahan's belief that the human species is ill-defined and has no sacred value, Eileen Crist argues that the elimination of meat eaters is not enough. For Crist, the increase in human population, consumption of resources, and the destruction of nature through the expansion of technology and infrastructure are driving climate change which threatens mass extinction. The worldview that human life is somehow more valuable and esteemed above animal and plant life is keeping society from doing what is necessary to combat the looming climate disaster.³² This supremacist worldview, laments Crist, leads to violence against nonhuman life and an unwillingness to limit human population growth. Consequently, Crist advocates for a redefinition of human nature that adjusts ethical priorities, changes dietary choices, puts a higher value on non-human life, and reduces the human population. Peter Singer agrees, in principle, that privileging human life is a mistake. In his essay, *Should This be the Last Generation?*, Singer asks:

So why don't we make ourselves the last generation on earth? If we would all agree to have ourselves sterilized, then no sacrifices would be required—we could party our way into extinction! Of course, it would be impossible to get agreement on universal sterilization, but just imagine that we could. Then is there anything wrong with this scenario?³³

Singer's answer is no; ending all human life is not immoral and, at least in the case of some defective humans, it is our moral obligation. Now, whilst Crist and Singer seek to redefine humans as less valuable, others seek to stabilize the definition of 'human' to protect human dignity and rights.

In his 2016 paper, James David Ernst Watson argues that international law provides a useful framework that justifies the universal and inherent dignity

³¹ McMahan, "The Meat Eaters," 386–387.

³² Eileen Crist, "Reimagining the Human," *Science* 362, no. 6420 (December 14., 2018): 1242, <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/362/6420/1242.full>. Note also recent calls to criminalize ecocide as a crime comparable to genocide through the International Criminal Courts, Sophie Yeo, "Ecocide: Should Killing Nature be a Crime?," *Future Planet*, BBC, November 5, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20201105-what-is-ecocide>.

³³ Peter Singer, "Should This be the Last Generation?," in *Modern Ethics in 77 Arguments: A Stone Reader*, ed. Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley (2017), 411, Kindle. In the same book, Scranton writes, "The rub is that now we have to learn how to die not as individuals, but as a civilization." Roy Scranton, "Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene," in *Modern Ethics in 77 Arguments: A Stone Reader*, ed. Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley (2017), 56, Kindle.

²⁹ Ibid., 179.

³⁰ Jeff McMahan, "The Meat Eaters," in *Modern Ethics in 77 Arguments: A Stone Reader*, ed. Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley (2017), 385, Kindle. See also this discussion regarding the ambiguity of the term species, Benjamin Plackett, "How Many Early Human Species Existed on Earth?: It Depends on Your Definition of Human.," *Live Science*, January 24, 2020, <https://www.livescience.com/how-many-human-species.html>.

for all human life. This conception, he concedes, is difficult to ground. The first hurdle to accepting universal human dignity is the challenge of speciesism—nature's unguided process of natural selection which results in the evolution of new organisms. Watson concedes that to privilege human over non-human animals based solely on their membership in the species of *Homo sapiens* is insufficient.³⁴ The second hurdle he outlines is the reliance on capacities such as autonomy, language, or intelligence, because some disabled human animals fall lower on this scale than some non-human animals. This second hurdle is illustrated well in the *Psychology Today* article by Liah Greenfield wherein she asks the question, when does human life begin?

The life of an animal organism, obviously, begins at conception. But human life begins only at the moment that the animal has a mind. In some, very fast, developers this can happen before the age of one year; in a large majority of cases this happens between two and three years of age. Does the understanding that human life begins much later than previously thought give an adult the right to terminate the life which has begun at conception but is not yet human?³⁵

Greenfield concludes that since biology alone cannot provide an answer to the question of human personhood, the decision to abort one's fetus remains a speculative moral choice. Greenfield's article is useful here in that it illustrates the localized and subjective nature of Watson's argument. Watson, however, does offer one potential counter to this challenge. Human dignity, he asserts, should be grounded, not on the capacities of the individual, but on human interconnectedness and interdependence. That is to say, the capacity to care for one another transcends the limited capacities of any one person and guarantees full moral status based on the relational nature of humans.³⁶ But this appeal to human relationships as the new standard for the universality and dignity of all humans fails on three counts. First, if human dignity is based on external relationships, then dignity is no longer inherent to the individual, it is only inherent to the dominant group who confers dignity on select individuals. Second, the same argument against self-perception as a guarantee for universal human dignity applies equally to Watson's claim that group-perception somehow provides a more stable measure. If the individual human has no inherent moral privilege, why should the group be granted moral privilege? And if a group is granted

such moral authority, what happens when two different groups disagree about who has dignity? This leads to the third problem: Watson offers no criteria for knowing which relationships count toward moral worth. If human life is not privileged above animal life, can interconnectedness with a clowder of cats or interdependence with a troop of tapeworms secure one's dignity? Why should only human relationships count toward moral worth?

Finally, if human dignity is related to the capacity to care for one another, then what about the unwanted homeless person, drug addict, or ethnic minority? In the case of race, what if the politically dominant majority decides that the minority has no worth? Why, for the naturalist, would that be objectively wrong? If a dominant group does not wish to have a relationship with the minority group, then interconnectedness as the standard for moral worth still grants society the power to make the minority group expendable. In all such examples, Watson's argument for inherent and universal human dignity fails.

Tom L. Beauchamp, like Watson, notes that assigning unique moral standing to human persons based on cognitive self-perception is problematic. Metaphysical claims to personhood, writes Beauchamp, provide no grounding for accepting moral personhood or moral standing.³⁷ Given this ambiguity, Beauchamp observes that both nonhuman animals and human animals often lack certain levels of cognitive awareness which fail to meet the standard necessary to confer moral personhood. Beauchamp warns, if no alternative standard can be found to justify traditional practices of animal/human experimentation then we must reconsider both how animals are used and the current limits we place on human experimentation. If Beauchamp's criticisms hold, the non-theistic naturalist's claims to universal human dignity fail. Consequently, one cannot use either self-perception or group-perception to assign an absolute moral value to any individual, group, or sub-group, of humans. Without a stable and universal definition of human personhood, McMahan, Singer, and Crist are correct and there remains no constraint on which persons—or groups of persons—can be experimented on, dehumanized, or even purged for the greater cause of society.

In looking back in history, it is salient to note that despite all the scientific advancement of the modern era, each of the aforementioned moral philosophers relies on Darwin's basic worldview of unguided animal to human evolution to define what it means to be human. Or, as Henry Gee puts it, "Rather than being at the pinnacle of creation, human beings are just one

³⁴ Modern humans are the only living sub-species of the broader classification of *Homo sapiens* (*H.s.*) used in anthropology and paleontology. Given the scientific definition, Watson's use of *H.s.* in his discussion of human rights is more properly *Homo sapiens sapiens*.

³⁵ Liah Greenfield, "When Does Human Life Begin?," *Psychology Today*, Sussex Publishers, August 13, 2013, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-modern-mind/201308/when-does-human-life-begin>.

³⁶ James David Ernest Watson, "A Universal Human Dignity: It's Nature, Ground and Limits" (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2016), 3.

³⁷ Tom L. Beauchamp, "The Failure of Theories of Personhood," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 4 (1999): 309–310, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ken.1999.0023>.

species on the tangled bank of Darwin's imagination."³⁸ Sadly, as we saw in the history of racialized slavery, when the human species is defined as merely "a variation in the act of formation," then cultural convention becomes the only constraint upon which any sub-group of humans can be downgraded into the category of expendable.³⁹ This opens the door to the final question, if the cultural consensus embraces racism as a potential good, on what foundation can ethicists build their case against this societal norm?

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Looking into the past at the Darwinists who rejected slavery, the question must be asked, were they acting in accord with their worldview or are they acting outside its parameters? Today, for the ethicist who decries racism, the question must be asked, is this belief in accord with the naturalistic worldview? Every worldview offers one of three options: a) it forbids racism as an injustice, b) it offers implicit support for racism or some form of oppression against a different group of people, or c) it expressly commends racism as the appropriate response to observed differences between people groups. The worldview assumption that humans are evolved primates—subject only the laws of macroevolution—allows for two subsidiary conclusions. First, this view cannot exclude the belief that people belong to different races based on external differences of appearance, ability, geographical location, dress, and custom. Second, it cannot exclude the belief that the races of mankind are ranked in value with the dominant race always enjoying the highest place in the racial caste system. Consequently, a naturalistic worldview which presupposes animal to human evolution, at best, provides a coherent foundation that permits racism and, at worst, provides a coherent foundation that entails racism.

To be clear, the argument made to this point is not that belief in macroevolution entails a commitment to slavery or racism *per se*, but rather that a survey of the relevant evidence shows that belief in unguided animal to human evolution—grounded in a naturalistic worldview—permits the inference that some racial groups are inferior, and members of these sub-groups of humans may be treated as such through public policy. As professor of biological anthropology at the University of North Carolina Jonathan Marks puts it, "The earliest Darwinians would casually represent non-Europeans as intermediates between apes and Europeans, sacrificing the full humanity of the non-white

peoples on the altar of establishing continuity with the apes."⁴⁰ Consequently, the embrace of animal to human evolution by naturalists cannot objectively exclude racism as a possible path toward improving the human condition. However, since racism existed before Darwin's theory of evolution, the real problem we face is not evolution *per se*, but the naturalistic version of macroevolution. This observation signifies the need to explore theistic alternatives to naturalism as an answer to racism.

Theism is a broad term that covers a range of beliefs from pantheism to monotheism. Advocates across the theistic spectrum offer various moral arguments against racism and for human dignity which are beyond the scope in this paper. Some theists accept animal to human evolution as a fact whereas others reject this scientific claim. Regardless of where they stand on this issue, the study so far makes clear that any moral system which offers the hope of a normative, objective, and transcultural argument against racism must ground human personhood in something outside nature. Whether humans evolved or were the result of God's direct supernatural creation, each of these worldview alternatives must not only account for the evidence of biological change, but also define personhood in such a way that racism is, at a minimum, excluded. Even more, this ethical system must define personhood in a way that compels us to honor both the dignity and sacredness of very human when racism is the accepted social norm.

One alternative to naturalism is the traditional Christian belief in special creation. For many Christians, the biblical revelation of the historical Adam and Eve—created as sacred beings in God's image and the sole progenitors of all human kind—provides the most coherent ethical foundation for knowing every life is sacred and the best foundation rejecting the socio-political dehumanization of any one group of humans. Given this moral foundation, insofar as race has any meaningful biological component, special creation allows for the small-scale evolution of genetic and phenotypical diversity (or microevolution) without impinging on the ontological unity, sacredness, and moral worth of every human person. Given this worldview, the following argument is proposed:

Premise 1: There are no scientific defeaters for belief in special creation.

Premise 2: There are good reasons to accept special creation.

Premise 3: If P1 and P2 are true, then all humans have the same moral worth.

Premise 4: Racism presupposes a hierarchy of personhood based on emergent properties (e.g., consciousness, mental

³⁸ Henry Gee, *The Accidental Species: Misunderstandings of Human Evolution* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 12.

³⁹ Samuel Wilberforce, "Review of *On the Origin of Species, by Means of Natural Selection; Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. By Charles Darwin," *Quarterly Review* 108 (1860): 325.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Marks, *Is Science Racist?* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 27, Kindle.

capacities, phenotypical distinctions, or morphological distance.)

Conclusion: Belief in special creation offers a scientifically possible ground for rejecting racism.

Given this proposal, special creation is not a sweeping unqualified denial of biological change over time. The full justification of premise one and premise two is beyond the scope of this paper.⁴¹ However, the argument above, if sound, does cohere with the pre-Darwinian formulation of skin color as an adaptive component of biology and the post-Darwinian science of coloration. As a technical paper in the *Journal of Human Evolution* states, "Skin coloration in humans is adaptive and labile. Skin pigmentation levels have changed more than once in human evolution. Because of this, skin coloration is of no value in determining phylogenetic relationships among modern human groups."⁴² Given this explanation, special creation accounts for the diversity of human coloration within the framework of microevolution. Therefore, the plausibility of Adam and Eve as the created image bearers of God and sole progenitors of all humans offers a promising starting point for the theistic argument against racialized hierarchies and a stable definition of personhood that safeguards human sacredness and individual rights.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. "The Science of Breeding Better Men." *Scientific American* 104, no. 23 (1911): 562. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26008833>.
2. "Tackling Systemic Racism Requires the System of Science to Change." *Nature* 593, no. 313 (May 19, 2021). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/d41586-021-01312-4>.
3. Beauchamp, Tom L. "The Failure of Theories of Personhood." *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 4 (1999): 309–324. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ken.1999.0023>.
4. Bowler, Peter J. *Darwin Deleted: Imagining a World Without Darwin*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2013.
5. Crist, Eileen. "Reimagining the Human." *Science* 362, no. 6420 (December 14, 2018): 1242–1244. <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/362/6420/1242.full>.
6. Darwin, Charles. "Letter number 4013 to T. H. Huxley." Darwin Correspondence Project. *Cambridge University Library*. 1863. <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/letter/DCP-LETT-4013.xml>.
7. Davis, Robert C. *Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast, and Italy, 1500-1800*. Early Modern History. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
8. Gaines, W. J. *The Negro and the White Man*. Philadelphia: A. M. E. Publishing House, 1897.
9. Gee, Henry. *The Accidental Species: Misunderstandings of Human Evolution*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
10. Goslee, David. "Evolution, Ethics, and Equivocation: T H Huxley's Conflicted Legacy." *Zygon* 39, no. 1 (2004): 137-160.
11. Greenfeld, Liah. "When Does Human Life Begin?" *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publishers. August 13, 2013. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-modern-mind/201308/when-does-human-life-begin>.
12. Haller, John S. "The Negro and the Southern Physician: A Study of Medical and Racial Attitudes 1800–1860." *Medical History* 16, no. 3 (1972): 238–253.
13. Huffard, Crissy, Andrew Lee, Elizabeth Perotti, et al. "Understanding Evolution." *Evolution 101*. *University of California Museum of Paleontology and National Center for Science Education*. https://evolution.berkeley.edu/evolibrary/article/evo_02.
14. Huxley, Thomas H. *Science and Education Essays*. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1899.
15. Huxley, Thomas Henry. *Evolution and Ethics*. London: Macmillan and Co, 1893.
16. Marks, Jonathan. *Is Science Racist?:* John Wiley & Sons, 2017. Kindle.
17. McDuffie, George. "The Natural Slavery of the Negro." In *Slaves and Masters 1567–1854*, edited by Mortimer J. Adler, vol 3, The Negro in American History, 230–239. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corp, 1969.
18. McGill Johnson, Alexis. "I'm the Head of Planned Parenthood. We're Done Making Excuses for Our Founder." *New York Times*. April 17, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/17/opinion/planned-parenthood-margaret-sanger.html>.
19. McMahan, Jeff. "The Meat Eaters." In *Modern Ethics in 77 Arguments: A Stone Reader*, edited by Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley, 377–386, 2017, Kindle.
20. Olivier, Jasmine, Matthew Clair, and Jeffrey S. Denis. "Racism." In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, edited by George Ritzer and Chris Rojek, 1–10. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2021.
21. Ordover, Nancy. *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
22. Plackett, Benjamin. "How Many Early Human Species Existed on Earth?: It Depends on Your Definition of Human." *Live Science*. January 24,

⁴¹ Note, two recent, and distinctive, efforts to establish the soundness of this first premise can be found in the following books: Swamidass, S. Joshua. *The Genealogical Adam & Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry* IVP Academic, 2019. And, Craig, William Lane. *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2021.

⁴² Nina G. Jablonski and George Chaplin, "The Evolution of Human Skin Coloration," *Journal of human evolution* 39, no. 1 (2000): 57.

2020. <https://www.livescience.com/how-many-human-species.html>.
23. Rachels, James. *Created from Animals: The Moral Implications of Darwinism*. Oxford University Press, 1990.
 24. Richards, Leonard L. *Who Freed the Slaves?: The Fight Over the Thirteenth Amendment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015. Adobe Digital Edition.
 25. Scranton, Roy. "Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene." In *Modern Ethics in 77 Arguments: A Stone Reader*, edited by Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley, 51–58, 2017, Kindle.
 26. Singer, Peter. "Should This be the Last Generation?" In *Modern Ethics in 77 Arguments: A Stone Reader*, edited by Peter Catapano and Simon Critchley, 409–411, 2017, Kindle.
 27. Watson, James David Ernest. "A Universal Human Dignity: It's Nature, Ground and Limits." PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2016.
 28. Wells, Spencer. *The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey*. Princeton Science Library. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.
 29. White, Paul. *Thomas Huxley: Making the 'Man of Science'*. Cambridge Science Biographies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
 30. Wilberforce, Samuel. "Review of On the Origin of Species, by Means of Natural Selection; Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life. By Charles Darwin." *Quarterly Review* 108 (1860): 225–264.
 31. Woodson, Carter G. *The Mis-Education of the Negro*: Book Tree, 2009.
 32. Wright, W. W. "Cotton and Negroes." *Debow's Review* 29, no. 2 (August, 1860): 136-151. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moajnl/acg1336.1-29.002/133>.
 33. Yeo, Sophie. "Ecocide: Should Killing Nature be a Crime?" Future Planet. *BBC*. November 5, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20201105-what-is-ecocide>.