

THE SCIENTIFIC CRITIQUE OF RACE (a work in progress)

The classic conception of race, updated with the genetic revolution, says that each racial group is distinguished from each other on 4 dimensions:

1. distinctive genotypes
2. distinctive somatic characteristics/phenotypes
3. distinctive continental “ancestral origins” (Africa, Europe, East Asia, Americas, etc.)
4. distinctive mental and psychological characteristics

In order for “race” to be a true description of human diversity, three general things must be true of this list:

A: Fairly sharp divisions between/among the alleged races must be possible with respect to each of 1-4. E.g. the alleged races must have significantly different genotypes; must have clearly distinct continental origins; etc.

B: The proposed division into groups, e.g. of genotypes, or continental origins, must have a reasonably objective and non-arbitrary basis

C: 1-4 must align with each other with respect to each alleged race. People with one continental origin must also have one particular phenotype, one particular genotype, etc., that differs from all of the others

Critiques of A, B, or C offered by Blum or Roberts [not complete, and the arguments not provided, just briefly noted!!]:

- I. Classifications based on different genetic characteristics will result in many different groupings, and it is arbitrary preferring one to the other. (against **B** with respect to 1)
- II. These genetically-based classifications will generally not align with the other characteristics (2-4) (against **B** with respect to 1, and **C**) (Blum 141-42)
- III. The number of categories for classifying populations into genetically significant groups is arbitrary. You can pick a small number or a large number, and that will then define genetic significance. This is similar to the historical observation that traditional race theorists proposed anywhere from 3 to around 60 races. (against **B** with respect to 1) (Roberts, throughout)
- IV. It is not possible to clearly differentiate groups even just by phenotype; conventional racial groups are not entirely distinct from one another phenotypically (against **A** with respect to 2) (phenomenon of “racial passing” demonstrates this) (Blum 137f)
- V. Continents are not sharply distinct from one another, and the continents used in traditional racial thought do not make sense from a genetic point of view. “Europe” and “Asia” are not 2 different continents but a continuous land mass. The “Africa” in traditional racial thought is only sub-Saharan Africa. Northern Africa is close to Europe. East Africa is closer to the Middle East than to South and West Africa. (against **A** with respect to 3) (Roberts, 64, 74)
- VI. Human beings are vastly more similar genetically than different, e.g. they share about 99.9% of their genetic make-up (Blum 139, updated in class) (Against **A**

with respect to 1)[possible problem with this argument: humans share 98.7% of their genes with chimpanzees]

- VII. Genetic variation *within* each conventional racial group is much greater than the average difference *between* groups. Specifically, 84-85% of the total human genetic variation (within the .1% [see VI]) that exists can be found *within* each individual conventional racial group, and indeed within ethnic groups that share the same geographical area. 6-7% (of that .1%) is “distinctly racial.” (Blum 138; Roberts 60)(against **A** with respect to 1)
- VIII. Every conventional racial group has the full range of genetic variability within it (i.e. within the .1%). Each conventional racial does not differ from any other to any significant degree with respect to their genetic diversity. (Is this a different argument than VII?) (against **A** with respect to 1)
- IX. There are some statistically significant genetic differences between conventional racial groups (within the .1%); but there is no evidence these have any relation to characteristics of mind, temperament, or psychology. All evidence is to the contrary. (This does not deny that these characteristics may have some genetic basis, to some extent, but does deny that the genetic basis differs among racial groups.) (Blum 140) (against **C** in relation to 4 with respect to 2 and 3)
- X. The qualities of mind and temperament involved in classic racial thought are clearly significantly a product of environment, not only genes—e.g. what opportunities a person has been provided with to develop their “intelligence,” (Blum 142, but not developed) (against **C** with respect to 1 and 4).
- XI. Many individuals’ ancestry does not align with distinctive continents in a sharp way (Roberts 66) (against **A** with respect to 3)
- XII. The continental groups alleged to be part of the definition of race can themselves be divided into genetically distinct subdivisions (Roberts 66) (against **B** with respect to 4)(this might be the same argument as V in different words)
- XIII. Although there are statistically valid associations between a conventionally-defined group and a genetically-based trait, such as blacks with respect to proneness to sickle-cell anemia, it is misleading to think that the trait is rooted in race. Generally there is another non-racial characteristic that explains the link between the conventional racial group and the trait—for example, a group defined by ancestry close to the equator. Such a group cuts across different races and has a stronger link than race with propensity to sickle-cell anemia. (Blum, 141). (This is not really an argument against race per se, but against a misuse of it—a major focus of several of Roberts’s arguments)