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ARTICLE X.

SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN
THE RACE PROBLEM.

BY PROFESSOR HERBERT A. MILLER, PH.D.

RACE problems are pressing hard upon most of the nations of the world. They are part of the general social question, which is growing more and more important. The first difficulty in understanding these problems is to find a clear definition of racial lines. External comparison is not enough to create a boundary between different peoples when they happen to have the same spiritual interests, i. e. the ultimate differences are psychical rather than physical. At any rate the psychophysical comparison of races is offering facts to scientific investigation in a field as yet almost untouched. Wherever there is a heterogeneous people there is need for exact knowledge of the capacities and possibilities of its constituents.

The cause of the backwardness of the so-called lower races is variously attributed to the influence of environment of all sorts, and to natural incapacity. These points of view differ so absolutely in kind that it is necessary to make an earnest effort to analyze the relation between the two, in order that energy may not be wasted in an effort to reach common conclusions from absolutely different premises. At present both opinions are chiefly based on assumptions. Each may accord with actual conditions, but each involves a very different attitude towards the course of human development: the one assuming that, in general, equal results follow equal condi-

tions, and that the apparent differences are due to unequal home training, economic conditions, and social ideals; the other, that, whatever the conditions, the possibilities are not the same. Between these two extremes the discussion of the Negro, and to some extent of the Indian in the United States, has been hopelessly mangled, and upon them practical educational theories have been based. Most of the sympathizers with industrial education for the Negro believe that such education is fitted to his capacity even more than to his needs.

A knowledge of the influence of environment is necessary for the understanding of a race, but it is not fundamental in drawing race lines, since environment must act upon something, and any conclusion as to its influence involves a consideration of that upon which it acts. Other facts are brought in through anthropology, in which anatomical comparisons have been supplemented with general psychological observations which have been made, unfortunately, by men of no special psychological training, and therefore have questionable value. By a purely psychological method alone can exact scientific data be obtained on what is really a psychological problem.

Psychology has a comprehensive and a restricted field. In the former, it includes the total complex activity of mental life; in the latter, it describes only the isolated elements of the complex. The complex activity is the reaction of the psychic organism to the meaning of life. This is the popular meaning of the term "psychology." Any fact of the mind, whether intellectual, moral, or spiritual, is referred to this category. It cannot be scientific, for it does not lend itself to analysis. It is an attitude of the mind which is the result of many psychic elements working together, plus the practical theory of the universe which the individual happens to hold.

This varying combination of influences which shape every attitude makes classification impossible, and to call it psychology takes one but little nearer scientific explanation. The uncertainty of complexity makes it desirable to seek relatively isolated elements. These will be component parts of the whole, but will have a meaning limited to their own functioning: e.g. the memory of legal terms to the lawyer varies with the importance of their bearing upon his cases. But memory of nonsense syllables has an interest limited solely to their interest as a memory exercise. In other words, the quality of memory may be different in different individuals, but no adequate test can be made where the interest and attention differ. Unrelated figures and letters having a minimum of interest offer an approximate condition of equality for the comparison of the memory of different individuals. The simplest element of mind that can be tested is, to be sure, more or less complex, being made up of, as yet, unanalyzable elements, but the variation of the relatively simple states is much less than that between the complex totalities. Two brothers may differ but slightly in capacity, but responsibility falling upon one will develop entirely different activity. In the simple states can be found regular and predictable variation; but in the complex, developed by the business of life, it is accidental and incalculable.

Psychophysics aims to describe these relatively simple states without relating them to their value in life. The results are meagre, but they are the only ones that can have any scientific value, because of their comparative invariability, while the larger reactions are made up of constantly changing meanings of ideals. The spirit or purpose behind the act is what determines its quality; in other words, it is the personality interpreting the value of the act to the organism as a whole. The

performance of the act, on the other hand, depends on the fundamental capacity of the organ which performs it. Thus desire for study, and capacity for accomplishment, are quite different things. Again and more obviously, it is this interpretation of the value of life that makes one man moral and the other immoral, though both may have equal psychophysical capacity. To conclude, from the manifestations of immorality among the Negroes, or from their failure to recognize certain social conventions, that the Negro is incapable of morality or of adaptation to the social demand, is a conclusion based upon inadequate evidence. Morality and social adaptation are the result of the interpretation of the value of a situation, and not a necessary development of inherent capacity. Therefore, not until different races have had exactly the same history can any valid conclusion be drawn as to their relative psychophysical capacity if mere observation is used. This does not mean that there is no such a thing as race characteristics, but that there are elements in interpretation that are independent of race. This, however, is a philosophical question. My point is that there is something that cannot be put to empirical test in all practical activity.

Space fails me to give any account of the many psychological observations that have been made concerning primitive people. Suffice it to say that there have been many things said; and there are great differences of opinion,—from those who see the savage little removed from the possibilities of a brute, to those who think the difference between the highest and lowest man is very slight. It may be the uncivilized instead of the uncivilizable mind that is described. The fact that some observers find that the ideas are sensuous instead of abstract may arise out of the demands of the environment. It may not call for anything except sensuous ideas. Again,

Indians and Negroes are said to lack the power of attention, and hence the door of learning is closed to them. Some travelers say that in Africa a few sentences will weary a native, and therefore conversation cannot be held with him. But attention is not merely a natural possession. In our schools the habit has to be cultivated by all sorts of subterfuges from the guardhouse to the elective system. According to the doctrine of "interest," on which the elective system is based, we find the savage giving perfect attention to his hunt. He has been under no necessity of developing the power of abstraction. Many of the arguments concerning primitive psychology arise from the logic of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. Africans are said to think it foolish to have manufactured articles when it would have been quite easy to get along without them, but what they *think* is no criterion of what they would think if they knew more. We can parallel that indifference in the pure Anglo-Saxons who are known as Highlanders, who find it very difficult to see the sense of the attempt to bring them back into the fold of civilization. A family in the Tennessee Mountains had but one pan, which was used for cooking, serving food, and as a family wash-basin. A new pan was presented, but was hung unused on the wall. When remonstrated with for not using it, the woman said, "Aint we uns got one pan?" The idea of progress is not inherent in any man, but is the social heritage derived from a long study of the meaning of the world.

I do not wish to be understood as claiming that race characteristics are not definite and important, but anthropologists have based their conclusion as to the difference in race levels upon the degree to which they *suppose* the race to have evolved. Their teachings have been eagerly grasped by the

general public as a scientific support of their belief that the Negro is inferior to the Whites.

I cannot go into the bearings of the doctrine of evolution upon the question, but, accepting the doctrine of Weissmann, would add, in the words of a writer on evolution: "Civilization and education are external and not internal, extrinsic and not intrinsic forces. . . . Civilization has changed his surroundings, but has it changed *the man*?"¹ This is an important question, but progress is not evolution in the strict sense of the word. It depends on subjective influences. As John Morley says: "The world grows better in the moderate degree that it does grow better because people wish that it should, and take the right steps to make it better. Evolution is not a force but a process, not a cause but a law. It explains the source and marks the immovable limitations of social energy. But social energy can never be superseded by evolution or anything else." Psychology as I use it has the narrower meaning, which makes it parallel with evolution as used by Mr. Morley. It can aim to study the "immovable limitations," but it is utterly impossible for it to give a standard for measuring the social energy which is the force that makes most of the visible results. We can study the perceptions, but we can do very little with the conceptions, for they form the unanalyzed elements. In conception we get an ethical environment which throws light on every situation, and thus distinguishes man from animal; we deal with every practical situation at something more than its face value in pleasure and pain.

We find this influence as applied to the Negro summed up excellently by one of the race speaking of his people: "They must perpetually discuss the Negro problem, must live, move

¹ H. W. Conn, *Method of Evolution*, p. 212.

and have their being in it, and interpret all else in its light or darkness. From the double life that every American Negro must live as a Negro and American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth century while struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth—from this must arise a powerful self-consciousness and a moral hesitancy which is almost fatal to self-confidence. To-day the young Negro of the South who would succeed cannot be frank and outspoken, but rather is daily tempted to be silent and wary, politic and sly. His real thoughts, his real aspirations, must be guarded in whispers; he must not criticize, he must not complain. Patience and adroitness must in these growing black youth, replace impulse, manliness, and courage. . . . At the same time, through books and periodicals, discussions and lectures he is intellectually awakened. In the conflict, some sink, some rise.”¹ This description of the conditions of real life indicates the impossibility of drawing psychological conclusions from practical reactions. We cannot fairly compare a black and a white artisan when the latter has pride in his work and the other an indifference due, in part at least, to the consciousness of his social position. Still there may be differences due solely to race. I would like to tell how I think this difference in attitude complicates any estimate of moral and cultural possibilities, but I must hasten on to indicate briefly my method of direct experimentation, which, though utterly incomplete, yet seems to me to be the direction in which this subject must be pursued if we wish to get the truth unhampered by the prejudice of one’s geographical position. In a word I aimed to make tests of the simplest sort upon people of as nearly the same condition as possible. The subjects were pupils in schools of comparable grades, and numbered 2,488 Negroes, 520 In-

¹ DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*.

dians, and 1,493 Whites, including 596 Highlanders in the Tennessee and Kentucky Mountains. All the tests were given by myself under as nearly as possible the same conditions and without variation. I can only name the tests, and say that they were devised for the purpose of giving them to groups, and that all my subjects came in groups which would average about forty in number. A careful record of age and sex and grade was kept, and the comparison considered those facts. My word for the reliability of the work must be accepted, and I hope before very long to publish a full description of the details. The tests were: (1) quickness and accuracy of perception; (2) disconnected memory, both auditory and visual, as tested by figures and letters exposed and read; (3) logical memory, tested by reproducing a story; (4) rational instinct, as shown in the immediate detection of fallacies; (5) suggestibility, as shown by the judgment of the size of equal circles on which there were numbers of different denominations; and, finally, (6) color preference.

I can give at present only some representative averages, which are interesting, and on the whole fairly indicative of the results obtained by a more complete interpretation of the figures. With the exception of the first table, which gives the actual number, all the results are in percentages. The graphic representation of the figures shows some things that cannot appear from the mere averages. Averages for the quickness of perception:

	Males.		Females.	
	No.	Av.	No.	Av.
Whites	355	31.17	236	33.61
Indians	160	31.81	120	34.77
Negroes	377	32.35	412	34.68

The average is misleading, as the plot shows that the larger number of Indians are quicker than the larger number of

either of the other races, but both aspects of the figures are consistent in showing that there is but slight difference in races in the same sex, but that there is a consistent difference in the quickness of the sexes, the females being the quicker. In disconnected memory I had five tests, and two facts are striking: the superiority of visual over auditory memory, and the consistent but slight superiority of the females, but the race differences are small. It did not seem to be unfair to combine all the persons of the same race for all the five tests in one average, and thus make it possible to multiply the number of cases by five. I do this because of the alleged superiority of the Negroes for so-called rote memory.

Male and Female.		Auditory and Visual Memory.	
No. Whites	2,960	Av. 55.	Av. deviation 19.
No. Indians	1,362	Av. 53.3	Av. deviation 17.5
No. Negroes	4,098	Av. 56.8	Av. deviation 19.

The conclusion seems to me to be that the differences are very slight. The variation shows that a large part of each group overlaps the others. At the same time the similarity of the deviations shows that the averages are fairly representative.

Let me give the results of the tests for logical memory:

	No. Males.	Av. %	No. Females.	Av. %
W.	343	40.27	229	38.9
I.	101	37.7	88	35.17
N.	394	40.45	427	37.49

Here the difference between the sexes is the reverse of that appearing in disconnected memory. There is almost no difference between the Whites and the Negroes; the Indians are not strictly comparable, for reasons that I cannot enter upon at this time.

Finally I would like to give you some idea of the results of the color choice test. I gave this to a larger number than any

of the others. I performed these tests in two different years, and all in the same manner, except that in the second year I changed from Milton Bradley colors to Prang colors, with very interesting results. Out of the Milton Bradley colors I had 13 against 12 of the Prang. With the Milton Bradley colors 42.1% of the White girls chose red and 19% blue; and 42.01% of the White boys preferred blue and 17.6 red. The number of persons was 380 and 112. Of the Negroes, numbering 201 girls and 267 boys, 3.6% of the girls and 3.4% of the boys chose red, and 57.1% of the girls and 52.1% of the boys chose blue. These facts are interesting, but quite different from those with the Prang colors. Putting red and red-violet together, we have the following table:

	Red and Red-Violet.	Blue.
W. M.	11.4%	50.4%
W. F.	27	41.4
I. M.	20.6	35.5
I. F.	49.4	18.5
N. M.	7.3	30
N. F.	17.1	41.6

Two things appear from this. That there is a racial difference in color preference, and that it makes a good deal of difference what colors are used. Preference for red does not mean for any red, and if the one presented is not quite right another color will be chosen. For the other colors than red and blue the figures are nearly parallel. It is a surprise to most people that the Negro does not take the red, but he consistently avoids it. The colors that we see in life are not so much the result of psychophysical as of social reaction. The one fact that stands out clearly in this investigation is the smallness of the differences between the Negroes and Whites within the range of these experiments. In general we find the Indians somewhat lower in their averages than the other two

racers. I do not suggest the possible inferiority of the Indians; but there is not an iota of evidence to show that they are superior to Negroes. This is contrary to the general assumption.

We must not conclude from these tests that there are no psychophysical differences between the races; in fact, we do find some tendencies of divergence, and admit the possibility of many more. The complex of all these tendencies gives the temperamental tone, which obviously does characterize sexes and races. The differences, however, are of degree rather than of kind. It is not sufficient to make a sharp line of demarcation. In the curves which represent the figures we find that the large mass of the persons of all the races are included within the common space. So far as the original endowment of the Negro is concerned, I would conclude that there is nothing in kind to differentiate him particularly as a different psychic being from the Caucasian. I have not entered upon the prevailing difference of opinion that exists upon this point.

In estimating the psychological development of a person or race, no one should be spurned for the peculiarities that he possesses. Some racial tendencies have undoubtedly been developed by natural selection, but we are accustomed to make an assessment in contemporary psychic values, and consider primitive those that do not fit the present social order. In the process of the universe a race may have a contribution to make through its very peculiarities; and it may at least find in these peculiarities a means of working out its own salvation. Thus the vivid imagination which I found in the Negro, and the unquestioned musical genius of the Negro, are to be given a value that we cannot estimate. The transition from the morning school song of the Negroes to that of equally untrained Whites is like going from a symphony to a hand-

organ. No one will question this gift of music in the Negro; and may we not expect from it, and other gifts which do not stand out so obviously, some social contribution from this and every race? We no longer hear much about the mental inferiority of women; but we are accepting the fact that the two sexes have different natural aptitudes, and are adapting the educational possibilities to meet those aptitudes. This should be the case with different races. But let us not jump to conclusions as to what these aptitudes are; for we are likely to judge from present rather than future social valuations. Perhaps from some such method as I have undertaken we can learn more of the differences between individuals.

Finally, class and race as well as sex problems arise from lack of spiritual affinity between the groups or individuals concerned. They lack "consciousness of kind." This phrase resolves itself into consciousness of the same kind of ideals or purposes. A social relation exists as soon as there are common purposes. If the ideals or purposes differ there will be antagonism. The first cause of this difference is due to some superficial accidental condition, such as the customs of the tribe or the color of the skin, which stand as symbols of the sameness of kind. That these external symbols are only accidental is proved by the ease with which they are laid aside when some deeper principle draws men together, bridging chasms that had seemed impassable. Mere propinquity will often do it. This accidental element in the race problem makes it no less real, but the purpose of science and philosophy is not to get the temporal and the accidental, but rather the universal and essential. The purpose of education and social progress is to make the accidental give way to the essential, and to let each individual stand for his true worth to society; then the problems as they now confront us will cease to exist.