



Libertarian Alliance

FACTS, VALUES

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AND

RACIALISM

The word “racialism” is very frequently used in political debate today, and the subject to which it refers is surrounded by a great deal of controversy. I believe that much of the controversy is not due to any disagreement over matters of principle, but to confusion over the meaning of the word itself. This confusion is partly due to the fact that some political factions have found that the word makes a very convenient smear: everyone agrees that racialism is a bad thing, so if you can find some way of pinning the label of “racialist” on someone whose opinions you disagree with, it saves you the trouble of finding logical arguments against whatever they are saying, and this is much easier to do if the definition of the word is kept suitably vague. However, I think that most of the confusion

has arisen because of a more subtle intellectual error, and it is this subject which I aim to explore in this piece.

FACTS AND VALUES

There is a fundamental distinction in philosophy between statements of facts (i.e. the way that things are) and statements of values (i.e. the way that things should be). In current usage, the word “racialism” is being employed to mean two different things, one of which is a question of values, while the other is a question of facts. On one hand, certain beliefs about how different races should be treated — that the members of some racial groups (or groups believed to be racial in nature) should be denied full human rights, or otherwise discriminated against, or simply disliked — are generally referred to as “racialist”. On the other hand, the same word is applied to various ideas about what differences exist between races: thus, for example, the theory associated with the names of Arthur Jensen and Hans Eysenck, that races differ in their average innate intelligence, has been described by some writers as “scientific racialism”.

The differences between the two concepts has, I think, been obscured by the common practice of defining racialism as a belief in the existence of “superior” and “inferior” races, ambiguous and capable of being inter-



Political Notes No. 16

ISSN 0267-7059 ISBN 1 85637 196 4

An occasional publication of the Libertarian Alliance,
25 Chapter Chambers, Esterbrooke Street, London SW1P 4NN
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preted in either a descriptive or an evaluative sense. Referring to one person as “superior” to another may be an objectively verifiable statement about his or her physical or mental attributes — in the sense that, for example, Kevin Keegan is superior to me as a footballer, or Sir Fred Hoyle is superior to me as an astronomer — or the word may merely be synonymous with “meriting better treatment” and lack factual content.

In the interests of semantic clarity, it would be advantageous to reserve the word “racialism” exclusively for either the descriptive or the evaluative sense. In view of the word’s derogatory connotations, my preference is for the latter, and it is in this sense that I will use it in the rest of this essay.

Having established the distinction between these two concepts associated with race, there remains the question of whether there is any logical connection between them. The National Front, Britain’s most notorious racist organisation, evidently thinks so, since it has seized on the conclusions of Jensen and Eysenck and made considerable use of them in its own propaganda. There have also been other racials in the past who have even gone to the lengths of deliberately fabricating spurious “scientific” theories about the mental qualities of different races in order to justify their policies, as happened on a large scale in Germany before and during the period of Hitler’s dictatorship. Unfortunately, many well-meaning anti-racials have responded by basing their arguments on a syllogism which goes something like this:

1. All humans should have equal rights, regardless of race.
2. Members of races which differ in innate intelligence (or other desirable mental traits) should not have equal rights.

3. Therefore all theories that races differ in innate intelligence (or other desirable mental traits) must be false.

There is a major controversy in philosophy about when, if ever, values can be derived from facts. This syllogism, however, is an excellent example of the derivation of facts from values, or, in colloquial terms, wishful thinking. There is no *a priori* reason for supposing theories such as that of Jensen and Eysenck to be false. They may be correct or they may not: that is a question for scientists to answer by empirical means. Reality is reality, and it cannot be altered by refusing to believe in it.

It should, perhaps, be noted at this point that if, as some writers have insinuated, Jensen and Eysenck have perpetrated a deliberate fraud in order to justify white supremacy, then they have made a very inept job of it, since exactly the same I.Q. tests which indicate that whites are more intelligent than Negroes also indicate that Orientals are more intelligent than whites.

RACIAL “INEQUALITY” AND UNJUST TREATMENT

If, as I myself believe, all humans should indeed have equal rights regardless of race, this belief must be supported by arguments sounder than the one described above. Most anti-racials have, I think, been misled by the example of Nazi “race science” into concentrating their entire attention on the accuracy of the facts offered as evidence by the racials, and neglecting the validity of the arguments used to derive values from those facts. The second premise of the above syllogism has generally been accepted without question by both sides in the debate, explicitly by the racials and implicitly by the anti-racials. It is this premise which must be questioned. In other words, supposing for the sake of argument that Jensen and Eysenck are right, what conclusions can be drawn from this? If those drawn by the National Front should be rejected, why should they be rejected?

According to the classical liberal principle of natural rights, human beings are entitled to human rights because of their ability to think rationally, make conscious decisions, and look after themselves and run their own lives on this basis. No scientific evidence has ever been produced that any race of the species *homo sapiens* lacks this ability. In fact, if any race did lack it, this would be readily apparent for as long as the race continued to exist, since no race could survive for long in this condition, any more than an imbecile outside the security of a mental asylum. The differences in intelligence which Jensen, Eysenck and their colleagues claim to have measured are much too slight to justify depriving anyone of their rights and liberties. The mental qualities which set humans apart from animals are shared by all races.