

The Fallacy of Equating the Hereditarian Hypothesis with Racism

Supporting Quotations

1. Introductory note

This document presents quotations illustrating the arguments that have been made for why the hereditarian hypothesis is racist (see Sections 2.1–2.10 in the main text). To show that the fallacy of equating the hereditarian hypothesis with racism is alive and well, only quotations from contemporary sources have been included. For older examples, please see the Further Reading. And for a detailed exposition of how the fallacy has influenced the development and public perception of intelligence research, see Cofnas (2016).

Each quotation is taken from a source which either heavily criticises the hereditarian hypothesis itself, or heavily criticises a particular researcher who has defended it. In some cases, the attribution of racism is stated openly and explicitly, while in other cases it is merely insinuated. In a few cases, it is plausible that the source is not actually equating the hereditarian hypothesis with racism, but rather objecting to group differences research on consequentialist grounds (see Section 3.1 in the main text). Relevant contextual details are given in the footnotes.

2. Arguments for why the hereditarian hypothesis is racist

2.1. ‘The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because there’s no such thing as intelligence’

Gillborn (2009) writes in *Nature*:

Every test ever invented (whether an IQ test or a driving test) assesses only how well a person is currently able to perform certain tasks. Measured ‘intelligence’ is a product of social processes, not a determinant of them [...] It is time that we were liberated from the racist and regressive ideas that have become so intrinsically bound up in the notion of intelligence.

Rose (2009) writes¹ in *Nature*:

There is a difficulty in the first instance of measuring ‘intelligence’ [...] However, except to a small band of dedicated psychometricians, it seems obvious that to try to capture the many forms of socially expressed intelligent behaviour in a single coefficient — and to rank an entire population in a linear mode, like soldiers on parade lined up by height — excludes most richly intelligent human activities.

¹ This quotation is taken from a commentary arguing that, when it comes to the study of group differences in cognitive ability, ‘science and society do not benefit’. A few of the statements in this commentary suggest that the author regards hereditarian scholars as racist, e.g., ‘It’s just ideology masquerading as science.’ However, it is possible that the author is only objecting to group differences research on consequentialist grounds.

Colquhoun (2009) writes² in *Nature*:

Steven Rose, Stephen Ceci and Wendy M. Williams ask whether scientists should study race and IQ [...] The problems with such studies seem to result, as they have done since the 1930s, from the near impossibility of defining the word ‘intelligence’. [...] The introduction of IQ tests has always seemed to be one of the best examples of the great political and social harm that can be done by the mind-boggling arrogance of scientists who think that they can sum up human abilities in a single number.

2.2. ‘The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because there’s no such thing as race’

Sternberg (2005) writes³ in *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*:

Scientists might argue that their work is value free and that they are not responsible for the repugnant or even questionable values or actions of opportunistic leaders [...] Studying so-called races represents a value judgment because race is a social construction, not a biological concept, and Rushton and Jensen’s entire article is based on the false premise of race as having meaning other than in their and other people’s imaginations

Gillborn (2016) writes in *Journal of Education Policy*:

In view of the wealth of evidence now available on the fictional nature of the labels that we humans call ‘races’ [...] we need to move to a position where all research on human capabilities (whether involving genetics or not) is predicated on a clear statement that any assertion of fixed and inevitable inequalities in ability/intelligence between racial/ethnic groups is, by its nature, racist.

Evans (2018) writes⁴ in *The Guardian*:

Race, like intelligence, is a notoriously slippery concept. Individuals often share more genes with members of other races than with members of their own race. Indeed, many academics

² This quotation is taken from a letter responding to a commentary by Ceci and Williams (2009), which argues that, when it comes to group differences in cognitive ability, ‘the scientific truth must be pursued’. It is plausible that the author is only objecting to group differences research on consequentialist grounds.

³ This quotation is taken from a commentary responding to an article by Rushton and Jensen (2005), which defends the hereditarian hypothesis. A few of the statements in this commentary suggest that the author regards hereditarian scholars as racist, e.g., ‘Only vaguely cloaked behind their words is the purported demonstration that certain groups are, on average, genetically inferior to other groups’. However, it is possible that the author is only objecting to group differences research on consequentialist grounds.

⁴ This quotation is taken from an article entitled ‘The unwelcome revival of race science’. In this article, the author makes several references to ‘scientific racism’, including the statement, ‘One of the reasons scientific racism hasn’t gone away is that the public hears more about the racism than it does about the science’. These statements strongly suggest that the author regards the hereditarian hypothesis as racist.

have argued that race is a social construct – which is not to deny that there are groups of people (“population groups”, in the scientific nomenclature) that share a high amount of genetic inheritance. Race science therefore starts out on treacherous scientific footing.

2.3. ‘The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because it is not scientifically plausible’

Marks (2009) writes in *Nature*:

The study of an organic basis of intelligence is not itself threatening. But it does not explain economic stratification, poverty and illiteracy rates any better than the history of slavery and colonialism does [...] Racism is a political act, and scientific racism is simply the recruitment of the trappings of science in pursuit of its ignoble goals. If scientific racism has a place in science, it debases the entire enterprise.

Evans (2018) writes in *The Guardian*:

A second plank of the race science case goes like this: human bodies continued to evolve, at least until recently [...] So why wouldn't human brains continue evolving, too? [...] The problem here is that race scientists are not comparing like with like. Most of these physical changes involve single gene mutations, which can spread throughout a population in a relatively short span of evolutionary time. By contrast, intelligence [...] involves a network of potentially thousands of genes, which probably takes at least 100 millennia to evolve.

The Economist (2019) writes⁵:

Genetics, however, cannot be the main reason for any observed differences, says Ewan Birney, director of the European Bioinformatics Institute, in Cambridge, because self-identification of ethnicity does not easily map onto genetic ancestry. “African-Americans have a substantial amount of European genetic ancestry—you should in fact call them ‘African-European-Americans’,” observes Dr Birney.

Harmon (2019) writes in the *New York Times*:

“I reject his views as despicable,” Dr. Lander wrote to Broad scientists. “They have no place in science, which must welcome everyone. I was wrong to toast, and I’m sorry.” [...] Dr. Collins said he was unaware of any credible research on which Dr. Watson’s “profoundly unfortunate” statement would be based.

⁵ This quotation is taken from an article entitled ‘James Watson: A pioneering biologist is reprimanded for unscientific, offensive views’, which strongly suggests that the author regards Watson as racist.

2.4. ‘The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because IQ is different from other traits’

Turkheimer (2007) writes⁶ in *Cato Unbound*:

No reasonable person would be offended by the observation that African people have curlier hair than the Chinese [...] But we can recognize a contention that Chinese people are genetically predisposed to be better table tennis players than Africans as silly, and the contention that they are smarter than Africans as ugly, because it is a matter of ethical principle that individual and cultural accomplishment is not tied to the genes in the same way as the appearance of our hair.

2.5. ‘The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because it could only be of interest to racists’

Sternberg (2005) writes in *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*:

Rushton and Jensen (2005) seem to believe, as have others, that they do perform a kind of value-free science and that they merely respect the truth [...] Deciding to study group differences represents a value judgment—that the problem is worth studying. Deciding to show that one group is genetically inferior on an index is a value judgment as to what is worth showing.

2.6. ‘The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because hereditarian scholars have said racist things or supported racist policies’

Rawlinson and Adams (2018) write in *The Guardian*:

The science writer and broadcaster Adam Rutherford said the background of the speakers suggested that “some pseudoscientific nonsense was being discussed” [...] “There are some people at these meetings with some deeply obnoxious views that are also scientifically invalid – notably Richard Lynn,” Rutherford said.

Van der Merwe (2018) writes in the *London Student*:

“This is so old-school as to be laughable,” Dr Rutherford said of the views discussed at the LCI [...] He explained: “Francis Galton, the brilliant but overtly racist UCL academic, may have given the world many valuable ideas, but also created eugenics as a pseudoscientific

⁶ This quotation is taken from an article arguing that ‘the possibility of genetic differences between the races for IQ’ is not a legitimate matter for scientific inquiry. Several of the statements in this article suggest that the author regards hereditarian scholars as racist, e.g., ‘proponents of race science, while entitled to their freedom of inquiry and expression, deserve the vigorous disapprobation they often receive.’

idea. UCL's Galton chair, named in his honour, was first occupied by Karl Pearson, another overt racist."

2.7. 'The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because it was used to justify racist policies in the past'

Turkheimer *et al.* (2017) write⁷ in *Vox*:

The conviction that groups of people differ along important behavioral dimensions because of racial differences in their genetic endowment is an idea with a horrific recent history. Murray and Harris pepper their remarks with anodyne commitments to treating people as individuals, even people who happen to come from genetically benighted groups. But the burden of proof is surely on them to explain how the modern program of race science differs from the ones that have justified policies that inflicted great harm

Evans (2018) writes in *The Guardian*:

In apartheid South Africa, the idea that each race had its own character, personality traits and intellectual potential was part of the justification for the system of white rule. The subject of race and IQ was similarly politicised in the US, where Jensen's paper was used to oppose welfare schemes, such as the Head Start programme, which were designed to lift children out of poverty.

Klein (2018) writes⁸ in *Vox*:

This isn't "forbidden knowledge." It's ancient prejudice [...] the idea that America's racial inequalities are driven by genetic differences between the races and not by anything we did [...] is perhaps the most common and influential perspective in American history. It is embedded in our founding documents, voiced by men with statues in their likeness, reflected in centuries of policymaking. It is an argument that has been used since the dawn of the country to justify the condition of its most oppressed citizens.

2.8. 'The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because it could be used to justify racist policies in the future'

⁷ This quotation is taken from an article entitled 'Charles Murray is once again peddling junk science about race and IQ'. In this article, the authors refer to 'pseudoscientific racialist speculation', and to 'Murrayism in either its right-leaning mainstream version or its more toxically racialist forms'. These statements suggest that the authors regard hereditarian scholars as racist. However, it is not totally implausible that the authors are only objecting to group differences research on consequentialist grounds.

⁸ This quotation is taken from an article entitled 'Sam Harris, Charles Murray, and the allure of race science'. A few of the statements in this article suggest that the author regards hereditarian scholars as racist, e.g. 'But for two white men to spend a few hours discussing why black Americans are, as a group, less intelligent than whites isn't a courageous stand in the context of American history; it's a common one.' However, it is not implausible that the author is only objecting to group differences research on consequentialist grounds.

Rose (2009) writes⁹ in *Nature*:

In the present case it is the proponents of race–gender–IQ theories who are defending a mistaken but politically expedient theory, with potentially seriously damaging social consequences

Gillborn (2016) writes in *Journal of Education Policy*:

The new geneism is no less racially conceived, and no less racist in its likely consequences, than the more familiar explicit scientific racism of *The Bell Curve*; but the colourblind façade repackages centuries old stereotypes in shiny new DNA-patterned bundles.

Turkheimer *et al.* (2017) write in *Vox*:

Asserting that the relatively poorer intellectual performance of racial groups is based on their genes is mistaken theoretically and unfounded empirically; and given the consequences of promulgating the policies that follow from such assertions, it is egregiously wrong morally

2.9. ‘The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because it implies low-scoring groups deserve to be poor’

Klein (2018) writes in *Vox*:

[If] the disparities we see in American life are the result of an intrinsic inferiority on the part of black Americans, then that diminishes the responsibility white Americans have to correct those disparities.

Evans (2018) writes in *The Guardian*:

Although race science has been repeatedly debunked by scholarly research, in recent years it has made a comeback [...] If you believe that poor people are poor because they are inherently less intelligent, then it is easy to leap to the conclusion that liberal remedies, such as affirmative action or foreign aid, are doomed to fail.

2.10. ‘The hereditarian hypothesis is racist because it implies low-scoring groups are inferior to high-scoring groups’

Dennett (2003) writes in *Freedom Evolves*:

⁹ This quotation is taken from another letter responding to the commentary by Ceci and Williams (2009). A few of the statements in this commentary suggest that the author regards hereditarian scholars as racist, e.g. ‘So why reignite a dead debate, unless it is to serve some sociopolitical, not scientific, end?’ However, it is plausible that the author is only objecting to group differences research on consequentialist grounds.

Is science showing us that the ultimate source of Western dominance is in our genes? On first encountering this question, many people—even highly sophisticated scientists—jump to the conclusion that Diamond, by merely addressing this question, must be entertaining some awful racist hypothesis about European genetic superiority

Kourany (2016) writes¹⁰ in *Philosophy of Science*:

For centuries scientists have claimed that women are intellectually inferior to men and blacks are inferior to whites. And although these claims have been contested and corrected for centuries, they still continue to be made.

Gillborn (2016) writes in *Journal of Education Policy*:

[Many] of the arguments that are presented in defence of geneism rest on beliefs that take for granted, and further legitimize, a view of the world shaped by the interests of White people, i.e. a world where speculation about the supposed inherent intellectual inferiority of whole population subgroups can be defended in the name of science

3. References

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¹⁰ This quotation is taken from an article which argues that ‘that scientists’ right to freedom of research cannot be allowed to subvert other people’s rights’. In this article, the author makes several references to ‘inferiority’ (see Section 2.10 in the main text), which suggests that she regards hereditarian scholars as racist. However, it is plausible that the author is only objecting to group differences research on consequentialist grounds.

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4. Further reading

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