

# UNESCO AND ITS PROGRAMME

341.16:001

R. J. K.

III

## THE RACE QUESTION

The importance which the problem of race has acquired in the modern world scarcely needs to be pointed out. Mankind will not soon forget the injustices and crimes which give such tragic overtones to the word "race". It was inevitable that Unesco should take a position in a controversy so closely linked not only with its goals but also with its very nature. For, like war, the problem of race which directly affects millions of human lives and causes countless conflicts has its roots "in the minds of men". The preamble of Unesco's Constitution, adopted in 1945, specifically named racism as one of the social evils which the new Organization was called upon to combat. Moreover, the Constitution declares that "the great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the *inequality* of men and races".

The vigorous action which Unesco is about to undertake in support of the struggle against race prejudice was evolved in response to a resolution adopted by the United Nations Social and Economic Council at its sixth session in 1948. By that resolution Unesco was called upon to consider the timeliness "of proposing and recommending the general adoption of a programme of dissemination of scientific facts designed to bring about the disappearance of that which is commonly called race prejudice".

The General Conference of Unesco in 1949 adopted three resolutions which committed the Organization "to study and collect scientific materials concerning questions of race", "to give wide diffusion to the scientific material collected", and "to prepare an educational campaign based on this information".

There is great confusion on the notion of race, so great that no campaign designed to remove prejudices can be effectively undertaken without careful preparation. Such groundwork must include a clarification of the present scientific position in the controversy on the subject; indeed, it must first of all provide a definition of race on which the different scientific circles concerned can agree.

It was with this in view that Unesco invited a number of anthropologists and sociologists from various countries to meet as a committee of experts in Unesco House in December 1949. They discussed all aspects of the problem at great length and finally drew up a declaration, the text of which is presented further on. Every word of this declaration was carefully weighed. Nothing was neglected in the effort to present to the public in a simple and clear manner the conclusions which science has reached on the subject.

Nor was the declaration in the form decided upon in Paris the end of the effort to make the statement fully authoritative. It was submitted to many leading scientists in various countries. They examined it in detail and a number of them suggested additions and amendments. The competence and objectivity of the scientists who signed the document in its final form cannot be questioned.

In organizing the meeting of experts which produced this authoritative declaration on the race problem, Unesco took up again, after a lapse of fifteen years, a project which the International Institute of Intellectual Co-operation has wished to carry through but which it had to abandon in deference to the appeasement policy of the pre-war period. The race question had become one of the pivots of Nazi ideology and policy. Mazaryk and Benes took the initiative in calling for a conference to re-establish in the minds and consciences of men everywhere the truth about race. Scientists were unanimous in wishing to have the opportunity of denouncing before world opinion the absurdity of the racist dogma. But they were not given such an opportunity. Nazi propaganda was able to continue its baleful work unopposed by the authority of an international organization.

Knowledge of the truth does not always help change emotional attitudes that draw their real strength from the subconscious or from factors beside the real issue. Knowledge of the truth can, however, prevent rationalizations of reprehensible acts or behaviour prompted by feelings that men will not easily avow openly. Unesco has the will and the means to make available to everyone the achievements

of science, if those achievements can help to lessen the hatreds that separate human groups from one another. But Unesco can really succeed in this task only if it is careful to present the facts in all their complexity without trying to hide ignorances and doubts.

Science was faced with the problem of race at the beginning of the nineteenth century when the great evolutionary theories were being formulated. Unfortunately, the problem soon shifted from the purely scientific field to the field of politics. As a result, the discussions which it has provoked have rarely been free from the passions and prejudices of the moment.

But psychology, biology and cultural anthropology, which have developed so remarkably during the last fifty years, have made possible extensive inquiries and experimental research studies into the problem. The results of this important work are presented in general terms in the declaration of the experts assembled by Unesco. It should not be forgotten, however, that new methods and techniques of appraising results are being put into practice every day. At the present moment, it is impossible to demonstrate that there exist between "races" differences of intelligence and temperament other than those produced by cultural environment. If, tomorrow, more accurate tests or more thorough studies should prove that "races" as such do, in fact, have different innate faculties or aptitudes, Unesco's moral position on the race question would not be changed.

Racism is a particularly vicious and mean expression of the caste spirit. It involves belief in the innate and absolute superiority of an arbitrarily defined human group over other equally arbitrarily defined groups. Instead of being based on scientific facts, it is generally maintained in defiance of the scientific method. As an ideology and feeling, racism is by its nature aggressive. It threatens the essential moral values by satisfying the taste for domination and by exalting the contempt for man. Concern for human dignity demands that all citizens be equal before the law, and that they share equally in the advantages assured them by law, no matter what their physical or intellectual differences may be. The law sees in each person only a human being who has the right to the same consideration and to equal respect. The conscience of all mankind demands that this be true for all the peoples of the earth. It matters little, therefore, whether the diversity of men's gifts be the result of biological or of cultural factors.

Thus, the problem of race must be approached not only

on the biological and social levels but also on the moral level. And, in view of the growing inter-relation of the sciences affecting man and society, it can be solved only by the joint action of different scientific disciplines. Unesco will undertake to make known to a vast public the results of the researches obtained in all these various fields. It will, for example, publish pamphlets prepared by eminent specialists.

Many inquiries have already been undertaken into inter-racial conflicts and the factors that produce them. The time has now come for us to consider the societies which have in large measure succeeded in resolving antagonisms by overriding racial differences. Thus, the General Conference of Unesco in Florence recommended for the 1951 programme of the Organization a study of racial relations in Brazil. This great republic has a civilization which has been developed by the direct contributions of different races. And it suffers less than other nations from the effects of those prejudices which are at the root of so many vexatious and cruel measures in countries of similar ethnic composition. We are as yet ill-informed about the factors which brought about such a favourable and, in many ways, exemplary situation. But in the present state of the social sciences, general speculations no longer suffice. We must have specialists make searching inquiries in the field. We must learn from them exactly why and how social, psychological and economic factors have contributed in varying degrees to make possible the harmony which exists in Brazil. Then the results of their inquiries can be set forth in publications in order to stimulate those who are still struggling elsewhere to introduce more peaceable and happier inter-racial relations.

Yet, no matter how great an effort Unesco may make in this field, it cannot by itself bring to an end the most tenacious and the most widely spread of human prejudices. It must be able to count on the support of groups and organizations formed in many countries to achieve the same purpose. To these fighters, indeed to all those who rebel against the idea that millions of human beings are condemned by the mere fact of their birth to humiliation and misery, Unesco brings its co-operation. It brings too the hope that the struggle against the misdeeds of racism will become a crusade to be carried out in common by all the peoples of the earth.

TEXT OF THE STATEMENT  
ISSUED 18 JULY 1950

1. Scientists have reached general agreements in recognizing that mankind is one : that all men belong to the same species, *Homo sapiens*. It is further generally agreed among scientists that all men are probably derived from the same common stock; and that such differences as exist between different groups of mankind are due to the operation of evolutionary factors of differentiation such as isolation, the drift and random fixation of the material particles which control heredity (the genes), changes in the structure of these particles, hybridization, and natural selection. In these ways groups have arisen of varying stability and degree of differentiation which have been classified in different ways for different purposes.

2. From the biological standpoint, the species *Homo sapiens* is made up of a number of populations, each one of which differs from the others in the frequency of one or more genes. Such genes, responsible for the hereditary differences between men, are always few when compared to the whole genetic constitution of man and to the vast number of genes common to all human beings regardless of the population to which they belong. This means that the likenesses among men are far greater than their differences.

3. A race, from the biological standpoint, may therefore be defined as one of the group of populations constituting the species *Homo sapiens*. These populations are capable of inter-breeding with one another but, by virtue of the isolating barriers which in the past kept them more or less separated, exhibit certain physical differences as a result of their somewhat different biological histories. These represent variations, as it were, on a common theme.

4. In short, the term "race" designates a group or population characterized by some concentrations, relative as to frequency and distribution, of hereditary particles (genes) or physical characters, which appear, fluctuate, and often disappear in the course of time by reason of geographic and or cultural isolation. The varying manifestations of these traits

in different populations are perceived in different ways by each group. What is perceived is largely preconceived, so that each group arbitrarily tends to misinterpret the variability which occurs as a fundamental difference which separates that group from all others.

5. These are the scientific facts. Unfortunately, however, when most people use the term "race" they do not do so in the sense above defined. To most people, a race is any group of people whom they choose to describe as a race. Thus, many national, religious, geographic, linguistic or cultural groups have, in such loose usage, been called "race", when obviously Americans are not a race, nor are Englishmen, nor Frenchmen, nor any other national group. Catholics, Protestants, Moslems and Jews are not races, nor are groups who speak English or any other language thereby definable as a race; people who live in Iceland or England or India are not races; nor are people who are culturally Turkish or Chinese or the like thereby describable as races.

6. National, religious, geographic, linguistic and cultural groups do not necessarily coincide with racial groups: and the cultural traits of such groups have no demonstrated genetic connexion with racial traits. Because serious errors of this kind are habitually committed when the term "race" is used in popular parlance, it would be better when speaking of human races to drop the term "race" altogether and speak of *ethnic groups*.

7. Now what has the scientist to say about the groups of mankind which may be recognized at the present time? Human races can be and have been differently classified by different anthropologists, but at the present time most anthropologists agree on classifying the greater part of present-day mankind into three major divisions, as follows:

The Mongoloid Division  
The Negroid Division  
The Caucasoid Division

The biological processes which the classifier has here embalmed, as it were, are dynamic, not static. These divisions were not the same in the past as they are at present, and there is every reason to believe that they will change in the future.

8. Many sub-groups or ethnic groups within these divisions have been described. There is no general agreement upon their number, and in any event most ethnic groups have not yet been either studied or described by the physical anthropologists.

9. Whatever classification the anthropologist makes of man, he never includes mental characteristics as part of those classifications. It is now generally recognised that intelligence tests do not in themselves enable us to differentiate safely between what is due to innate capacity and what is the result of environmental influences, training and education. Whenever it has been possible to make allowances for differences in environmental opportunities, the tests have shown essential similarity in mental characters among all human groups. In short, given similar degrees of cultural opportunity to realize their potentialities, the average achievement of the members of each ethnic group is about the same. The scientific investigations of recent years fully support the dictum of Confucius (551-478 B.C.) "Men's natures are alike; it is their habits that carry them far apart."

10. The scientific material available to us at present does not justify the conclusion that inherited genetic differences are a major factor in producing the differences between the cultures and cultural achievements of different peoples or groups. It does indicate, however, that the history of the cultural experience which each group has undergone is the major factor in explaining such differences. The one trait which above all others has been at a premium in the evolution of men's mental characters has been educability, plasticity. This is a trait which all human beings possess. It is indeed, a species character of *Homo sapiens*.

11. So far as temperament is concerned, there is no definite evidence that there exist inborn differences between human groups. There is evidence that whatever group differences of the kind there might be are greatly over-ridden by the individual differences, and by the differences springing from environmental factors.

12. As for personality and character, these may be considered raceless. In every human group a rich variety of personality and character types will be found, and there is no reason for

believing that any human group is richer than any other in these respects.

13. With respect to race-mixture, the evidence points unequivocally to the fact that this has been going on from the earliest times. Indeed, one of the chief processes of race-formation and race-extinction or absorption is by means of hybridization between races or ethnic groups. Furthermore, no convincing evidence has been adduced that race-mixture of itself produces biologically bad effects. Statements that human hybrids frequently show undesirable traits, both physically and mentally, physical disharmonies and mental degeneracies, are not supported by the facts. There is, therefore, no *biological* justification for prohibiting inter-marriage between persons of different ethnic groups.

14. The biological fact of race and the myth of "race" should be distinguished. For all practical social purposes "race" is not so much a biological phenomenon as a social myth. The myth "race" has created an enormous amount of human and social damage. In recent years it has taken a heavy toll in human lives and caused untold suffering. It still prevents the normal development of millions of human beings and deprives civilization of the effective co-operation of productive minds. The biological differences between ethnic groups should be disregarded from the standpoint of social acceptance and social action. The unity of mankind from both the biological and social viewpoints is the main thing. To recognize this and to act accordingly is the first requirement of modern man. It is but to recognize what a great biologist wrote in 1875: "As man advances in civilization, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being one reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races." These are the words of Charles Darwin in *The Descent of Man* (2nd ed., 1875, pp. 187-8). And, indeed, the whole of human history shows that a co-operative spirit is not only natural to men, but more deeply rooted than any self-seeking tendencies. If this were not so we should not see the growth of integration and organization of his communities which the centuries and the millenia plainly exhibit.



15. We now have to consider the bearing of these statements on the problem of human equality. It must be asserted with the utmost emphasis that equality as an ethical principle in no way depends upon the assertion that human beings are in fact equal in endowment. Obviously individuals in all ethnic groups vary greatly among themselves in endowment. Nevertheless, the characteristics in which human groups differ from one another are often exaggerated and used as a basis for questioning the validity of equality in the ethical sense. For this purpose we have thought it worth while to set out in a formal manner what is at present scientifically established concerning individual and group differences.

(1) In matters of race, the only characteristics which anthropologists can effectively use as a basis for classifications are physical and physiological.

(2) According to present knowledge there is no proof that the groups of mankind differ in their innate mental characteristics, whether in respect of intelligence or temperament. The scientific evidence indicates that the range of mental capacities in all ethnic groups is much the same.

(3) Historical and sociological studies support the view that genetic differences are not of importance in determining the social and cultural differences between different groups of *Homo sapiens*, and that the social and cultural changes in different groups, have, in the main, been independent of changes in inborn constitution. Vast social changes have occurred which were not in any way connected with changes in racial type.

(4) There is no evidence that race mixture as such produces bad results from the biological point of view. The social results of race mixture whether for good or ill are to be traced to social factors.

(5) All normal human beings are capable of learning to share in a common life, to understand the nature of mutual service and reciprocity, and to respect social obligations and contracts. Such biological differences as exist between members of different ethnic groups have no relevance to problems of social and political organization, moral life and communication between human beings.

Lastly, biological studies lend support to the ethic of universal brotherhood; for man is born with drives toward co-operation, and unless these drives are satisfied, men and nations alike fall ill. Man is born a social being who can

reach his fullest development only through interaction with his fellows. The denial at any point of this social bond between man and man brings with it disintegration. In this sense, every man is his brother's keeper. For every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main, because he is involved in mankind.

The original statement was drafted at Unesco House, Paris, by the following experts :

Professor Ernest Beaglehole, *New Zealand*

Professor Juan Comas, *Mexico*

Professor L. A. Costa Pinto, *Brazil*

Professor Franklin Frazier, *United States*

Professor Morris Ginsberg, *United Kingdom*

Dr. Humayun Kabir, *India*

Professor Claude Levi-Strauss, *France*

Professor Ashley Montagu, *United States* (Rapporteur).

The text was revised by Professor Ashley Montagu, after criticism submitted by Professors Hadley Cantril, E. G. Conklin, Gunnar Dahlberg, Theodosius Dobzhansky, L. C. Dunn, Donald Hager, Julian S. Huxley, Otto Klineberg, Wilbert Moore, H. J. Muller, Gunnar Myrdal, Joseph Needham, Curt Stern.