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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF RACE: CLASSICAL PARADIGMS AND MEDIEVAL ELABORATIONS¹

A Review Essay

Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996. Pp. xviii + 418.

This book, the life's work of its late author, Ivan Hannaford, sets out to trace the development of the concept of race -- how and when it evolved -- as we understand it today in western civilization. The author tracks the accumulating growth of knowledge over the centuries, looking for those foundational shifts in thinking and in the organization of knowledge that contributed to a theory of race. He concludes that in classical antiquity categorization of humanity by race did not exist, the ancients using instead a political archetype to order their world (citizens and barbarians). Nor was the religious archetype -- categorization by faith -- of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam based on racial divisions. But from the 12th century onward the racial archetype gradually developed out of a wide variety of sources that explained human differences as "based on [ideas of] blood, physiognomy, climate, land, soil, and language" (p. 14). Such thinking began to take more specific shape at the end of the 17th century, and emerged fully conceptualized in the 19th century.

The work is enormously learned, quoting liberally from authors spanning 2,500 years and packed with insightful and nuanced readings. The book's strength is clearly in its second half covering the period from the 17th century (Descartes, Hobbes, Locke) up to our time. It is in its first half that, despite its grand plan and wide sweep, the book exhibits two major flaws. First, because of his avowedly philohellenic stance, the author refuses to see the classical world as contributing anything of consequence to the development of modern racial notions. Second, the author underestimates the large role played by Arabic science and philosophy in the transmission and elaboration of classical thought and thus in the development of western thinking. As a consequence of these two flaws, Hannaford attributes to one or another medieval or early-modern thinker ideas that were actually first expressed in classical antiquity and were subsequently

¹ I should like to thank the editor of this journal, Wolfgang Hasse, for a number of helpful bibliographic, and other, suggestions. My thanks also to Arthur Kiron who read an early draft of this paper and offered valuable suggestions.

adopted and elaborated in Arabic writings. Thus what Hannaford sometimes identifies as seminal intellectual shifts in western thought are oddly isolated, appearing on the scene without diachronic or synchronic context.

As to the first problem, Hannaford argues that Hesiod, Herodotus, and Hippocrates show “no assumption about the major divisions of mankind based upon the idea of biologically transmitted characteristics, and hence no theoretical notion of biological similarity or dissimilarity except in a crude humoral way.... Only in Hippocrates is there a suggestion that the nature of man may be analyzed on the basis of observed differences in air, water, and place, but his crude scheme owes more to the humors and to the analysis of soul than it does to a consistent biological theory or to environment hypotheses of a later era” (p. 20). The way Hannaford has qualified his initial statement (“except in a crude humoral way,” “owes more to the humors ...than to a consistent biological theory,” and later p. 30, “a collection of interesting humoral observations rather than a systematic philosophical or scientific analysis”) he may indeed be right. But it is the qualification that is at issue, for whatever crude way Hippocrates and, indeed, Herodotus understood characteristics to be biologically transmitted, the fact remains that they understood that there was a link between physical and nonphysical human characteristics, the latter including temperament (e.g., courage, cowardice), and intelligence. They may have believed that these characteristics were environmentally caused and that they would not be transmitted in a different environment, and this therefore may indeed exclude them from the classification as racists as we today understand the term. Nevertheless, as early as Herodotus and Hippocrates we see a direct link between physical and nonphysical characteristics (which are explicitly or implicitly considered as inferior or superior) and this link is a crucial component -- in fact, the lifeblood -- of racist thinking.² And beyond Herodotus and Hippocrates the concept of a link is inherent in all writers of antiquity who accepted the common environmental theory of anthropological differentiation, that is, the theory that the environment determines the physical and nonphysical characteristics of humanity and thus accounts for differences among peoples.³ We cannot so easily, then, dismiss the

² For the central place of this belief in any definition of racism, see, among many works, A.T. Vaughan, “The Origins Debate: Slavery and Racism in Seventeenth-Century Virginia” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 97 (July, 1989): 346 based on George M. Fredrickson’s works; Vaughan’s *Roots of American Racism* (New York, 1995), p. ix; D.L. Noel, “Slavery and the Rise of Racism” in D.L. Noel, ed., *The Origins of American Slavery and Racism* (Columbus OH, 1972), pp. 153-163; Harry Bracken, “Philosophy and Racism”, in his *Mind and Language: Essays on Descartes and Chomsky* (Dordrecht, Netherlands, 1984), p. 51; the essay originally appeared in *Philosophia* 8 (1978): 241-260.

³ Some discussion of the theory will be found in Lloyd Thompson *Romans and Blacks* (Norman, Okla., 1989), pp. 100-104; Frank Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), pp.170-179; Germaine Aujac, *Strabon et la science de son temps* (Paris, 1966), pp.270-273; K. Trüdinger, *Studien zur Geschichte der Griechische-römischen Ethnographie* (Basel, 1918); E. Honigmann, *Die sieben Klimata* (Heidelberg, 1929); A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L’astrologie grecque* (Paris, 1899), pp. 334ff;

classical physical-nonphysical link when we look at the development of racist thinking in Western civilization.

To be sure, “the Environment-theory of the geneses of civilization has none of the moral repulsiveness of the Race-theory,” as Toynbee said, but he also noted their similarities: “Both theories attempt to account for the empirically observed diversity in the psychical behaviour and performance of different fractions of Mankind by supposing that this psychical diversity is fixedly and permanently correlated, in the relation of effect to cause, with certain elements of diversity, likewise given by empirical observation, in the non-psychical domain of Nature.... They are merely two different attempts to find a solution for the same equation.... The structure of the equation which is postulated in the two theories is identical....”⁴ Indeed Lloyd Thompson, while discussing the classical writers, notes in passing the “operation of the ancient doctrine of the influence of physical environment in the ideological systems of its inheritors in the early Islamic world and in eighteenth-century Europe.”⁵

But Hannaford dismisses any influence such thinking may have had on the development of race theories. Instead he assigns a major role in the development of a hypothesis of race to the kabbalistic “Doctrine of the Countenance” (*hokhmat ha-parşuf*) which “holds that there are visible natural signs which may give a clue to what men are really like behind the mask” (p. 136). Again, more explicitly: “The Cabala’s analysis of type and prototype, of the relationship between microprosopus and macroprosopus, introduces ‘type thinking’ into the study of man. The Doctrine of the Countenances has had a much greater influence upon rational thought than we dare to admit, and it continues to shape modern race thinking” (p. 137). Hannaford then connects this Doctrine to the “curse upon Canaan and Ham, the ‘world darkener,’ who in later versions of the story becomes the African” (p. 135). The end result is that “with bodily

C.J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 80-115; and Karlhans Abel, “Zone” in Pauly, A. and G. Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Supplementband 14 (1974): 989-1188. Scholarship dealing with the environmental theory as it was transmitted in later times: Glacken’s work throughout; André Miquel, *La Géographie humaine du monde musulman jusqu’au milieu du 11e siècle* (Paris, 1973²) 2:34-70, 141-145; G. Rotter, *Die Stellung des Negers in der islamisch-arabischen Gessellschaft bis zum XVI Jahrhundert* (Bonn, 1967), pp. 152-155; J.O. Hunwick, *West Africa and the Arab World* (Accra, 1991), pp. 4-8; A. Altman, “The Climatological Factor in Yehudah Hallevi’s Theory of Prophecy” [Hebrew], *Melilah* 1 (Manchester, 1944): 1-17; A. Melamed, “The Land of Israel and the Climatological Theory in Jewish Thought” [Hebrew], *Ereş Yisra’el be-Hagut ha-Yehudit biy-me ha-Benayim*, ed. M. Halamish and A. Ravitzky (Jerusalem, 1991), pp. 52-78.

⁴ *A Study of History*² (Oxford, 1935) 1: 253

⁵ *Romans and Blacks*, p. 102.

features as mysterious signs related to the curse on Ham and Canaan, Aristotle's warning that physiognomical criteria should not be given precedence over philosophical and political criteria is dismissed. We enter a world in which the natural relationship between microcosmic and macrocosmic man becomes of prime importance" (p. 137).

Hannaford believes that the kabbalistic Doctrine of the Countenances was qualitatively different from what preceded it -- "a new direction in the study of man's physiological and psychological make up" (p. 131) -- and thus was responsible for this major change in human thought (see also p. 326). But the link between type and prototype was not introduced by the kabbalists. Whether we consider Pythagoras or Hippocrates (as Galen believed) as the founder of this "science," physiognomy was a well-established belief in antiquity, especially from the end of the first through the fourth centuries CE.⁶ An examination of R. Förster's two-volume *Scriptores Physiognomonici* (Teubner, 1893) will give an indication of its popularity. Galen wrote an entire book on the subject of physiognomy, Ὅτι ταῖς τοῦ σώματος κράσεσιν αἱ τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεις ἔπονται, that is the relationship between one's character and physical appearance, which was later translated into Arabic in the 9th century.⁷

There are additional problems in Hannaford's treatment of this subject, for the connection he makes between the Doctrine of the Countenance and the curse on Canaan/Ham is his own invention. It is, to the best of my knowledge, not found in Jewish literature, certainly not in the *zoharic* passages he cites.⁸ Furthermore, the *zoharic*

⁶ See E.C. Evans, "The Study of Physiognomy in the Second Century A.D.," *Transaction of the American Philological Association* 72 (1941): 96-108; R. Megow, "Antike Physiognomielehre," *Das Altertum* 9 (1963): 213-221; and L. Thompson, *Romans and Blacks*, pp. 104-107. **On ancient physiognomy see now Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, 2004), pp. 149-162.**

⁷ Galen's work was edited by I. Müller, *Scripta Minora* (Leipzig, 1891) 2:32-79, and by C.G. Kühn (Leipzig, 1827; repr. Hildesheim, 1965) 4:767-822. For the Arabic translation, see M. Ullmann, *Die Medizin in Islam* (Leiden, 1970), p. 39. On Galen's theories of physiognomy, see E.C. Evans, "Galen the Physician as Physiognomist," *Transaction of the American Philological Association* 76 (1945): 287-298. On Galen's introduction of the temperaments as dependent on the humors, see also J.R. Irwin, "Galen on the Temperaments," *Journal of General Psychology* 36 (1947): 45-64. An example of one modern scholar who sees a direct connection between classical physiognomy and its Renaissance revival is William Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880* (Bloomington IN, 1980), p. 90.

⁸ The relevant passage is in ed. Reuben Margaliot (Jerusalem, 1940-53) 3: 70b-78a; English translation, ed. H. Sperling and M. Simon, *The Zohar* (London, 1934) 3:219-232. Hannaford is also ill-informed about the composition of the *Zohar* which, he thinks, "was probably written during the second century A.D." (p.131), a position that was long ago disproved by scholarship. For the date (13th century) and authorship of the *Zohar* and its constituent parts, see Gershom Scholem in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1971) 16:1206-1211. **Another who is confused about the Zohar's date is Stephen Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford, 2002).**

Doctrine of Countenances has nothing to do with race; it concerns only individual human variation, not variation between ethnic or racial groups. This distinction Hannaford blurs, but it should be made. "Ethnological physiognomy" (to use Evans' term) is found in Hippocrates, Galen, and other classical writers, but not in the *Zohar*.⁹

Returning to my main point, we can see a lack of diachronic context also when Hannaford deals with the Christian adoption and adaptation of kabbalistic ideas into natural philosophy. Here the author sees Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486-1535) playing a major role in the development of racist ideas. Although Hannaford says that Agrippa drew "on the *Zohar* as well as the literature of Greece and Rome" (p. 139), he believes that "at the heart of [Agrippa's system] is the central Cabalist Doctrine of the Countenances" (p. 143) which had a decisive influence on western racist conceptions. When Hannaford then provides examples of Agrippa's thinking that human color is subject to the influence of the heavens (e.g. Saturn producing black people, the Moon producing a complexion of "white mixed with a little red," etc.) he leaves us with the impression that this too derives from kabbalistic thought. But, as is well known, belief in astrologic influences of this kind go back to antiquity. For example, Ptolemy (2nd century CE), in describing the astrological effects on the human body and soul (i.e. temperament), claims that Saturn in the east makes his subjects honey-colored (μελίχροας) temperamentally having an excess of the moist and cold, Jupiter makes his subjects a nice-colored white (λευκούς ἐπὶ τὸ εὐχρουν) and exceeding in the hot and the moist, Mars if rising makes his subjects red and white (λευκερούθρους)

On p. 27 he gives it a 2nd-century date of composition, while on p. 88 he describes it as medieval. Another chronological absurdity occurs when Hayes sees an evolution in thought from the Rabbis to Josephus (p. 45). Haynes's equivocation as to whether the *Zohar's* meaning is "the introduction of death" (p. 27) clearly derives from my article "The Curse of Ham: A Case of Rabbinic Racism?" in *Struggles in the Promised Land*, ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York/Oxford, 1997), p. 27, although he doesn't cite it. Another unsubstantiated statement regarding a curse on Ham concerns George Best's (1578) use of it to explain the origin of black skin. According to Hannaford, Best's account "was a huge success in England as well as in France and Germany" (p. 183). But, against this opinion, and Hannaford's theories in general, see R. Blackburn, "The Old World Background to European Colonial Slavery," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997): 95-96 n. 75, and Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia M Vaughan, "Before Othello: Elizabethan Representations of Sub-Saharan Africans," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997): 27, n. 25: "Best's specific interpretation seems not to have been adopted, in print at least."

⁹ "Galen ... as Physiognomist," p. 296. "To Romans ... terms like *Gallus*, *Germanus*, and *Aethiops* must often have served as what social psychologists call 'labels of primary potency,' disproportionately magnifying certain stereotyped 'attributes' of those peoples...." (Thompson *Romans and Blacks*, p. 107). It appears that Hannaford's understanding of the *Zohar* was influenced by Winthrop Jordan's incorrect interpretation of the passage in his *White over Black*; see D. Goldenberg, "The Curse of Ham: A Case of Rabbinic Racism?" in *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States*, ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York/Oxford, 1997), pp. 27-28.

and in temperament having an excess of the warm and dry, when setting simply red (ἐρυθρούς ἀπλῶς) and temperamentally exceeding in the dry, Mercury in the east made his subjects honey-colored as did Saturn (μελίχροας) and exceeding in the warm, but in the west he made them an unpleasant white color of dark-green (or honey-colored) complexion (λευκοὺς μένουκ ἐπὶ τὸ εὐχρουν δὲ ὁμοίως ... μελανοχλῶρους [μελίχροας]) and exceeding in the dry.¹⁰ From a later period, Firmicus Maternus (4th cent. CE) refers to the belief current in his day that, “the characters and colors of men are due to the configuration of the heavenly bodies, ... the Moon makes the whites (*candidos*), Mars the reds (*rubeos*), Saturn the blacks (*nigros*)....”¹¹

Another example of missing diachronic context is the treatment of Montesquieu to whom Hannaford attributes a decisive role on the “relation of domestic slavery and political servitude to climate” (pp. 198-199). But 800 years before Montesquieu, Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna; 980-1037), the great Islamic philosopher and physician, had set out the belief that certain climates produced a slavish personality: “Those who are far removed from acquiring virtues are slaves (*‘abīd*) by nature like the Turks and negroes and in general people living in an unfavorable climate.” Similarly, Samaw’al al-Isra’īlī (12th century), a Jewish convert to Islam, had claimed that the Nubians are slaves by nature, as did Ibn Khaldūn, the 14th-century Islamic historian (“The only people who accept slavery are the Negroes [Sudan], owing to their low degree of humanity and their proximity to the animal stage”). In fact, Warren Gates has shown that Montesquieu drew his theory of climate from Ibn Khaldūn via a work by Jean Chardin published in 1680.¹² And before

¹⁰ *Tetrabiblos* 3.11. In 3.13 Ptolemy goes into further detail regarding astrological influences on the characters of humans. E. Irwin comes to the conclusion that μελίχλωρος / μελίχρους “honey-colored,” is an intermediate shade between black and white; *Color Terms in Greek Poetry* (Toronto, 1974), pp. 57-59.

¹¹ *Mathesis* 1.2, ed. and trans. into French by P. Monat (Paris, 1992) 1:15; see also 1.5 (p. 55). In ed. W. Kroll and F. Skutsch (Stuttgart, 1968) 1:6 and 15. **The only Jewish physiognomic text I am aware of that is thought to mention skin color or, more precisely, reflectivity, is questionable. The document was published by Peter Schäfer, *Geniza-Fragmenten zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen, 1984), p. 139: “He who is born in the sign of Libra on Sunday in (the station of) Jupiter or in (the station of) the moon, if he is born in (either of) these two hours, he will be born short (?) and thin, and with a shining [*shwb*] face (?), and he will have a sign on his fingers and toes, ... and he will be skillful, ... and his is one of the good....” The translation is that of Jonas Greenfield and Michael Sokoloff, “Astrological and Related Omen Texts in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 48 (1989) 211, who note that “as for the meaning of *shwb*, we have followed Schäfer’s translation but with reservations.” As for the lack of the word “face” in the text, cf. Babylonian Talmud, *Hullin* 7b.**

¹² Ibn Sīnā is quoted in E.I.J. Rosenthal (the original text is still in manuscript), *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge, 1958), pp.154-155, and M. Horten, *Die Metaphysik Avicennas* (Halle, 1907), p.680. Samaw’al (and the similar view of Amshāfī) is quoted by Rotter, p. 159, from

any of the Arab writers, there was Aristotle who explained the slavish character as dependent on climate/geography. In contrast to Europe and the cold climates where the inhabitants have a spirited temperament, the inhabitants of Asia Minor lack a spirited temperament, “so that they are in continuous subjection and slavery.”¹³

It is clear, then, that much of what Hannaford ascribes to later developments in western thought actually has an old pedigree. And just as a thorough diachronic development is lacking, so too is a synchronic framework missing from the scheme Hannaford constructs. This is the second problem with the book and it is evident particularly in regard to the role played by Arabic science in the development of western thought. Take the following example: Hannaford sees a revolutionary turning point in the development of racism in Maimonides’ (d. 1204) statement that those who live at the extreme ends of the world, the Turks in the north and the Ethiopians in the south, are “irrational beings, not human beings, below humanity but above the ape.” According to Hannaford this is “the first time in Western thought [that] people are described as beyond the bounds of rationality; they are not human” (p. 112 with reference to Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:51)¹⁴

The entire Islamic context in which Maimonides lived and thought is missing. In fact, Maimonides’ source for his statement was the Arab philosopher Miskawayh (d. 1030), who wrote of those “who dwell in the farthest parts of the inhabited world both to the

manuscript. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, ed. E. Quatremère (Paris, 1858), 1:269; ed. Beirut, 1901, p.148; ed. Bulaq, pp.124-25. Translation is that of C. Issawi, *An Arab Philosophy of History* (London, 1950), p. 98. F. Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah* (New York, 1958), 1:301, translates: “[T]he Negro nations are, as a rule, submissive to slavery....” For further bibliographic information, see Lewis, *Race and Slavery*, p. 122 n. 15. Gates’ article, “The Spread of Ibn Khaldūn’s Ideas on Climate and Culture,” is in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967): 415-422. Cf. also W. Sypher’s statement that Montesquieu may be “the earliest writer fully to apply the theory of climatic influence to the institution of slavery” (*Guinea’s Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIIIth Century* [Chapel Hill, NC; 1942], pp. 50-55).

¹³ *Politics* 7.6.1, 1327b. On Aristotle’s notion of natural slavery, see P. Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge UK, 1996), pp. 107-127. On Aristotle’s concept of natural slavery and its (Early) Modern philosophical receptions, see also Fred D. Miller, Jr., *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle’s Politics* (Oxford, 1995; repr. 1997), pp. 108f, 241f., 316.; cf. pp. 55, 211f., 231, with the criticism by Johannes Fritsche, this journal (*IJCT*) 5 (1998/99): 113.

¹⁴ Maimonides’ Judeo-Arabic text was edited, with a French translation, by S. Munk, *Le Guide des Égarés* (Paris, 1866), 3:123, and with a Hebrew translation by J. Kafih, *Moreh ha-Neukhim* (Jerusalem, 1972) 3:674. The English translation is that of S. Pines (Chicago, 1963), pp. 618-619. (At 3.29 [Pines, p. 515], Maimonides uses a Turk/Hindu antithesis to define the “extreme edges of the world.” In an earlier article, “The Idiocy of Race,” in *The Wilson Quarterly* 8 (Spring, 1994): 19-20, Hannaford had made the same argument about the place of Maimonides’ statement in the development of race theory.

north and to the south such as the remotest Turks in the county of Gog and Magog and the remotest Negroes [*zanj*] and similar nations which are distinguished from apes to a slight degree only.”¹⁵

But beyond the direct source, it should be noted that Maimonides was echoing a commonly held belief in the Islamic world. Referring to a view that sees black Africans as “people distant from the standard of humanity and approaching that of the animal,” André Miquel cites eight different authors and works from the 9th and 10th centuries, and Bernard Lewis quotes one of them, the *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam* written in 982, that refers to the black African Zanj as “wild animals” and the Zabaj as “like the Zanj, but they are somewhat nearer to humanity,” and he adds also Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī (11th century), who includes the Blacks among the barbarians who have not contributed to civilization and “who are more like beasts than like men.”¹⁶ Al-Fārābī (10th century) equates those living “in the far north or in the far south,” the latter being the black African, as being “bestial by nature,” and they “must be treated like animals.”¹⁷

Just as this idea predates Maimonides, so it is found in the Islamic writers after Maimonides. Ibn Khaldūn expressed the commonly held opinion that Blacks “have little [that is essentially] human and have attributes that are quite similar to those of dumb animals.”¹⁸ Elsewhere too, Ibn Khaldūn repeats this description of black Africans, “who are closer to dumb animals than to rational beings. They live in thickets and caves, and eat herbs and unprepared grain. They frequently eat each other. They cannot be

¹⁵ *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, ed. C. K. Zurayk (Beirut, 1966) p. 69; the quotation is from Zurayk’s English translation of Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character* (Beirut, 1968), p. 61; similarly at p. 47 (Arabic) and p. 42 (English). For Miskawayh as Maimonides’ source, see S. Harvey, “A New Source of the Guide of the Perplexed,” *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 31-47.

¹⁶ A. Miquel, *La Géographie humaine* 2:144 citing Ibn al-Faqīh, *Kitāb al-buldān*; Ibn Rusta, *K. al-aʿlāq al-nafīsa*; Hamadānī, *Ṣifāt Jazīrat al-ʿArab*; Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*; Maqdisī, *K. al-badʿ wal-taʾrīkh*; the *Merveilles de l’Inde*, Ibn Ḥawqal, *K. ṣūrat al-arḍ*; and the *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam*; see also G. Rotter, *Die Stellung des Negers*, p. 161. *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam*, ed. M. Sotoodeh (Tehran, 1962), pp. 195-200; English translation by V. Minorsky (London, 1937), pp. 163-166 quoted in Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* (New York-Oxford, 1990), p. 52; Ṣāʿid al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Umam*, ed. L. Cheikho (Beirut, 1912), p.9; (Cairo, n.d.), pp.11-12 quoted in Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery*, pp. 47-48.

¹⁷ That is, they should be “enslaved and employed like beasts of burden” if they can be useful; if not, they should be “treated as one treats all other harmful animals.” *Al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*, ed. F.M. Najjar (Beirut, 1964), p. 87; translation by Najjar in Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (Glencoe IL, 1963), p. 42.

¹⁸ *Muqaddima*, ed. E. Quatremère 1:269; translation, F. Rosenthal 1:301 (above, n. 11).

considered beings.”¹⁹ Al-Dimashqī (d. 1327) speaks of the inhabitants of the Sūdān “who may be numbered among the savage beasts,” of the Safāqus who are “brutish,” of the Zanj, the Sūdān, the Ḥabasha, the Nūba, whose submissiveness and moral characteristics are “close to the instinctive characteristics found naturally in animals.” Levtzion and Hopkins’ collection of Arabic writers on Africa contain many such references to the “beastlike behavior” of the Blacks.²⁰ Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (Iran, 13th century) says that the Zanj are different from animals only in that “their two hands are lifted above the ground.... Many have observed that the ape is more teachable and more intelligent than the Zanj.”²¹

The idea that those who lived at the ends of the earth -- the Turks in the north and the Blacks in the south -- were more animal than human was a commonly held belief in the medieval Islamic world, which ultimately derived from classical antiquity.²² Graeco-

¹⁹ *Muqaddima*, 1:95, Rosenthal 1:119; similarly 1:150 and 1:168, respectively. See also Lewis, *Race and Slavery*, p. 122.

²⁰ N. Levtzion and J.F.P. Hopkins, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 205-206, 211, 213-214, 321-322. Similarly Abū ʿl-Fidāʾ quoting Ibn Saʿūd (d. 1286/87) in *Corpus*, p. 200.

²¹ Lewis, *Race and Slavery*, p. 53 from *Taşawwūrāt* ed. W. Ivanow (Leiden, 1950), pp. 52-53 and translation pp. 57-58; see also Minoos Southgate, “The Negative Images of Blacks in Some Medieval Iranian Writings”, *Iranian Studies* 17 (1984): 16. See also Fedwa Malti-Douglas (*Woman’s Body, Womans’ Word* [Princeton, 1991], p. 18) who thinks that the black slave in *The Thousand and One Nights* who jumps down from a tree to have sex with Shāhriyār’s wife, “can be thought of as an ape.”

²² Not just the Islamic world. Christian Europe inherited the same classical traditions. **Albertus Magnus, for example, put the Pygmies between apes and humans in the Chain of Being** (H. Stadler, ed., *Albertus Magnus De Animalibus Libri XXVI (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters 16, Münster, 1920) 21.1.1.11-12, p. 1328*. In general, see S. Phillips, “The Outer World of the European Middle Ages,” in *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the early Modern Era*, ed. S.B. Schwartz (Cambridge, Eng., 1994), pp. 45-47; C.J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore*, esp. pp. 254-287; and M.B. Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing, 400-1600* (Ithaca, 1988), pp. 57-69. Regarding sub-Saharan Africa, Katherine George summed up the classical consensus which was inherited by Christian Europe: “[Its inhabitants] not only lack civilization but any worthy ethic of social organization or conduct as well. Anarchic, promiscuous, and cruel, they live the life of beasts rather than that of men. The most remote, in addition, are often denied the possession of a truly human form.... There was established thus early the pattern of thought which for many future centuries formed a basis for approach to the primitives of Africa, and which defined them primarily ... in terms ... of their inhumanity, their wildness, and their lack of proper law.... The charge of bestiality, so much the mark of the primitive among classical geographers, is abundantly encountered in these fifteenth-century accounts” (Katherine George “The Civilized West Looks at Primitive Africa: 1400-1800. A Study

Roman tradition saw distant peoples -- whether from the north, south, east, or west -- as barbaric and primitive. This classical ethnocentrism was determined by geographic parameters, that can be conceived of as concentric circles emanating from the writer's region and encompassing ever more primitive and barbaric peoples (e.g. Herodotus 4.106, 191), who are savage and have "the nature of a wild beast" (Diodorus 3.8.2). As we move outward, the people are barely, or only partly, human (e.g. Herodotus 4.105, Pliny *NH* 5.8.44-46) until, at the furthest extremes, we get to Pliny's monstrous races (*NH* 4.13.95), which are most commonly found in Africa, in the outermost districts (*extremitates*) of Ethiopia (*NH* 6.35.187-188, 195). With its classical pedigree and medieval elaboration, it is, therefore, rather problematic to isolate one 12th-century thinker as the creator of this idea.²³

in Ethnocentrism," *Isis* 49 [1958]: 62-72; quotations on 64-65). On the importance of these classical paradigms in the formation of European images of the New World, see W. Haase, "America and the Classical Tradition: Preface and Introduction," and P. Mason, "Classical Ethnography and Its Influences on the European Perception of the Peoples of the New World," in *The Classical Tradition and the Americas*, ed. W. Haase and M. Reinhold, 1.1 (Berlin, 1994): v-xxxiii and 135-172, especially 143-148.

²³ The ubiquitous presence of classical antecedents and medieval context in regard to the climatic-zone theory, may be seen in another Maimonidean statement that derives from either Galen or al-Fārābī, the 10th-century Muslim philosopher: "Just as the inhabitants of the middle climes are more complete in intellect and more beautiful in form than those living in the northern and southern extreme climes, so too is the speech of the former more balanced than that of the latter." (Maimonides' Judeo-Arabic text with Hebrew translation was published by J. Qafeh, *Iggerot* [Jerusalem, 1972], p. 149. A Hebrew translation had been published earlier by S. Muntner, *Pirqa Moshe bi-Refu'ah* ["Medical Aphorisms of Moses"] [Jerusalem, 1959], pp. 361-362. Cf. a similar quotation of Galen in Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Iyyunim weha-Diyyunim*, Judeo-Arabic text with Hebrew translation by A.S. Halkin [Jerusalem, 1975] pp. 30-31.) In Muntner's punctuation of the texts, the passage is attributed to al-Fārābī, while according to S. Harvey, "A New Source of the Guide of the Perplexed," *Maimonidean Studies* 2 (1991): 39 n. 25, based on Muhsin Mahdi's discussion in his edition of al-Fārābī's work (which was not available to Muntner), and based as well on the reading in MS Bodleian of Maimonides' work, the statement derives from Galen. For a recent discussion of geographic ethnocentrism, and a parallel tradition of "inverse ethnocentrism" (Homer's "blameless Ethiopians"), in the classical world, see James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* (Princeton, 1992), pp. 45-60. The two concepts are related. Wiedemann notes that the edges of the world are also where utopias are found. This is where we find paradigms of morality and bestiality. (T.E.J. Wiedemann, "Between Man and Beast: Barbarians in Ammianus Marcellinus," *Past Perspectives: Studies in Greek and Roman Historical Writing*, ed. I.S. Moxon, J.D. Smart, A.J. Woodman (Cambridge UK, 1986), pp. 191-192. Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, pp. 194-213, has recently dealt with the bestiality of those at the extremes of the earth as an element in "proto-racist" thought in classical antiquity.

Hannaford makes the same kind of error when discussing Maimonides' views that remnants of Sabaens (i.e., pagans) are to be found among the Turks in the extreme north and the Indians in the extreme south (*Guide* 3.29), and that under certain circumstances it may be necessary to kill idolaters so that others not be led astray by them (*Guide* 3:51). By saying this, according to Hannaford, "Maimonides ...significantly altered the account of Creation.... What follows from this fundamental departure from Augustine and from Graeco-Roman principle and practice was exposure of people outside the law of king and church to unprovoked attack. Because their idolatrous ways were seen as a threat to the true faith, their extirpation from the face of the earth could be justified" (p. 125).

Of course extirpation of pagans and idolaters did not begin with Maimonides; it is as old as the Bible and the Qur'an.²⁴ Regarding the identification of those in the far north and far south with false religion, here, once again, Maimonides was echoing a common sentiment of the larger Islamic culture. The theologian Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. 1021), speaks of the "Turks, Zanj, Berbers and their like" as "by their nature" having no interest in matters intellectual and in the pursuit of religious truth.²⁵ Andalusī also refers to the "rabble of Buja, the savages of Ghana, the scum of Zanj," the only humans who have no form of monarchial government and no religious law. Similarly, al-Iṣṭakhrī (and from there into Ibn Ḥawqal; both 10th century), Abū Ḥāmid al-Gharnāṭī (d. 1169), and, postdating Maimonides, al-Dimashqī (d. 1327).²⁶ Ibn Khaldūn is explicit:

Most of the Negroes of the first zone dwell in caves and thickets, eat herbs, live in savage isolation and do not congregate, and eat each other. The same applies to the Slavs. The reason for this is that their remoteness from being temperate produces in them a disposition and character similar to those of the dumb animals, and they become correspondingly remote from humanity. The same also applies to their religious conditions. They are ignorant of prophecy and do not have a religious law, except for the small minority that lives near the temperate regions.... All the other inhabitants of the intemperate zones in the south and in the north are ignorant of all religion. [Religious] scholarship is lacking among them.²⁷

²⁴ Deut. 20:17 (Canaanite nations), 25:19 (Amalekites); Sura 9:5 (idolaters, pagans: "[F]ight and slay the pagans wherever you find them"). See also *Encyclopedia of Islam*² 2:538a, s.v. Djihād: "To the non-scripturaries [i.e. excluding *ahl al-kitāb*], in particular the idolaters ... according to the opinion of the majority, their conversion to Islam is obligatory under pain of being put to death or reduced into slavery" (E. Tyan); 4:408a, s.v. Kāfir: "[U]nbelievers proper ... have only to expect death or slavery ... if they fall as prisoners of war into the hands of Muslims" (W. Björkman).

²⁵ *Rāḥatū'l-ʿaql*, ed. M.K. Hussein and M.M. Hilmy (Cairo, 1953), p. 241, quoted in Lewis, *Race and Slavery*, p. 55.

²⁶ *Corpus*, pp. 40, 44, 133, 211 and 214.

S.H. Nasr has described the idea underlying these formulations in Islamic philosophy of the eleventh century:

Not only is there a profound ecological relation between the flora, fauna, men, and climatic conditions of a region but also between the aspects of Nature as a combination of subtle and physical parts and the civilizations and religions which rise in those climates. Just as the amount of sunshine influences the color of the skin of the people living in a certain zone, so do these subtle or psychic aspects of Nature influence the soul of the people living in a particular climate.²⁸

The relationship between Nature and the physical and nonphysical (including the intellectual and psychic) aspects of humanity was thus taken over from the classical environmental theory and elaborated in the Islamic world. It has a long and complex history, which surely ought to be investigated when looking at the development of the concept of race. Instead, Hannaford has strangely isolated from this millennia- and cultural-spanning fabric of ideas a few writings that he considers intellectual turning points in western thought, as if kabbalistic thought and Maimonidean philosophy were created *ex nihilo*.

The history of the idea of race in western civilization is yet to be written. To be sure, several works have recently appeared that can serve as foundational underpinnings for the structure. Frank Snowden's *Blacks in Antiquity* and Lloyd Thompson's *Romans and Blacks*, covering classical antiquity; Bernard Lewis' *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* and Gerhard Rotter's *Die Stellung des Negers*, covering the Islamic world; and Jean Devisse and Ladislav Bugner in *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (ed. L. Bugner) and Paul Kaplan's 1983 dissertation, *Ruler, Saint and Servant: Blacks in European Art to 1520*, covering the Christian world, come to mind.²⁹ Perhaps it is time to attempt a synthesis that would trace the development of the idea of race and racism in the West. While Hannaford's book is erudite and reflects the author's massive learning, and while it provides a detailed catalogue of the relevant writers especially from the 17th century onward, it cannot be said to have accomplished the task of overall synthesis that it set for itself.

²⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah* 1:150; translation, Rosenthal 1:168-170.

²⁸ S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Boulder, 1978 revised), p. 88. For other Islamic sources expressing the same ideas, see Miquel, *La Géographie humaine* 2:144-145.

²⁹ No full-scale study of Blacks in Jewish antiquity has yet appeared. For the moment see Goldenberg's "The Curse of Ham: A Case of Rabbinic Racism?" in *Struggles in the Promised Land* (above, n. 9), pp. 21-51, and see now David Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton University Press, 2003).

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