

Cognitive/Evolutionary Psychology and the History of Racism

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Philosophical defenses of cognitive/evolutionary psychological accounts of racialism claim that classification based on phenotypical features of humans was common historically and is evidence for a species-typical, cognitive mechanism for essentializing. They conclude that social constructionist accounts of racialism must be supplemented by cognitive/evolutionary psychology. This article argues that phenotypical classifications were uncommon historically until such classifications were socially constructed. Moreover, some philosophers equivocate between two different meanings of “racial thinking.” The article concludes that social constructionist accounts are far more robust than psychological accounts for the origins of racialism.

1. Introduction. Racism is often taken to mean the following propositions:

1. People can be classified into distinct biological groups on the basis of phenotypic features.
2. Outer characteristics of people are linked to inner characteristics. In other words, a visible characteristic, such as skin color, can be a sign of inner mental or moral characteristics.
3. These characteristics are inherited and innate.
4. Races are fixed and immutable, either by nature or by God.
5. These groups can be ranked on a hierarchy of value.

I will call the position outlined above “doctrinal racism.” A rough consensus exists among historians, sociologists, and anthropologists that doctrinal

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racism arose in the eighteenth century, solidified in the long nineteenth century, declined in the twentieth century, and is possibly making an unwelcome return in the twenty-first (Sussman 2014; Yudell 2014). Cognitive/evolutionary psychologists, and their philosophical defenders, have labeled the position regarding the recent invention of racism the Social Constructionist (SC) position, and I will accept that label. Philosophical defenders of cognitive/evolutionary psychological (CEP) accounts of racialism argue that SC accounts are at best incomplete and at worst simply wrong regarding some aspects of racism's recent invention. CEP philosophers hold that significant parts of racism, namely, 1–4 above, owe in part to an underlying, species-typical, cognitive mechanism for essentializing that gets recruited for racial essentialism.

Philosophers, including those defending CEP, often distinguish between “racialism” that endorses only 1–4 and reserve “racism” for the ideology that also endorses 5 (Appiah 1990, 4–5; Machery and Faucher 2005a, 1208). The distinction provides conceptual clarity, but in practice it is unclear that the two concepts have ever been separated in any significant way. Philosophers making the distinction underplay how value judgments and power relationships of racism have been constitutive of racialism (Hochman 2013, 1003). There is insufficient evidence for CEP philosophers to claim that categorizing people by phenotypical differences was a common historical practice before the rise of doctrinal racism in the West. As Mallon has argued, this is an empirical claim (2010, 272) and is a matter of weighing evidence. The historical evidence against CEP philosophers's position far outweighs their supporting historical evidence.

In this article, I first sketch CEP's argument for existence of a cognitive mechanism that underlies racial cognition. I then examine the historical evidence CEP philosophers have mustered for the mechanism's existence and compare it to other available sources to show that there is little evidence for it before the rise of doctrinal racism. I then turn to Mallon's argument that CEP approaches should replace SC approaches about the rise of racialism and show that it rests on an equivocation.

2. CEP and the Commonalities of Racialism. Two common features of racialism persist across time and space, according to CEP scholars: first, that people should be grouped according to phenotypical characteristics and, second, that these phenotypical features point to some underlying biological properties. Hence: “This is not to deny that racial categorization varies across cultures and times in many respects, but rather to stress that these core elements of racial categorization are not a merely parochial cultural phenomenon. . . . The presence of these common themes across different cultures is just what an evolutionary psychologist would expect, since evolutionary psychologists view racial cognition as a by-product of a cognitive system

shared by all normally developing humans. In contrast, because socialization accounts cannot explain why these core elements should recur across times and cultures, they are at best incomplete” (Kelly, Machery, and Mallon 2010, 442). CEP’s defenders rely on three kinds of evidence: first, experimental studies of children that seem to indicate that children identify race in ways unaccounted for by socialization (e.g., Hirschfeld 2012); second, experimental, cross-cultural studies that purport to discover similarities in racial thinking across the globe (e.g., Gil-White 2001); and, third, a historical case that purports to discover racial thinking before or apart from its local manifestation in Europe and the Americas in the eighteenth century (e.g., Mallon 2010). My present critique is concerned with the quality of the historical evidence as well as the tension between the historical evidence and their first two lines of evidence.¹

In making the historical case for CEP, Mallon (2013) takes on what he dubs the Conceptual Break Hypothesis (CBH), to wit: “Sometime in or since the Renaissance, some fundamental change occurred in the European and American tradition of thinking about the human groups that we now call ‘races’—a change in the concept, meaning, or theory by which people represent those groups” (77). Mallon argues that the CBH rests on a further hypothesis he calls HERE: “*The historical emergence of racial essentialism* (HERE) hypothesis: racial essentialism is a culturally specific and historically recent way of thinking about some human groups” (79). The HERE hypothesis is important because “the existence of a racial essence is considered by many philosophers to be criterial for the modern *race* concept” (79). Mallon argues that CEP research shows the HERE hypothesis is mistaken. Other philosophical defenders of CEP argue a milder position: “The cognitive and evolutionary approach to racialism is a needed supplement to the social constructionist approach. The recurrence of racial classification across cultures and the commonalities between them suggest that racial classifications are the product of some universal psychological disposition” (Machery and Faucher 2005a, 1210; see also Mallon and Stich 2000; Machery and Faucher 2005b; Kelly et al. 2010; Machery, Faucher, and Kelly 2010).

Whether one takes the strong position of Mallon or the irenic position of his colleagues, both depend on evidence showing that such commonalities across time and space actually existed. Even if we grant that racial essentialism need not manifest itself uniformly across all times and places, we should nonetheless expect to find quite a bit of evidence for its existence before the rise of doctrinal racism because CEP philosophers hold that the mechanism is a “trait that is largely culturally invariant—that it develops relatively in-

1. CEP researchers have more contemporary cases than they do historical ones. Mallon (2013) cites experimental evidence from the Ukraine, Mongolia, Brazil, and Madagascar. For a critique of CEP’s cross-cultural evidence, see Jackson (2016).

variant across a wide range of cultures” (Mallon 2013, 78; see also Mallon and Weinberg 2006). A trait that is largely culturally invariant, especially one that is “species typical” in the same way that possessing two arms and legs is (Mallon 2013, 78), would have a robust historical base. Such evidence is in extremely short supply in CEP writings, and there is a great deal of evidence, ignored by CEP writers, to the contrary. In short, there is little historical evidence that “humans tend to classify people into races when they meet other people with different phenotypes” (Machery and Faucher 2005b, 1014) before the rise of Western doctrinal racism. Machery and Faucher conclude that “it should not be the case that *many* non-related cultures at different times have developed some racial classification. Hence, if something like the concept of race appears in *many* nonrelated cultures, the radical thesis is falsified” (1015, my emphasis). Machery and Faucher do not specify how many cultures are needed to count as “many,” but CEP researchers cite very few historical cases, namely, ancient Greece and Rome as well as premodern China.

3. A Historiographical Caution. Mallon, while nodding toward the heterogeneity of racial ideas and forms, nonetheless concludes: “These different systems of human groupings are all quite different from one another and also from contemporary racial groupings, but crucially, they all seem to involve groups of persons that are presumed to share unseen properties that explain differences and are transmitted to their children, and they all plausibly reflect cognitive propensities to apply principles to human groups that also lie behind folk reasoning about the biological domain” (2010, 279). In CEP writing, terms such as “biological kinds” or “biological domain” are frustratingly vague. Imprecise claims about a general tendency to essentialize human groups led historian George Fredrickson (1997) to complain about the “lack of analytic rigor” in using racist thought as a “catchall” that allows us to find “implicit, attitudinal racism in most times and places.” Such general conceptions are of no use to comparative historians who required “sharper tools and stronger conceptualizations” (77). To avoid such problems, historians using the language of race to describe the social relations of antiquity, for example, do so very carefully (McCoskey 2003, 2012). Lape (2010), in her study of Athenian democracy and identity uses “race,” “racialism,” and “racism” as terms of convenience but without committing to any similarities between social identity in Athens and modern racism, warning her readers that “nothing in this study’s argument hinges on the use of these terms per se” (3). Others, such as Kennedy (2016), wonder “why we even need to find a modern practice that corresponds exactly to ancient types of discrimination” (11). Thus, historians move carefully when making claims about whether the ancients had concepts like “race” or “ethnicity” or whether those modern terms correspond to ancient terms like

genos or *ethnos*. “Any definition we apply,” concludes Gruen (2013), “is bound to be arbitrary, adopted for heuristic purposes, and, at best, only an indirect reflection of whatever reality may lie behind it” (2). In the next section I apply these historiographic cautions to CEP’s arguments for racialism in history.

4. Western Racism before Modernity. A key point for CEP researchers is that “members who share the relevant phenotypic properties are assumed to share some important and distinctive set of underlying biological properties as well” (Kelly et al. 2010, 442). CEP researchers suggest that such biological properties include “visible physical properties (skin color, body shape, height, hair appearance, etc.),” which were thought to pick “out meaningful, important biological kinds” (Machery and Faucher 2005b, 1011).

The most commonly cited historical work on antiquity in CEP literature is Isaac (2004) (Machery and Faucher 2005b, 1015; Kelly et al. 2010, 442; Mallon 2010, 277; 2013, 78).² Machery and Faucher claim that Isaac has “provided some convincing evidence that racialism and racism . . . existed in classical Greece and Rome” (2005b, 1015). CEP philosophers admit that ancient racialism differed from what came later but shared the idea that people should be grouped according to phenotypical characteristics that signal some underlying biological properties (Kelly et al. 2010, 442) These properties, moreover, “were preserved in inheritance from parents to children over many generations (Isaac 2004, 74)” (Mallon 2010, 277). A closer reading of Isaac’s book, together with other sources we have on antiquity, shows that this understanding is unsupported.

First, the book’s major theme is the theory of environmental determinism. Isaac carefully defines racism: “The essence of racism is that it regards individuals as superior or inferior because they are believed to share imagined physical, mental, and moral attributes with the group to which they are deemed to belong, and it is assumed that they cannot change these traits individually” (2004, 23). Isaac expands standard definitions of “racism” that rely on heredity, by drawing on authors who hold that “biological determinism should not be regarded as *the* essential ingredient of racist attitudes. Environmental determinism can just as well be a key to racism” (21). For Isaac,

2. Mallon (2010) also cites Kamtekar’s (2002) study of Plato. Kamtekar is not claiming that Plato held the same beliefs found in modern racialism: “The condition for using and making sense of the concept of race is not a specific scientific theory or investigative context, but rather, the rough idea that people who are related by birth resemble one another. This notion is clearly available to the ancients in general and to Plato in particular” (2002, 3). Kamtekar’s claims can be explained by the “wealth of biological stimulus” (Hochman 2013, 1000), in other words, that many people in many times and places have noticed that children do, in fact, bear such resemblances. In short, Kamtekar’s work does not seem like good evidence for the existence of a cognitive race module.

environmental determinism had a similar effect in antiquity that heredity had later: removing agency from people and locating it outside an individual's control. Isaac uses the term "proto-racism," which he distinguishes from "the modern form of biological determinism" (5). Isaac shows how ancient authors believed that differences among peoples owed to the environments in which they live: "the dominant approach accepted in some form by almost all the available sources from the second of the fifth century BC on, is the environmental theory: an environmental determinism which made it possible for Greek and Roman texts to describe foreign people in terms of fixed physical and mental traits determined by climate and geography" (504).

However, the link between the environment and human forms was not necessarily causal. For example, Irby (2016) points out that Herodotus, the father of history, did not conceptualize the environment as causing certain organic forms; rather, "climate is largely an analogy for characteristics rather than their cause (e.g., 2.35.2: *Aigpyttioi hama tō ouranō*—the Egyptians exist *together with* their climate, not because of it)" (248). Climate and human characteristics, in this view, are not sequential, with climate causing human characteristics; rather, the relationship seems to be one of coexistence, as if they were one and the same.³ Further, it is not the case that because traits were fixed across generations they were fixed by heredity: "They are not the same as our modern pseudo-scientific model of racism, but inherent in these ways of imagining [human identities] *are* value judgments that classify people as superior or inferior, as part of in or out groups, in ways that could not easily be altered simply by moving to another climate or geographic location, environment at conception and birth mattered most" (Kennedy 2016, 11). CEP's position can only then be defended if we ignore the differences between environmental determinism (which is not even deterministic in the view of some ancient writers) and heredity.

Turning to the issue of "phenotype" complicates the picture further. CEP's defenders are not necessarily committed to skin color as a marker of racialism; they can and do argue that other phenotypical features could be the basis of racialism: "evolutionary psychologists hold that people in many cultures and historical epochs have relied on skin color *and other bodily features* to classify their fellows" (Kelly et al. 2010, 441, my emphasis). It is worthwhile to consider skin color, however, since as Jablonski argued, "Skin color is the most obvious visible attribute of the human body" (2004, 614), and therefore, if phenotype is important in racial identification, we should expect skin color to play an important, even if not a necessary, role. Skin color is mentioned only fleetingly in Isaac's book: only two index entries in a book of over 500 pages. The historical consensus is that "ancient Greeks and Romans

3. On the distinction between causal arguments and arguments from coexistence, see Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 293–305).

did not base identities on skin color” (McCoskey 2003, 104). The pioneering work of Frank Snowden demonstrates that the most marked phenotypical trait humans have, skin color, was not a basis for racial classification in antiquity (1970, 1983).

I am not suggesting that the failure of the ancients to identify skin color with race falsifies CEP accounts of racialism; however, if their proposed cognitive mechanism is species typical, then it is surprising that it did not pick out the largest and most visible organ of the human body as a marker of race. Mallon acknowledges Snowden’s work but minimizes its importance: if they did not use skin color, they used some other phenotypical traits. What is important, Mallon claims, is that “ancient Greeks and Romans did label specific human groups, hypothesize about their distinctive national characters, and also hypothesize about the origins of those differences” (2010, 277). The question then becomes how far can CEP researchers stretch the idea of “phenotype” in order to continue to claim that it was used as a basis of identity in the ancient world? If bodies related to the environment, not in a causal manner but in one of coexistence, then bodies and environments were of a piece. Ancient thought often grouped human physical appearance (biology) together with what we would call cultural traits (anthropology), the local plants and animals (ecology), and the land itself (geography and geology; Kennedy and Jones-Lewis 2016, 2). CEP research seems committed to the notion that we are wired to pick out bodily features, but the ancients did not distinguish between bodies and their surroundings as we do. For example, one of the most inflexible forms of proto-racism in antiquity was astrological; people were inferior because of the stars under which they were born (Isaac 2004, 504). Astrology, and environmental determinism, persisted as a dominant explanation for human difference well into the sixteenth century. Astrology was “considered a very serious science that studied the processes through which planets and fixed stars controlled ‘generation and corruption’ in the sublunary world by eliciting change among the four elements (water, earth, fire, and air) and therefore over human temperaments and complexions, that is, over the bodily balance of elements and humors as described in the Hippocratic and Galenic corpus. Astrology was part of the obvious mental landscape of every learned individual in the early modern world, regardless of religion or country of origin” (Cañizares-Esguerra 1999, 36–37). It was the modern rejection of astrological influence that located race in the body and marked a key point in the birth of modern racism. It is difficult to see how Isaac’s account supports CEP’s claim that people naturally classify people “biologically” without stretching that term beyond recognition or simply defining it tautologically.

Second, Isaac’s book clearly argues for the social construction of racial ideas. CEP’s defenders admit that constructionist accounts can be fully explanatory. Machery et al. (2010) contrast two different cases of racism in

modern society: first, it is more difficult for black Americans to get a mortgage than it is for white Americans, and this is easily explained by “social and economic mechanisms” (236). However, such social mechanisms cannot explain “the finding that judgments and decisions made under strict time constraints are sensitive to race, especially those made by people harboring implicit racial biases,” such as Americans misidentifying a harmless object as a gun after being shown a picture of a black face (236). Psychology can explain the second instance, whereas social constructionism cannot. Isaac is clearly treating cases of the first sort and not the second. For example, many of Isaac’s examples are drawn from societies dedicated to imperialist expansion. In such contexts, marking people as permanently inferior justified their conquest and subservient status. Isaac notes that for fourth-century (BCE) authors there was “a direct correlation between imperialist conceptions and the way in which the enemy is perceived” (2004, 509). CEP researchers merely point to Isaac’s conclusions, that proto-racism existed in antiquity, and ignore his detailed constructionist accounts that turn on the need to conquer and enslave foreigners or to justify the differential treatment of minority groups within society. Proto-racism justified such policies by displacing agency from the oppressor and onto nature itself. It is not the case that the “other” was racialized and then oppressed. It is that oppression was politically or socially useful, and, thus, the “other” was racialized. By ignoring how power and racism relate, CEP’s defenders miss racism’s role in the construction of racialism. If Isaac’s constructionist explanation is lacking, CEP’s defenders must demonstrate its inadequacies rather than asserting them.

Beyond Isaac’s work, a broader look at the premodern history of racism and ethnocentrism finds racial ideas thin on the ground. Many ancient texts report the widespread belief that humans could reshape the environment, and thus Isaac’s claims of fixed changes resulting from environmental factors “cannot stand in light of the perspective that comes from the authors of ancient botanical and zoological literature, who believed that animals and plants could be introduced to nearly any land and substantially improved by appropriate human control and management” (Secord 2016, 211). After surveying a broad range of ancient texts, Tuplin (1999) concludes, “It is all right to have been barbarian. This is a relationship to the outsider which is certainly disdainful, but it stands apart from attitudes which we would naturally designate as racist. . . . Race in the narrow sense is not a high priority for Greeks, [and] foreigners are not primarily marginalised because of physical or genetic differences” (62). Far from providing evidence for a cognitive mechanism for biological essentialism, ancient Greek society was a significant counterexample, as it shows that physical differences were not important components of proto-racism.

Beyond antiquity is a literature far too vast to recount here, but suffice to say, rather than fixed races we find that most thinking about human differ-

ences was based on ideas of the malleability of the human form. Pointing to the power of pre-Mendelian biological thought, medieval Christian thought on conversion of the Jews, doctrines of maternal impressions upon the fetus, climatic determinism, long traditions of Rabbinic scholarship, and other ideas, Braude concludes: “Flexibility, openness to change, the possibility of indeterminacy, wonder, and endless transformation distinguished such notions from what developed later. . . . Our inability to take such notions seriously reflects the deep and thorough-going way in which our consciousness has been shaped—distorted is not too strong a term—by a complex and multi-variegated process that rooted racism in modern culture. On the contrary, the longevity, omnipresence, variety, and constancy—to indulge a paradox—of proteanism demand that these notions be integrated into our understanding of the history of collective identity” (2011, 43–44).

To summarize: CEP’s proposed psychological mechanism is posited to be species typical, and yet there is abundant historical evidence against its existence. Constructionist accounts, which point to social/cultural factors for the rise of racism/racialism are abundantly supported. The point is not that CEP researchers cannot find an isolated writer here or there who seems to support their position; rather, they must explain away why a species-typical mechanism is only supported by such isolated writers and the existence of copious evidence against such a mechanism.

5. Racism Outside the West: The Case of China. Just as they do for antiquity, CEP’s defenders rely on very few sources to support the idea that racism existed outside the modern West. Their exemplar is Dikötter (1992). For example, Machery and Faucher note, citing Dikötter, that when Chinese of the twelfth century first came in contact with Occidentals, the Chinese made much of their “ash-white” skin (2005b, 1015). Mallon argues that Dikötter’s work “highlights the way in which race-like ideas played a historic role, for example, in a nationalist response to the emergence of Buddhism in China” (2010, 278).⁴

Like Isaac’s work, CEP’s defenders take the historian’s conclusion—that there were ‘race-like’ ideas—while ignoring his SC account of the origin of those ideas. In the second edition of his book, Dikötter notes that Machery and Mallon put forth “the most misunderstood aspect of my book” (Dikötter

4. Mallon (2010, 278) also cites Johnston (1995, 187) on the racialist views of Han Chinese regarding Mongols during the Ming dynasty. Johnston’s is a study of Chinese strategic thinking, not racial thinking. He is interested in tracking when doctrines of zero-sum strategy were in play in Chinese history. He notes that such doctrines “were to a significant degree a function of the changing assessments of the Ming capacity to act offensively against the Mongols” (Johnston 1995, 250). Thus, Johnston’s claim is explained by SC approaches that recognize racism’s power relations at the heart of racialist distinctions.

2015, viii). Dikötter's is a thoroughly constructionist account tying the race-like ideas of premodern China to specific forms of cultural knowledge. Among them were the association of different points on the compass with different colors, versions of climatic determinism that linked bodies to the climates they inhabited, and the belief that physical bodies had to change to culturally grow.

Writing in 1992, Dikötter was one of the first scholars to take a more global perspective on racism. He anticipated the charge that taking Western concepts of race and imposing them on other cultures was bad historiography and a culturally imperialistic imposition of Western standards on local populations who would be stripped of their own agency in the creation of their social world (Wacquant 1997). Dikötter demonstrated how Western ideas were imported into a China that was fertile ground for them because of Chinese cultural heritage. "The racial categories of analysis which first emerged in China with the rise of nationalism," he argues, "were largely constructed on the basis of indigenous modes of representation, in particular lineage discourse" (Dikötter 1997, 14; also see Dikötter 2008).

As with antiquity, a broader reading of historical works undercuts the notion that when people of different phenotypes meet, categorization on that basis immediately follows. Beginning with Marco Polo in the thirteenth century, Europeans almost universally described the skin color of Asians as "white" (Keevak 2011; Ellis 2012). It was not until the seventeenth century, when Jesuit missionaries reported back on the huge cultural and symbolic significance of the color yellow did Europeans begin conceptualizing the Chinese as "yellow" (Dikötter 2008, 1483). Even so, Asians' skin color was completely ignored in Europe as a scientific topic even during the rise of doctrinal racism. Between the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, there were no studies dedicated to the skin color of Asians (Mazzolini 2014, 138).

CEP scholars face further disappointments if we look beyond Asia when seeking evidence of a spontaneous classification of peoples by phenotype. In North America, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it was far more significant for both the Cherokee and English settlers that both groups associated right-handedness with political authority than their slight differences in physical appearance. Skin color did not emerge as a significant racial marker until half a century later, when discourse about the importance of skin color for differentiating people filtered out from major slaveholding regions where "black" and "white" skin began to be imbued with ideas we would take as racial (Shoemaker 2004, 127–32).

The English experience in North America is repeated again and again in the histories of racial formation. The French experience in North America followed roughly the same chronology, for example (Belmessous 2005), and we can trace the hardening of ethnocentrism into biological racism in

the Iberian Peninsula only as those societies entered the imperial periods of development (Glick 1978). Racialist ideas do not appear on contact between different groups but arise out of the imposition of social, political, or economic power, just as a SC would predict. Surveying the historical process of racial formation across the globe, Spickard finds that different “groups may initially see each other as simply ethnic or cultural groups, but at some point—I will call this *the racial moment*—they begin to see themselves as fundamentally and irrevocably different from one another” (2005, 2). The significant point for my argument is that racial thinking does not precede social and cultural cues, as we might expect if the CEP account is the case, but only arises after there is a social need for it because racialization naturalizes social power as an act of nature or God. “The purpose of writing racial division onto the body,” concludes Spickard, “is to naturalize it, to make it inevitable, and thus no one’s fault” (13).

CEP researchers’ focus on racialism rather than racism proves to be a significant error in their accounts. Machery and Faucher argue that “most social scientists focus on racism and take the existence of racial classifications for granted, without inquiring about their origin” (2005b, 1011). This is what Hochman meant when he wrote that CEP “gets the causality wrong. Historically, racism has gone hand in hand with racialism. Furthermore, the negative value judgments associated with racism, and also ethnocentrism, may play a role in essentialist thinking about the ‘other’” (2013, 1003). CEP researchers write as if the racial classifications must have preceded racist social structures. Such is not the case since classifications were invented to facilitate the imposition of the social power constitutive of racism.

We have far more evidence that most premodern ideas about group differences were marked by fluidity and malleability of the human body. There is little evidence that different groups that come into contact with each other attach special significance to phenotypical markers. Instead, we see racial ideas emerging decades or centuries after such contact only when it serves social, cultural, or political interest. Moreover, such ideas emerge, by and large, just at the time when SC historians have long claimed they did, with the rise of imperialism and capitalism. Even if it were possible to find some scattered proto-racial ideas in antiquity or premodern China that does not seem to be enough to make a case for an innate, species-wide cognitive mechanism.

6. Racial Thinking: The Fallacy of Equivocation. In this section I address Mallon’s recent claim that CEP studies have shown “the HERE hypothesis is mistaken” (2013, 86). Mallon concludes that the CEP account is incompatible with the SC account of the rise of racial thinking. He suggests that evidence from psychological tests given to twenty-first-century subjects in Brazil and Madagascar (the subjects of Mallon’s paper) should

replace historical documentation about what, for example, we know about proto-racial thinking in ancient Greece or medieval Iberia. There are significant problems with Mallon's suggestion.

Mallon is aware of certain problems when dealing with historical evidence. "To what extent," he asks, "can we make inferences about cultures from the writings of what are, inevitably, cultural elites" (Mallon 2010, 288)? The question is a good one, but the problem for CEP's defenders runs much deeper. Mallon's argument for replacing the HERE hypothesis fails because it equivocates on the word "thinking" between disciplinary contexts, and it would continue to equivocate even if we replaced "thinking" with "concept," "belief," "idea," or "thought." The equivocation remains because words mean specific things in specific disciplinary contexts—one thing in psychology and another in history—and CEP scholars fail to account for the new meaning in the new context.⁵ Examining how psychologists use the word "thinking" and how historians use the same term supports my claim of equivocation.

The kind of psychological tests on which Mallon relies are fairly new inventions, dating only to the 1920s or so. Psychologists first attempted to measure racial beliefs (often under the label "attitude" research) both to test new scaling methods of psychological tests and to counter the previous generation of "race psychology" that had been designed to prove white supremacy (Samelson 1978). The research described by Mallon is more sophisticated than these early attempts to discover and measure "race prejudice," but the fundamental idea is the same: to uncover inner mental states through psychological testing. Psychological investigation, in this view, discovers what is going on in people's heads: to find out what they are "thinking." In the studies Mallon relies on, subjects are given new and different scenarios in order to reveal the underlying cognitive processes that lead to judgments about identity. The assumption behind these methods is that what people say about their beliefs does not necessarily show us what their underlying reasoning process is, which can only be discovered by psychological experimentation. As Ingold characterizes the enterprise, "What they say is one thing: what they know is another. Sayings enjoy a currency within the public

5. I follow Walton in maintaining that "the key element of . . . the fallacy of equivocation is not (a) whether the perpetrator deliberately deceives the victim, or (b) whether the victim is confused, not knowing which way to interpret the ambiguous term." Rather, the "key element is the capability of the argument, as put forward in context, to mislead any potential recipient in the dialogue, by using an ambiguous term that is plausible in one sentence when interpreted one way, and then because of a contextual shift, plausible in another sentence when interpreted in another way" (1996, 66). Just as the fallacy can be committed without psychological intent or without psychological confusion, one can point to racial "thought" without pointing to psychological conceptions of racial differences.

sphere of social interaction; knowledge is internal and private to the individual” (2004, 137). As one anthropologist who is sympathetic to the CEP enterprise put it, her goal was to discover “whether what villagers say about race accurately and exhaustively reflects how they reason about it” (Hale 2015, 141).

The problem is that historical subjects are unavailable for psychological testing, and CEP researchers are forced into documenting their historical claims with historical evidence: they are left with what people said about race, not the underlying cognitive processes. This is particularly problematic given that the quest for experimental evidence is based on maintaining the very distinction that CEP researchers immediately abandon as soon as they turn to history. To make the matter more complicated, CEP researchers rely, not on primary historical source materials but rather on historians’ writings. The result of this reliance is an equivocation because, in historical writing, “thinking” often does not refer to individual mental states but to larger conceptual systems and ideologies.

I will take one of the historical sources on which CEP scholars rely (Hirschfeld 1995, 1419; 1996, 22; 2002, 622; Gelman and Hirschfeld 1999, 403; Gelman 2003, 2009; Kelly et al. 2010, 442; Mallon and Kelly 2012, 513; Mallon 2013, 80) as an illustration of my point: Guillaumin (1980). The kind of “idea” that Guillaumin is discussing here is really not adequately captured by the kind of psychological testing reported by CEP research. Guillaumin is concerned with social power, and for her race is constituted by inequitable power relationships rather than by a cognitive state of an individual, once again highlighting the futility of trying to understand racialism without understanding the power relationships of racism. “It is vitally important,” she argues, “for us to know how and upon what grounds the idea arose that *certain social relationships* are natural, irrespective, in the last resort, of politics or economics, and reflecting only Nature itself together with its constraints and its inevitability” (38, my emphasis). Thus, she is using constructionist talk “against inevitability,” to use Hacking’s (1999) felicitous phrase (6). What is important for Guillaumin is not essentialist categorization but how racial relationships are instantiated in law and science as inevitable, fixed, and unalterable: something that is not at all the subject of the psychological tests described by CEP scholars.

Historians rarely write about “thinking”; instead, they typically discuss “ideas.” For example, Mallon refers to Guillaumin as one who argues that “the *idea* of race emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (2013, 80, my emphasis), and the word, after all, appears in her title. The problem for Mallon is that “idea” is polysemous. “Ideas,” writes Hacking (1999), means “conceptions, concepts, beliefs, attitudes to, theories. They need not be private, the ideas of this or that person. Ideas are discussed, accepted, shared, stated, worked out, clarified, contested. They may be woolly, sug-

gestive, profound, stupid, useful, clear, or distinct” (22). There is a long tradition of historical writing that embraces all these aspects of “idea.” In the founding editorial of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Arthur Lovejoy included much more than psychological states; the history of ideas, he wrote, was a “bilateral affair—the story of the traffic interaction between human nature, amid the exigencies and vicissitudes of physical experience, on the one hand, and on the other, the specific natures and pressures of the ideas which men have, from very various promptings, admitted to their minds” (1940, 23).

The books by Isaac and Dikötter illustrate the problem. The “ideas” Isaac discusses are explicitly not the mental states of individuals. Racism, Isaac and his colleagues write, is “more than an attitude or a set of attitudes; it is an ideology which claims to be based on scientific truth” (Isaac, Ziegler, and Eliav-Feldon 2009, 1). Isaac et al. specifically rule out discussions of the kind of cognitive states that CEP’s psychological tests claim to access: “The schémas and specific manifestations of racism represent a form of rationalization that was unknown and could not have existed before the Greeks developed those forms of abstract and systematic thinking which we usually call philosophy” (10). Dikötter is primarily interested in “racial categorisations developed by scholars and scientists” (2015, 134) and not with attitudes or the racial cognition of individuals. The object of study in both these works is not the same object of study of interest in CEP scholarship. CEP scholarship equivocates on “racism,” when scholars claim they have evidence that the object of their study, individual cognition, is evidenced by the texts and material artifacts studied by historians.

A whirlwind tour of some standard synthetic works on the history of racial thought reinforces my point. We have at least two books in which the “idea” of race appears right in the title: Gossett’s *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (1963) and Hannaford’s *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (1996). In neither of these books does “idea” refer to cognitive states of individuals, otherwise Gossett would not be able to write sentences that claim to explore “the chief ideas of Social Darwinism” (1963, 145). Hannaford takes as his subject “popular and intellectual discourse” through his examination of “texts as well as contexts,” which includes “economic, social, geographical, physiological, and psychological perspectives” (1996, 6). In a similar manner, Malik (1996) freely interchanges the “idea of race” with “the modern discourse of race” (224). Smedley (1998) claims that “ideas cannot be interpreted or analyzed apart from their cultural matrices. They arise out of specific material and social circumstances and are constituted of individual and group perceptions, understandings, and decisions made by human beings” (18). None of these writers are particularly concerned with individuals’ internal psychological states. On a purely descriptive level, therefore, Mallon is incorrect to claim that the evidence provided

by CEP has falsified the HERE hypothesis: it has only appeared to do so by committing the fallacy of equivocation.

7. Conclusion. CEP researchers often make pleas for the interdependence of CEP and SC approaches to racism. They divide the ground for such cooperation as follows: CEP scholars claim that the constructionist approach “does not explain why many cultures have developed some concept of race and some classification based on phenotypic features”; therefore, the “cognitive and evolutionary approach to racialism is a needed supplement to the social constructionist approach” (Mauchery and Faucher 2005a, 1210). The CEP approach is only needed, however, if there is a phenomenon standing in need of explanation. CEP does not want to explain racist thought in China or in antiquity; rather, they want to explain the similarities among racist thought across time and space. Their approach to proving the existence of such similarities, at least thus far, has been to try to amass a number of cases to inductively show the existence of a general pattern of racist thought. My argument here has been that they have not produced many cases, and the similarities among those cases have been purchased by defining their key terms, “heredity,” “fixed,” “biological,” and so on, at such a general level that it is difficult to imagine any system of categorization that could not be encompassed by them. In short, there is no phenomenon in need of explanation.

CEP scholars are committed to the notion of a species-typical mechanism, along the lines of having two hands and two legs. Evidence for the existence of such a mechanism should be abundant, and yet it is not. If anything, history shows that classifications based on phenotypical features become common only after the rise of doctrinal racism in a specific time and place. Broad surveys of the historical record simply do not reveal that racial thinking was widespread in human history, as CEP predicts it should be. Even if we overread Isaac and Dikötter, as I believe CEP scholars do, to mean that people in those times and places indeed classified people by phenotypic traits that were taken to be biological, the result is that those two sources are arrayed against a much, much larger literature that denies such classifications took place. Even if we grant to CEP’s defenders that their proposed biological mechanism can be overridden by social and cultural learning, it is a strange mechanism indeed that displays itself so very rarely.

CEP is committed to the notion that their proposed mechanism preceded racial classifications and thus played a causal role in such classification systems. There is little support for this in the historical record we have at present. The much more common pattern is that phenotypical features become important racial markers only decades or centuries after initial contact. The reasons for the arrival of such a “racial moment” often have to do with attempts to naturalize an inequitable distribution of social power. By naturalizing racial markers, societies’ oppressors escape responsibility their oppres-

sion. If CEP hopes to add to this narrative, researchers must build a case for exactly how their proposed cognitive mechanism does so.

CEP researchers rely on two historical instances of racism outside of modern Western doctrinal racism: the antiquity of the West and premodern China. In the case of Western antiquity, climatic determinism cannot be equated to heredity in any straightforward way. In the case of China, CEP researchers have only a few passing references in which Asians noted a different skin color among Europeans, and CEP researchers need to explain how Europeans failed to note any phenotypical differences between Europeans and Chinese until centuries after establishing contact.

CEP researchers' claims that constructionist accounts cannot explain the rise of racialism in these cultures are belied by the very sources they use to support their claims. Both Isaac and Dikötter offer constructionist accounts for their findings. As Dikötter argues, "It is precisely *because* [race] is a historically contingent concept that it is important to look at the pre-existing moral and cultural traditions which have assisted, or on the contrary, prevented, the appearance of racial thinking in China" (2015, ix, my emphasis). CEP researchers cannot simultaneously enroll these authors' findings that forms of racial thinking arose at these time and places and declare those same authors unable to explain the rise and construction of that thinking. They must rather accept that racial thinking appeared in those places, while demonstrating the failure of the constructionist accounts offered by the sources they quote (Sesardic 2003, 430).

Mallon's argument on the HERE hypothesis equivocates on "racial thinking." CEP research discovers individual, often unarticulated, cognitive states. SC research discovers ideological systems of thought as found in laws, literature, material culture, writing, and so on. Mallon (2013) thus cannot argue that CEP research has shown that racial thinking arose before doctrinal racism in the West unless he unpacks in greater detail the relationship between his sense of "racial thinking" and historians' sense of "racial thinking." There is no straightforward path between the two, and few now believe that our inner cognitive states are either generative of or merely reflect our social settings (Richards 2002, 2012; Ingold 2004, 2015). Psychological studies of twenty-first-century populations cannot overturn our understandings of codified social relations centuries before. If CEP researchers want to join with constructionist researchers in accounting for racism, they need to read much more widely in constructionist literatures and take more seriously that which they read.

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