

THE CONCEPT OF “BLACKNESS” IN THEORIES OF RACE

Milan HRABOVSKÝ

Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Comenius University
Mlynské luhy č. 4, 821 05 Bratislava, Slovakia
milan.t.hrabovsky@gmail.com

The present study deals with the analysis of the concept of “blackness” and its meaning and impact on theories of race and racism. The concept of “blackness” (black skin) was used for both external and internal characteristic of a “black group” (or “race”). The study describes the formation of the concept from ancient times, through the Middle Ages to modern times, when it became a basis for emerging theories of race. The reader will get an overview on the etymology of both concepts: “blackness” and “race”. We will analyse the impact of these concepts on the theories of the Swedish botanist Carl Linné (Carolus Linnaeus, 1707 – 1778), the German physician and naturalist J. F. Blumenbach (1752 – 1840), the German physiologist of the Romantic era C. G. Carus (1789 – 1869) and the French diplomat A. Gobineau (1816 – 1882).

Key words: race, racism, blackness

Introduction

*“If he have the condition of a saint and the complexion of a devil,
I had rather he should shrive me than wive me.”*

(William Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice*, Act I, Scene 2)

The present study will analyse the concept of “blackness”¹ and its meaning and impact on theories of race and racism. The concept of blackness has been used in theories of race for both the external and internal characteristics of the so-called “black group”. In spite of this, various race and racist “studies” as well as a wide range of prejudices and stereotypes assume an immediately “lower”

¹ From now on the concept will be indicated without inverted commas for the purpose of continuous reading.

status for “black” skin. There are only a few studies devoted to the issue of why exactly “black” skin is considered inferior.

We will describe the creation of the word from ancient times through the Middle Ages to modern times, when it became the base for emerging theories of race. The reader will get an overview of the etymology of both concepts: “blackness” and “race”. We will analyse the impact of these concepts on the theories of the Swedish botanist Carl Linné (Carolus Linnaeus, 1707 – 1778), the German physician and naturalist J. F. Blumenbach (1752 – 1840), the German physiologist of Romantic era C. G. Carus (1789 – 1869) and the French diplomat A. Gobineau (1816 – 1882).

The study examines the issue in a unique way within the framework of different theoretical analyses of race and racism in Slovak as well as foreign literature. According to our knowledge, the concept of “blackness” has not been so far treated in such a comprehensive form. At the same time we are presenting one of the most complex analyses of the very concept of race.

Black skin was regarded as “damned” and as one of the reasons of enslavement since the launch of the slave trade in 1441. At that time, the Portuguese captain Antaõ Gonçalves received two black slaves – a male and a female – on the western coast of Sahara and delivered them to Henry the Navigator (1394 – 1460), who awarded him a knighthood.

There is a common misconception that race theorists were the first who opened the Pandora’s Box of race. However, race theorists emerged in an atmosphere of developed slavery.² Giving proof that racial slavery was said to be consecrated by God, the American slave owners were among the first who referred constantly to the legend of the “black” curse.³ In a documentary by BBC 4 entitled *Racism: A History. The Colour of Money*, various theorists also stick to the hypothesis: “The British don’t become slave traders and slavers because they are racist. They become racist because they use slaves for great profit in America. And devise a set of attitudes towards black people that justify what they’ve done. The real engine behind the slave system is economics.”⁴ Racist slavery, thus the enslavement of African citizens, was responsible for emerging ideologies of white supremacy (the so-called “white man’s mission”). The slave system not only enslaved on the “coloured” principle, but black skin was also referred to as something “deeper” and more fatal. The influential Scottish zoologist Robert Knox noted in his work *The Races of Men* (1850): “I feel disposed to think that there must be a physical and, consequently, a psychological inferiority in the dark races generally.”⁵ The view is clearly

² HRABOVSKÝ, M. Rasová mytológia [Racial Mythology], p. 52.

³ FREDRICKSON, G. M. Rasizmus – stručná historie [Racism: A Short History], p. 45.

⁴ BBC 4. *Racism: A History. The Colour of Money*, 2007.

⁵ KNOX, R. *The Races of Men*, p. 224.

presented that “dark” skin as a physiological sign predetermines the person to psychological inferiority.

This (fabricated) interconnection of external and internal characteristics laid the basis for the slave system. Black skin was an external sign which referred to the internal inferior characteristics (such as character or mental ability). The first question is “Why exactly black skin?” The present study is focused on an analysis of blackness as a long-lasting prejudice and at the same time constantly abused “argument” for the humiliation of human beings on the basis of their external appearance.

The second question is “Why exactly *race*?” As a starting point, one can use an indication by the philosopher Charles W. Mills. He pointed out that John Rawls in his influential book *A Theory of Justice* (1971), as well as in his other works, states that there is “not a single subsection of any chapter, let alone any chapter, on race ...”⁶ Given the significant impact of John Rawl’s ideas on moral, social and political philosophy, this is more than a surprise. Charles W. Mills drew attention to the words of John Rawls, who had not studied racial issues as he had only dealt with the “classical (Western) political tradition”.⁷ And right here there is a stumbling block. The overwhelming majority of “classical” Western philosophers such as John Locke, David Hume, John S. Mill, G. W. F. Hegel and Immanuel Kant theorized in their works the issue of race. Even Immanuel Kant was the first who defined in his essay on *Von den Verschiedenen rassen der Menschen* (1775) the inferiority of the “black race”.⁸ Accordingly, the inferiority of the “black race” is one of the fundamental stories of Western intellectual thoughts.

It is necessary to make a short note on the methodology. By the word “race”⁹ we distinguish between: *the term of race* – the origin of the term itself, e.g. the term is derived from *razza* which stands for “kin”, “breed”, “origin” and “mankind”; *the concept (notion) of race* – derived from the Greek νοεμα (noéma)¹⁰ as a certain perception, idea, comprehension, and understanding;¹¹ and finally *theories of race* – a specific and various use of the concept of race in different theories.¹²

⁶ MILLS, C. W. Rawls on Race/Race in Rawls, p. 161.

⁷ MILLS, C. W. Rawls on Race/Race in Rawls, p. 175.

⁸ In 1775 there did not exist “classical” writings such as *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853, Arthur Gobineau); *Die Grundlagen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1899, H. S. Chamberlain).

⁹ The 1950 UNESCO statement on race stipulates that the concept of “race” should be indicated in inverted commas since the concept is understood as a social myth. However, in this text, inverted commas are left out for better continuous reading.

¹⁰ TRENCHARD, W. C. Complete Vocabulary Guide to the Greek New Testament.

¹¹ LIDDELL, H. G., SCOTT, R. A Greek-English Lexicon.

¹² HRABOVSKÝ, M. Rasová mytológia [Racial Mythology], p. 20.

1. Ancient theories and the concept of “black”

“μενεος δε μεγα φρενες αμφιμελαιναι πιμπλαντ”

(Homer: Iliad, I. 103)

The first link of “black” as a gloomy state of *mind* was introduced by the Greek poet Homer in his epic poem the Iliad when describing in the first verse the anger of Agamemnon: μενεος δε μεγα φρενες αμφιμελαιναι πιμπλαντ (Homer: I, 103).¹³ Why is there exactly “black” or a reference to “black” as a symbol and metaphor for anger, madness of something negative?

The Homeric and Orphic Creation myth suggested that it was the black-winged Night (Νυξ; νυκτος – niktos) and Erebus (darkness) who gave birth to a silver egg from which Eros, a synonym for light and the sun, hatched.¹⁴ Thus, darkness (night) retreats from the light, so that the world and life could begin. Greek mythology places the dead souls into Tartarus (Ταρταρος), a grove of black poplars. On the contrary, Elysion (Ηλυσιον) is a place similar to a biblical paradise full of light.¹⁵ And so the night, darkness and blackness all represent a place of death, negation and the afterlife.

The opposite of black and white already appears in Pythagorean theories. Aristotle attributes to Alcmaeon of Croton the division of inceptions on the mutual opposites of *light* (φως – fōs) and *darkness* (σκοτος – skotos), both of which are significant for us.¹⁶ An interesting aspect in this regard is a passage by Diogenes Laertius stating that the Pythagoreans already considered the colour white to represent a good nature and black to represent a bad one: “Pythagoreans were admonished not to sacrifice a white cock, for he is a suppliant and sacred to Moon.”¹⁷

The meaning of black comes from the Greek φλεγειν (*flegein* – to burn, to scorch). The root of the word has its origin in φλεγμα (*flegma* – flame, heat, fire, the result of phlegm).¹⁸ When examining people of black skin, the Greeks based their theory on the Phaeton myth in which the father was Helios, the sun god himself. Phaeton borrowed the chariot of the sun, and he flew so close to the earth that his flame (fire – phlegm) burned some people’s skin. With the help of the myth, the Greeks understood that black skin was a consequence of climate conditions – black skin was a consequence of the fierce heat of the sun.

¹³ “μενεος δε μεγα φρενες αμφιμελαιναι πιμπλαντ” – “his heart was black with rage” (Samuel Butler, 1898); “spirit filled with huge black rage” (Ian Johnston, 2000). Greek texts are available from the Perseus Digital Library (Tufts University).

¹⁴ GRAVES, R. *Řecké mýty* [The Greek Myths], pp. 24 – 25.

¹⁵ GRAVES, R. *Řecké mýty* [The Greek Myths], p. 119.

¹⁶ A 986^a25. ARISTOTELES, *Metafyzika* [Metaphysics].

¹⁷ THOMPSON, L. L. *ISmyrna 753: Gods and the One God*, p. 117.

¹⁸ LIDDELL, H. G., SCOTT, R. *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

Later on, expressions in Old English such as *blæc*, *blakaz* (burnt), *blac*, *black* (burnt, dark) and the Latin term *flagro* (to burn, to flame)¹⁹ were used from 1300 for the description of skin colour and from 1504 for describing “black people” – Africans.²⁰ All these concepts referred to the primary Greek intuition of perceiving “black” as having been burnt by the sun.

The notion of “black” as a term describing a negative condition, even illness, is elaborated in the works of ancient medicine. The term phlegm is used by the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates as a “pathological bodily fluid”.²¹

Hippocrates divides bodily fluids into φλεγμα (phlegm), αιμα (haima – blood), μελαινη χολη (melainé cholé – black bile) and χλωρινη χολη (chlóriné cholé – yellow bile). Phlegm is specified in the following way: “For whenever the great heat comes on suddenly while the earth is soaked by reason of the spring rains and the south wind, the heat cannot fail to be doubled, coming from the hot, sodden earth and the burning sun; men’s bowels not being braced nor their brain dried – for when spring is such the body and its flesh must necessarily be flabby – the fevers that attack are of the acutest type in all cases, especially among the phlegmatic (φλεγματιησι).”²²

Another meaning of black (μελανος – melanos) is attributed to a different bodily fluid. The word μελας (melas – black, dark) has several etymological meanings: *metaphorically* θανατος (thanatos – death); *referring to character* (malignant and dark); and *referring to disease*, black secretions, thus μελαινα (melaina).²³ In his famous compendium called *Corpus Hippocraticum*, Hippocrates claimed that the human body and its *nature* were determined by blood, phlegm and yellow and black bile (μελαινη χολη – melainé cholé). Black bile was perceived as a poison and the cause of a disease called melanchólie (blackening bile, μελαγχολια – melancholia) and all diseases related to the gall bladder (χολωδης – cholódés).²⁴ Hippocrates believed that black bile was caused by an improper mixture of blood, which had a serious impact on human *character* since ancient medicine considered the human organism as *a part* of the universe.

The basic premise of ancient medicine was that individuals were part of a larger universe. “Pythagoras was the first to name the place of all things

¹⁹ CASSELL LATIN DICTIONARY.

²⁰ HARPER, D. Online Etymology Dictionary.

²¹ LIDDELL, H. G., SCOTT, R. A Greek-English Lexicon.

²² HIPPOCRATES. De aere aquis et locis. Book X.

²³ LIDDELL, H. G., SCOTT, R. A Greek-English Lexicon.

²⁴ FÖLDÉNYI, L. F. Melanchólia [Melancholy], p. 15.

Cosmos, due to its orderly nature.”²⁵ This orderly nature also reigned in the human body and created harmony.

Similarly *Corpus Hippocraticum* defined the *normal* condition of the human body by the proportion (harmony) of bodily fluids and by the influence of the external environment. A disturbed harmony had an impact on the *fyzis* (φυσίς – nature).²⁶ The thesis of four elements was inspired by the thinking of Empedocles who stated that everything was composed of water, air, fire and earth. A balanced proportion of these elements in ancient medicine meant a guarantee for the universe as well as for health, order and the human body.

Black bile became a characteristic (state of mind) of the human organism and an issue of external nature (*fyzis*). Very black bile was also associated with autumn or late summer.²⁷ A melancholic person was seen as a “poisoned man” without a harmonious mental state and was associated with fear and distress.²⁸

In this way the human character was connected with the external environment. Hippocrates and Empedocles tried within ancient medicine to discover a unifying hypothesis explaining various phenomena through natural causes.²⁹ Melancholy (black bile) caused changes inside the body and above all on *external* appearance (as could be seen in the case of Agamemnon’s anger). There was a mutual correlation between the human body and the external world. This meant that not only black bile, based on the proportion of bodily fluids, affected the *spirit* (mind of man), but also that the spirit was responsible for the diseased excess of black bile.³⁰

A disrupted physical organism meant the disruption of the cosmic balance in relation to the affected person. The presence of black bile also changed the *physical appearance* of a person. On the other hand, a disrupted spirit was reflected in the external appearance of an affected person. The chest of Agamemnon was filled with “blackness”: his heart was filled with negative feelings that changed his physical appearance. According to Plato, a bad and evil (κακος – kakos) body (σώμα – sóma) led to a bad soul (ψυχή – psyché).³¹

Ancient understanding brought several meanings of the colour black: (a) in mythology as the night (*niktos*) associated with the initial state of the world and

²⁵ Aetius. *De Vestutis Placitis*. II. 1.1 (D. 327. 8). In THEODOSSIOU. E., DACANALIS, A., DIMITRIJEVIC, M. S., MANTARAKIS, P. *The Heliocentric System from the Orphic Hymns and the Pythagoreans to Emperor Julian*, p. 128.

²⁶ KÁBRT, J., CHLUMSKÁ, E. *Lékařská terminologie [Medicine Terminology]*, p. 9.

²⁷ LONIE, I. M. *The Hippocratic Treatises: On generation, On the nature of the child, Diseases IV*, p. 60.

²⁸ FÖLDÉNYI, L. F. *Melanchólia [Melancholy]*, p. 16.

²⁹ LONGRIGG, J. *Greek Rational Medicine: Philosophy and Medicine from Alcmaeon to the Alexandrians*, p. 27.

³⁰ FÖLDÉNYI, L. F. *Melanchólia [Melancholy]*, p. 101.

³¹ 86d. PLATO. *Timaeus*.

with the world of the dead, (b) darkness (*skotos*) as opposed to light and as a bad nature, (c) black in the meaning of being inflamed (*flegein*) as well as a result of exceeding certain limits, and (d) black defined as melanin (*melanos*) responsible for melancholy. Black acted in all the above mentioned cases as a negative, bad and pathological phenomenon.

2. The Middle Ages and the conception of black colour

“...And black Gehenna called, the type of Hell.”

(John Milton: Paradise Lost, Book I, 400 – 405, 1757)³²

Και το φως εν τη σκοτια φαινει και η σκοτια αυτο ου κατελαβεν

(KATA ΙΩΑΝΝΗΝ 1,5)³³

Christianity “created” opposites of light and darkness. In the introductory sentences of the Gospel of John we read about light (φως – *fōs*) which has not been overcome by darkness (σκοτια – *skotia*). The term *skotos* has already been analysed in the case of the Greek term as an antonym of light and as a kind of bad nature. Darkness as an *embodiment* of evil and light as a symbol of purity can be traced in many biblical statements.

The Gospel of Matthew states: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light (φωτεινον – *fōteínon*), but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness (σκοτος).”³⁴ Purity is associated with light and impurity with darkness. The Gospel of Mark mentions a man seen by disciples in the empty tomb of Jesus: “And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe (λευκη – *leukén* – shining, glittering), and they were alarmed.”³⁵

There are many references in this context in the Apocalypse of John (Book of Revelation):³⁶ “Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white (λευκοις – *leukois*),

³² MILTON, J. Paradise Lost. “... black Gehenna, kind of Hell” *Gehenna* (in Greek γεννα – *genna*) or Hebrew *gejhinom*, known as the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, near Jerusalem, where child sacrifice was practiced in the Middle Ages. Literally it was a place of torment for sinners and non-believers. In NEWMAN, J., SIVAN, G. *Judaismus od A do Z*. Praha [Judaism A-Z]. The original meaning did not speak of the blackness of the place.

³³ “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it”. In The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

³⁴ Mt. 6:22n. In English Standard Version, 2001.

³⁵ Mk. 16:5. In English Standard Version, 2001.

³⁶ Rev. 3:4n. In English Standard Version, 2001.

for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments (ματτιοις λευκοις – himatois leukois), and I will never blot his name out of the book of life.” White is a sign of those who are immaculate (without sin) and who will be dressed in white robes. The very representation of Jesus is repeatedly illustrated as a white and shining person: “The hairs of his head were white (λευκα), like white (λευκον) wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire.”³⁷ One of the horsemen in the Apocalypse comes on a white horse: “The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war!”³⁸

The colour black preserved the meaning of darkness and the dark. Carl G. Jung pointed out medieval alchemic conceptions linked by a black colour (*nigra*) with a dark, primordial unconscious state (*nigredo*). Black was seen as an impurity (*immunditia*).³⁹ *Nigredo* referred to the grim melancholy that reminded one of death and the afterlife.⁴⁰

Pope Innocent III (1161 – 1216) in his tract for the Holy Mass from 1195 indicated white as a sign of purity, red – as Christ’s blood and black as – a sign of waiting, repentance, death and Good Friday.⁴¹ The German King Henry III (1017 – 1056) was called “the Black” not because of his physical appearance so much as for his attacks on the Church. Black symbolized evil, which was the enemy of the Church.⁴²

Black as the colour of Satan (the devil) appeared from the 6th to 11th centuries.⁴³ However, Satan did not have a monopoly on black. There were various animals pictured in black such as basilisks, dragons, wolves, snakes, ravens, vampires and werewolves.⁴⁴ According to the French medievalist Michel Pastoureau, society in the Middle Ages believed in the existence of monsters and creatures that lived on the edge of the cognizable world for a long time.⁴⁵

Although many of these monsters had human features, such as for instance the monopod (a dwarf-like creature with a single, large foot), the satyr,

³⁷ Rev. 1:14. In English Standard Version, 2001.

³⁸ Rev. 19:11; 6:2. In English Standard Version, 2001.

³⁹ JUNG, C. G. Výbor z díla III. Osobnost a Přenos [Personality and Transmission], pp. 180, 288, 264.

⁴⁰ JUNG, C. G. Výbor z díla III. Osobnost a Přenos [Personality and Transmission], p. 277.

⁴¹ PASTOUREAU, M. Black: The History of a Color, pp. 16 – 20.

⁴² PASTOUREAU, M. Black: The History of a Color, p. 40.

⁴³ PASTOUREAU, M. Black: The History of a Color, p. 51.

⁴⁴ WHEELER, L. K., MATTSON, J. Monsters and Fabulous Beasts from Ancient and Medieval Cultures.

⁴⁵ PASTOUREAU, M. Black: The History of a Color, p. 79.

blemmyae (headless monster) and panoti (a creature with big ears),⁴⁶ their monstrosity and deformation proved on the other hand that they were not pure creatures as described in the Book of Genesis.

The existence of these monsters was described in a medieval compendium consisting of 37 books called *Naturalis Historia* (circa 78 AD) by the Roman writer Pliny the Elder. Pliny’s catalogue of mythological beings was borrowed from another important encyclopaedic work called *Etymologiae* compiled by Isidore de Seville.⁴⁷ *Etymologiae* brought a new world description in the form of “T” and “O” maps. “T” represented already known continents (Africa, Asia and Europe) and “O” the water surface (the Mediterranean, Red and Black Seas). The sun always rose in the east, close to paradise on earth (Eden, Paradis).⁴⁸ Later in the 17th and 18th centuries, this continental division of established human classification was categorized into three race types.⁴⁹ Unknown places were marked by cartographers as *Hic svnt leones* (Here are the lions) or *terra incognita* (unknown land), and these places became the reputed home of mentioned monsters.

Dark skin suggested that creatures coloured in this way had to inhabit the unknown part of the world (*terra incognita*) out of the social, moral and religious order. Dark skin presented a visible sign of pagans and “sinful” creatures. Hence the colour black acquired a status of disorder, chaos, irregularity and impurity linked to physical appearance.⁵⁰

There was a slight modification in the meaning of the colour black in the 13th and 14th centuries. The exegesis to Song of Songs written by the theologian and philologist Origen became very important at that time, especially Verse 1, 5-6: “I am very dark (μελαινα – melaina), but lovely O daughters of Jerusalem ... Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me.”⁵¹ Reference to the woman, identified as the African Queen of Sheba did not remove the negative meaning of the colour black but opened up its other dimension: exoticism.

⁴⁶ WHEELER, L. K., MATTSON, J. Monsters and Fabulous Beasts from Ancient and Medieval Cultures. These medieval imaginations are described in a great way by the Italian philosopher Umberto Eco in his novel *Baudolino* (Bratislava, Slovart 2001).

⁴⁷ WHEELER, L. K., MATTSON, J. Monsters and Fabulous Beasts from Ancient and Medieval Cultures.

⁴⁸ LIVINGSTON, M. Modern Medieval Map Myths: The Flat World, Ancient Sea-Kings, and Dragons.

⁴⁹ “Divisus est autem trifarie: e quibus una pars Asia, altera Europa, tertia Africa nuncupatur.” In ISIDORE OF SEVILLE. *Etymologiarvm sive originvm liber XIV. Liber XVI. II. De Orbe* [1], p. 623.

⁵⁰ PASTOUREAU, M. *Black: The History of a Color*, pp. 58, 79.

⁵¹ Song 1:5-6. In English Standard Version, 2001 and In ORIGENÉS. *O Písni písní* [Song of Songs].

Christian tradition accepted the idea that among the kings/wise men (*magoi*) bringing gifts to Jesus there was one with dark skin. The scene is artistically portrayed very well on a triptych called *The Epiphany* (around the year 1495) by the Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch. The central panel, sometimes referred to as *Aanbidding der Koningen* (The Adoration of the Magi), depicts a king (wise man) called Balthasar with black skin. This meaning of black skin did not cause a breakthrough in its perception, it was still considered as a negation and evil.

In the view of the above mentioned bodily fluids, a fundamental breakthrough in the understanding of black bile was made by Avicenna, who later influenced the medieval perception of black bile. In the Middle Ages with the influence of the Christian religion, the devil (*διαβολος* – *diabolein*: divide, split up) was seen as a cause of division and discord and was in the position of the antagonist and creator of chaos.⁵² Black bile was originally responsible for the improper ratio of bodily fluids. According to Avicenna, black bile was coloured in black because of the devil's influence, originating from the devil's bath (*balneum diaboli*).⁵³ Until the 12th and 13th centuries black bile acquired a religious dimension (devil's origin). A melancholic was in a state of "eclipse" without God and His mercy. A medieval melancholic had a disease of the soul called laziness (*acedia*) and was unable to *act*.⁵⁴ Acedia was considered a serious sin, turning away from God.⁵⁵

Black as an expression of evil, darkness and (so-called) divine punishment was fully demonstrated during the tragic events of the Black Death (1346 – 1350). The colossal tragedy and massive death that struck in the Middle Ages associated the colour black with punishment for "sins". Black within Christianity clearly pointed to a negative state.

3. Noah's curse of Ham and his son

"Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."

(Genesis 9, 25)

The most fatal use and misuse of "black" as a curse occurred during the slavery system which originated in the 1440s, when a Portuguese captain named Antam Gonçalves received two black slaves on the western coast of the Sahara.

⁵² For example Rev. 20:7-10. In English Standard Version, 2001.

⁵³ FÖLDÉNYI, L. F. *Melanchólia* [Melancholy], p. 77.

⁵⁴ AUGUSTÍN. *Vyznania* [Confessions], p. VIII. 9.

⁵⁵ FÖLDÉNYI, L. F. *Melanchólia* [Melancholy], p. 81.

The import of slaves into the New World (America) in 1532 was a very important milestone. Wishing to become unquestionable and “eternal”, the great power imbalance had launched a modern conceptual development of race theory. However, racial theorists appeared later on in an atmosphere of developed slavery.

One can follow two lines here: the first one generates from a black (colour) negation (evil, disease, the colour of a demon) and the second one added to the colour black a definite status of a “curse”, which is more developed in the following analysis. This second line is constituted on the basis of a powerful story from the Book of Genesis about Ham’s curse: “Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.””⁵⁶

Noah divided mankind into three separate groups: Japhet (Ιαφεθ – Iáfeth), Ham (Χαμ – Cham) and Shem (Σημ – Sém). The medieval understanding of social groups was based on this very division: Japhet was a predecessor of the nobility and aristocracy, Shem of priests (later *semiti*) and Ham of villains and slaves.⁵⁷ The *connection* between the proclamation of Ham as a slave (οικετης, oiketēs – slave, servant) on the one hand and Cain’s mysterious mark (σημειον, semeion – mark, sign) on the other created an explosive mixture. Cain’s mysterious mark together with Ham’s curse formed an opinion of the “different” Africans who Europeans encountered during their discoveries of the African continent. Their interest in skin colour derived from their desire to defend the emerging slave trade. Black skin was considered “cursed” and with the help of biblical anthropology, this theory justified enslavement and colonization. Skin colour referred to a group of people, who by having the mark automatically acquired a different group status. Reference to Ham’s curse created a conception of the “black” and God’s “castaway”.

The confirmation of the colour black for Ham was finally delivered in 1674 by the historian, geographer and theologian Hornius Georgius (George Horn) in his work *Arca Noae, sive Historia Imperiorum et Regnorum*. Horn placed Ham

⁵⁶ Gen. 9:20-25. In English Standard Version, 2001.

⁵⁷ POLIAKOV, L. The Aryan Myth, p. 7.

in Arabia, Syria, Egypt and Africa.⁵⁸ Being placed in Africa, Ham became “black”. According to skin colour, Horn considered Japhet to be white (*albus*), Ham black (*nigros*) and Shem yellow (*flavus*).⁵⁹

Since there is no direct connection between Ham and his black skin in the Bible, Hornius deduced it from the etymological explanation for his name. According to Hornius, the African heat caused the black discoloration of the skin, as the name Ham suggests in Hebrew “חם (chm – hot-blooded) א חום (chwm – black)”.⁶⁰

Other interpretations suggest that Ham breached two important ethical norms by seeing the nakedness of his father, “the ethic of bodily modesty and the norm to honour and respect one’s parents”.⁶¹ In the view of David M. Goldenberg, the expression “seeing somebody naked” evokes a sexual act, even a sex crime: “In addition, the very name *Ham*, may have further suggested a sexual act since the roots *hmm* and *yhm* can connote the sense of sexual heat ...”⁶² Replication of this exact accusation of Ham, and thus the accusation of “blacks” of sexual crimes could be found in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*: “Systematically these negroid parasites (*diese schwarzen Völkerparasiten*) in our national body corrupt our innocent fair-haired girls and thus destroy something which can no longer be replaced in this world.”⁶³

Ham and his descendants became a “black” group inhabiting Africa, and, what is more, Ham was cast away by Noah and so the colour black gained the status of a “cursed”, “bad” colour. It is a symbol of darkness and sex crimes, and a group had appeared which was defined by this “cursed” skin colour. Some slave owners and authors of racial theories would return to this “curse” later on.

In the 17th century Sir Thomas Brown criticized this in his work *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646). In a chapter named *Of the Blackness of Negroes* (The Sixth Book), he discussed Ham’s black skin: “The heat and scorch of the Sun; or the curse of God on *Cham* and his Posterity”.⁶⁴ In his first

⁵⁸ “...qui in illa Mundi primaeva divisione Arabiam, Syriam, Aegyptum & universam Africam obtinuit.” In HORNI, G. *Arca Noae sive historia Imperiorum et regnorum a conditio orbe ad nostra tempora*, p. 38.

⁵⁹ “...in albus, qui funt Scythae & Japhetaei, nigros qui funt Aethiopes & Chamaei, flavus qui funt Indi & Semaiei.” In HORNI, G. *Arca Noae sive historia Imperiorum et regnorum a conditio orbe ad nostra tempora*, p. 37.

⁶⁰ “Chami nomen & à calore quo aestuat Arabia & Africa & à nigredine fluxit: hoc enim Hebraeis est חם cham calidum, & חום nigrum.” In HORNI, G. *Arca Noae sive historia Imperiorum et regnorum a conditio orbe ad nostra tempora*, p. 39.

⁶¹ LEVENSON, J. D. *Genesis: introduction and annotations*, p. 26.

⁶² GOLDENBERG, D. M. “What did Ham do to Noah?”, p. 260.

⁶³ HITLER, A. *Mein Kampf*, p. 630.

⁶⁴ BROWNE, T. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries into very many received tenents and commonly presumed truths*.

variant, he points to the etymology of the antic word *Aethiops* (Ethiopian – αἰθεῖν+οψ – charred skin), which attributed black skin to sunlight.⁶⁵ It clearly leans to the theory of geographic conditions that “now the ground of this opinion might be the visible quality of Blackness observably produced by heat, fire, and smoke”.⁶⁶ Subsequently in the Sixth Book, in Chapter Eleven entitled *Of the same*, he expressed his second view on black skin based on the curse of Ham who had seen his father naked.⁶⁷ Discrepancies notwithstanding, he pointed out that only Canaan, a son of Ham, was cursed; this curse was also transmitted to his descendants: “Secondly, to have cursed Cham had been to curse all his posterity, whereof but one was guilty of the fact.”⁶⁸ Thomas Brown argued that it was not possible to deduce that the “curse” itself had a black form since there was no single reference to it in the Bible.

4. Etymology of the word “race”

“You can’t start a fire; you can’t start a fire without a spark.”
(Bruce Springsteen: *Dancing in the Dark*, 1984)

The authors of influential publications such as George L. Mosse (*Toward the Final Solution*, 1985), Léon Poliakov (*The Aryan Myth*, 1996) and the historian George M. Fredrickson (*Racism*, 2003) have all used the concept of race, but they have not paid closer attention to its etymology.

The two variants of the “race” concept

Some authors emphasize two etymological variants of the race concept; let us call them the “Latin” and “Arabic” variants. The sociologist Albert Memmi⁶⁹ interprets the “Latin” concept of race as possibly originating from the Latin *ratio* (in chronological order) in the 15th century. Memmi argues that a more probable origin is derived from the word *radix* (inner roots). The British and German historians Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann both

⁶⁵ BROWNE, T. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries into very many received tenents and commonly presumed truths*, pp. X. 370 – 378.

⁶⁶ BROWNE, T. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries into very many received tenents and commonly presumed truths*, pp. X. X. 370 – 378.

⁶⁷ BROWNE, T. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries into very many received tenents and commonly presumed truths*, pp. X. XI. 378 – 382.

⁶⁸ BROWNE, T. *Pseudodoxia Epidemica or Enquiries into very many received tenents and commonly presumed truths*, pp. X. XI. 378 – 382.

⁶⁹ MEMMI, A. *Racism*, p. 12.

interpreted⁷⁰ the “Arabic” variant. The concept of race comes from the Arabic term of *ras*, meaning a head, origin or inception, and was further developed by the Germans, English and French in the 17th century in the form of *race*.

Burleigh and Wippermann, however, do not establish their own etymological analysis but rather build on the meaning introduced by the German editors Otto Brunner, Werner Conze and Reinhard Koselleck in the dictionary *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (1984). Probably the most influential introduction of the “Arabic” variant was made by the writer and rabbi Ernst Klein in his work *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (1966 – 1967), in which he derived the concept of race from the Arabic *ra's* (head, origin, inception).⁷¹

Even if some authors may lean towards the “Arabic” variant, as do the already mentioned Burleigh and Wippermann, most probably the meaning of race was generated from the “Latin” variant. The anthropologist and writer of core texts on race and racism, Ivo T. Budil, suggests⁷² that the meaning of race appeared in the 15th century in Italian (*razza*), Castilian (*raza*), Portuguese (*raça*) and French (*race*), whereby he cites the opinion of L. N. McAlister from his book *Spain and Portugal in the New World* (1984). We will therefore try to undertake a more rigorous etymological analysis of the concept of race.

Etymology of race – the concept

The linguist Walter W. Skeat lists three meanings of the word race: (1) a fast run (*ras*) in the Old English of the 14th and 15th centuries; (2) a family, a class (*razza*, *raze*, *raggia*) in medieval Italian, taking over from the Latin *radia*, *radiare*; and (3) a root (*radix*), which was adopted in the Old French as *rais*, *radiz*.⁷³ In his revised dictionary, Walter W. Skeat mentions similar meanings: (1) a fast run, speed (*rees*, *res*, *raes*) from medieval English; (2) a family, family tree, lineage, rearing (race) derived from the Portuguese *raça*, Spanish *raza* and Italian *razza*; (3) a straight line, a motion, an origin (*reiza*) from High German; and (4) a root (*raze*) from Old French in the form of *rais*, *raiz* and from the Latin *radix*, *radicem*.⁷⁴ In a dictionary of Old English another linguist,

⁷⁰ BURLEIGH, M., WIPPERMANN, W. *Rasistický stát. (Německo 1933 – 1945)* [The Racial State. (Germany 1933 – 1945)], p. 25.

⁷¹ Similarly in Hebrew: ראש (róš).

⁷² BUDIL, I. T. *Zrození moderní rasové teorie: Život a dílo Victora Courteta* [The Birth of Modern Racial Theory: Live and Work of Victor Courtet], p. 6.

⁷³ SKEAT, W. W. *A Concise Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*.

⁷⁴ SKEAT, W. W. *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*.

Francis Henry Stratmann, indicates the following meanings: (1) *raes* (motive force, direction) and (2) *raesen* (running, a rush) from the Old Saxon.⁷⁵

In an etymological dictionary of the Romance languages the philologist Friedrich C. Diez introduced the term *razza* from the Italian (*raccia*), Portuguese, Spanish and French words *raza* and *raca*, which refer to Old German in the form of *razza* underlying the importance of the blood line (*linea sanguinis*).⁷⁶

The philologist Edward Pick in his French etymological dictionary mentions the term *raza* (a breeding, a lineage) in Portuguese, Spanish and Italian (*raza*, *razza*), which refers to Old German in the form of *reiza* (a lineage, an ancestry, a family).⁷⁷

The linguist Friedrich Kluge in a German etymological dictionary mentions *rasse* (to breed, to give a birth), which was borrowed from the French of the 18th century in the form of *race*, whereby he introduced the Latin and later Italian meaning of *razza*, which appeared in the 14th century in Old German in the form of *reitza*, *reizza* (a lineage, a genealogy, a family).⁷⁸

Thus many meanings lead to a Latin origin. In a Latin etymological dictionary F. E. J. Valpy introduces the term root, source, core (*radix*) from the Greek *ραδιξ* (*radix*), which describes a sentence or the upper part of a tree spreading into branches.⁷⁹ Finally, two philologists H. G. Liddell and R. Scott in their Greek-English dictionary present the term *ραδιξ* (*radix*) in the meaning of branches, a ramification of which was the Latin term *radix*.⁸⁰

Various meanings of the race concept are presented from this short analysis. The concept is unclear from the etymological point of view and is marked by several explanations and an ambiguous origin. The concept emerged in the 14th and 15th centuries in the Romance languages – Italian (*razza*, *raza*), Spanish (*raza*), Portuguese (*raça*) and French (*raza*, *raca*) – which semantically come from Latin (*radix*). In the case of German there can be seen a line (*reitza*, *reizza*) inspired by the above mentioned languages. In the 16th century the Romance meaning infiltrated into English (*race*).⁸¹ In 1500 the English perceived race as “people of common descent”. The original English term (1520) includes: “wines with characteristic flavour”. Later, in 1560, there is mention of a “tribe, nation, or people regarded as of common stock”. And

⁷⁵ STRATMANN, F. H. A Dictionary of the Old English Language.

⁷⁶ DIEZ, F. An Etymological Dictionary of the Roman Language.

⁷⁷ PICK, E. An Etymological Dictionary of the French Language.

⁷⁸ KLUGE, F. An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language.

⁷⁹ VALPY, F. E. J. An Etymological Dictionary of the Latin Language.

⁸⁰ LIDDELL, H. G., SCOTT, R. A Greek-English Lexicon.

⁸¹ CREMER, H. “...und welcher Rasse gehören Sie an?” Zur Problematik des Begriffs “Rasse” in der Gesetzgebung. Deutsches Institut für Menschenrechte, pp. 1 – 15.

finally, the most modern meaning emerged in 1774 as “one of the great divisions of mankind based on physical peculiarities”.⁸²

The meaning of “race” – the concept

According to many researchers, such as for instance the historian George M. Fredrickson, the anthropologist Ivo T. Budil and the historian Eduard Nižňanský, the origination of the concept of race can be dated to modern history.⁸³ In 1735 the Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus (Carl Linné) introduced the first classification of the human variability when dividing the genus *Homo* into four categories. Later the professor of medicine Johann F. Blumenbach in 1770 – 1781 divided humankind into five groups.⁸⁴

In 1735 Linné published his voluminous book *Systema naturæ*, in which he determined four basic races (naming them as *varieties*): *Homo Americanus*, *Homo Asiaticus*, *Homo Europæus* and *Homo Africanus*. The very last variety will be the interest of this study. *Homo Africanus* is defined by Linné as: “niger, phlegmaticus, lusus, arbitrio” (black, phlegmatic, lazy and freaky).⁸⁵ Linné’s assignment of interior characteristics is neither subjective nor accidental, and it becomes, as German historian George L. Mosse writes, the “pioneer of racial classification”.⁸⁶ The above mentioned categorization seems for us, people of a different period, as “subjective” and “accidental”. But why has Linné chosen for the “blacks” (*niger*) exactly these characteristics? Why is the phlegmatic feature there for *Homo Africanus*?

Linné’s inspiration for the theory of group characteristics was inspired by the physician Galen of Pergamon and his division of human types according to four bodily fluids. This theory was later extended by the most influential ancient physician Hippocrates.

We have already examined the etymology of the word phlegm (φλεγμα – flame, heat, fire, the result of “heat”), which by its activity in the body creates phlegmatics. Linné simply assigned to the “black group” those characteristics which were attributed to the colour black in the Hippocratic tradition. Phlegm caused black skin in terms of physical appearance; moreover, it caused also laziness and capriciousness – inner characteristics. Acedia (laziness), defined in the Middle Ages, was perceived as an illness as well as damnation. The

⁸² HARPER, D. Online Etymology Dictionary.

⁸³ This study considers the beginning of the Modern Era to be 1492 – the discovery of the New World.

⁸⁴ HRABOVSKÝ, M. Rasová mytológia [Racial Mythology], p. 13.

⁸⁵ LINNAEI, C. *Systema naturae*, p. 22.

⁸⁶ MOSSE, G. L. *Toward the Final Solution. A History of European Racism*, p. 20.

Linnaean concept of these streams merged into one category for *Homo Africanus*. According to Linné, *Homo Africanus* had a black skin colour associated with laziness and capriciousness as well as the “damnation” linked to the curse of Ham.

Linné’s classification of *Homo sapiens* was developed by the physician and naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who in his work *De generis humani varietate nativa* (1776) was the first to introduce a division of races based on skull, jaw and brain size. In 1770 – 1781 he divided mankind into five distinct groups: Caucasian (*Caucasiae*), Mongolian (*Mongolicae*), Ethiopian (*Aethiopicae*), American (*Americanae*) and Malaysian (*Malaicae*).⁸⁷

The anthropologist K. F. H. Marx stated that Blumenbach had a great collection of skulls (“Golgotha”) from which arose the “extraordinary beautiful feminine skull of the Caucasian (*Georgian*), attracting the eye of everyone”.⁸⁸ Blumenbach primarily dealt with the question of whether the vital force could be attributed to blood, and he was also interested in the origin of the dark skin of Negroes (*negroes*).⁸⁹ The anthropologist Maria Jean-Pierre Flourens has written that Blumenbach owned a large library of books about Negroes, believing that the origin of every man was the same. He called Negroes “our black brothers”.⁹⁰ Blumenbach did not perceive the colour black as the result of Ham’s curse but as a consequence of black bile in the blood. Climatic conditions caused the production of bile in the liver.⁹¹ It is in this way that Blumenbach built upon Hippocrates’ understanding of skin colour causation.

The Caucasian group (*varietas Caucasia*), which represents the white race, got its name after the Caucasus Mountains because there might have lived there the most beautiful human tribe and the first autochthonous form of mankind.⁹² At the same time, white skin was very common for the Caucasian variety.⁹³ According to G. L. Mosseho, Blumenbach was inspired by an old biblical myth that Noah’s Ark had reached land in the Caucasus Mountains, which had become the place of the “first people”; he also decided that they had been “the most beautiful” people. Blumenbach chose Greek art and the anatomical proportion of Greek sculptures as the criteria of the “beautiful race”.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ BLUMEBACH, F. *De generis humani varietate nativa*, p. 286.

⁸⁸ MARX, K. F. H. *Zum Andenken an Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, p. 9.

⁸⁹ MARX, K. F. H. *Zum Andenken an Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, p. 18.

⁹⁰ FLOURENS, M. J.-P. *Éloge Historique de Jean-Frédéric Blumenbach*, pp. 57, 60.

⁹¹ BLUMEBACH, F. *De generis humani varietate nativa*, p. 126.

⁹² “Nomen huic varietati a Caucaso monte, tum quod vicinia eius et maxime quidem australis plaga pulcherriman hominum stripem, Georgianam foveat; tum quod et omnes physiologicae rationes in eo conspirent, in eandem regionem, si usupiam, primos humani generis autochthones verisimillime ponendos esse.”

⁹³ BLUMEBACH, F. *De generis humani varietate native*, pp. 303 – 304.

⁹⁴ MOSSE, G. L. *Toward the Final Solution. A History of European Racism*, p. 21.

Until Blumenbach's third edition of *De generis humani varietate native*, he still used Linné's concept of *varietas*. As Ivo T. Budil indicates, in the third edition from 1795 Blumenbach replaced the concept *varietas* with *gens*, which was consequently translated into other languages as "race".⁹⁵

Forgotten today, but very influential in the 18th century, was the anatomist, psychologist and representative of romantic movements, Carl Gustav Carus, who laid the basis of fundamental racial typology – *Rassentypologien*. Inspired by Linné, Blumenbach and Kant, he emphasized skin colour as a key feature of group difference.⁹⁶ Based on skin colour, he defined four races: *die Nachtvölker* (the night folk, Ethiopia), *die Tagvölker* (the daily folk, Caucasian and European types), *die Aufgangsvölker* (the Eastern folk, Mongolian, Malay and Chinese types), and *die Untergangsvölker* (the Western folk, the American type). His division of races emphasized "Befähigung zur Geistesentwicklung" (*competence in mental development*).⁹⁷ The cultural prejudice of black as a dark colour without light (thus without spirit and life), inspired by the biblical expression "vita erat lux hominum" (*light was the light of man*), led Carus to the finding that *die Nachtvölker* were "einer niederen Individualität" (*a lower individuality*). On the other hand, *die Tagvölker* had "Befähigung für höhere Entwicklung der Intelligenz" (*an ability of higher development of intelligence*).⁹⁸

The final modification of the vague concept of race is made by the founder of the theory of race, Arthur Gobineau⁹⁹ in his work *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1853 – 1855). Race was not for Arthur Gobineau only a "biological" theory but above all a "spiritual" mind matrix. Arthur Gobineau claimed that in order to *understand* issues concerning nations, civilization and humankind, we should start to "think in a racial way". And those who think in this way will be able to explain and understand various social and cultural phenomena. Without Arthur Gobineau, race would have become a categorical constant. According to him, race was a law of life and its cause but also a master key to the enigma (le mot d'une énigme) of humankind.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ BUDIL, I. T., BLAŽEK, V., SLÁDEK, V. (Eds.). Dějiny, rasa a kultura [The History, Race, and Culture], p. 46.

⁹⁶ STUBBE, H. Hatten die Germanen graue Augen? Rassenpsychologisches bei C.G. Carus, pp. 44 – 53.

⁹⁷ STUBBE, H. Hatten die Germanen graue Augen? Rassenpsychologisches bei C.G. Carus, p. 46.

⁹⁸ STUBBE, H. Hatten die Germanen graue Augen? Rassenpsychologisches bei C.G. Carus, p. 46.

⁹⁹ Ivo T. Budil convincingly proved in his book *Jitro Árijců* [The Daybreak of Aryans] that Arthur Gobineau used his aristocratic title illegitimately. In BUDIL, I. T. *Jitro Árijců* [The Daybreak of Aryans].

¹⁰⁰ GOBINEAU, A. *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, p. 28.

Gobineau did not limit himself only to the definition of “biological” features of the race (*le mot race dans sa portée physiologique*); he created a hierarchy of races. The superior white race was at the top of the order due to its “natural aristocracy” (*noblesse humaine*). The basic criteria of this natural aristocracy were antique sculptures, which were used by Gobineau because of their index of “comparative beauty” (*beauté comparative*). The antique sculptures, especially their mathematical and anatomical “beauty”, were at the origins of racial differences.¹⁰¹ The “purity” and “quality” of race manifested itself in the maintaining of these characteristics and physical features, but when it came to the intermixture of blood, the “purity” and “quality” of race were suddenly lost. According to Gobineau, old and heroic ancestors had honoured *the law of nature*, which was inherent to people. It was the “spirit of isolation” (*l’esprit d’isolement*) against the intermixture of blood. The good and bad qualities of a nation were therefore lost when it came to the intermixture of blood.¹⁰²

All the above mentioned characteristics are used by Gobineau in order to distinguish between races. The negroid (black) race (*la variété mélanienne*) was the lowest in the hierarchy according to the shape of the pelvis; in the mental area it was “dull” (*médiocres*) and had only developed “taste and odour” (*le goût et l’odorat*) capabilities.¹⁰³ The black race and yellow race were “unable to make a first step towards civilization” (*impossible de faire le premier pas vers la civilisation*). Their own “nature” was paralyzing them and that was the reason why they were not resistant to the “mingling of blood”. The black and yellow races could get a “better deal” once their blood was mixed with a “noble group” (*le noble groupe*), since most of the human races were incapable of civilization while remaining unmixed. Gobineau argued that the *invention* of institutions did not come from a universal vision but was created by Europeans (the white race): “All the civilizations derive from the white race” (*toute civilisation découle de la race blanche*).¹⁰⁴ Civilizational achievements did not assume any trace of African influences. The yellow race in the view of Gobineau had a tendency to suffer obesity, low physical energy and even apathy. Their desires were faint and they only longed for material pleasures. Although they had respect for the order and they were in practical terms above the black race in the hierarchy, they did not constitute civilization, for they did not know how to activate “beauty and action”.

¹⁰¹ GOBINEAU, A. *The Inequality of Human Races*, p. 108 (Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines, p. 115).

¹⁰² GOBINEAU, A. *The Inequality of Human Races*, pp. 27 – 28 (Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines, pp. 58 – 59).

¹⁰³ GOBINEAU, A. *The Inequality of Human Races*, p. 205 (Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines, pp. 188 – 189).

¹⁰⁴ GOBINEAU, A. *The Inequality of Human Races*, p. 210 (Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines, p. 192).

At the top of the hierarchy was the white race, which was thoughtful, had a sense of unity, great physical strength and beauty, an extraordinary instinct for order and a love of freedom. The white race had a monopoly on beauty, intelligence and strength, but it lost these characteristics with the mixing of blood.¹⁰⁵ All civilizations were made from the white race and the others could not arise without its help. If there was a “sense of civilization”, it was due to the impulse of the white race. The white race ruled because it had managed to maintain the blood purity and an “extraordinary attachment to life” (*un amour singulier de la vie*).¹⁰⁶

Later these thoughts on the “civilizational advantage of the white man” were at the centre of arguments involved in the slave system. Of course, from the point of view of the “white man” it was not a slave system but a “civilization mission”; it was about the “cultivation of pagans and savages”.

What is the black race?

As might be obvious from what has been written in this study, the concept of race has a far more important scope than just “variety of colour”. The American theologian J. Kameron Carter emphasizes that: “It should already be clear by now, but it is nevertheless worth saying explicitly, that ‘white’ and ‘race’ and even ‘black’ are ... not merely signifiers of pigmentation. In other words, their referent is perhaps only secondary to colour. Rather, they signify a political economy, an *ordo* or a social arrangement ...”¹⁰⁷ This was an “invention” of the “black race” as something considered inferior to the whole story of Western civilization, which had discovered “whiteness” not only as a colour “but [as] a regime of political and economic power”.¹⁰⁸ This power could be (and was) later used by Western civilization for enslavement. Western civilization used race in order to create a “single great collective story”¹⁰⁹ into which “black skin” did not belong.

The final transformation of the race into its scientific form occurred in the 19th century. As Michael Yudell claims: “Racial differences were fast becoming part of the scientific vernacular, prejudice and discrimination based

¹⁰⁵ GOBINEAU, A. *The Inequality of Human Races*, p. 209 (Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines, p. 191).

¹⁰⁶ GOBINEAU, A. *The Inequality of Human Races*, p. 207 (Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines, p. 190).

¹⁰⁷ CARTER, J. K. *Race. A Theological Account*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ CARTER, J. K. *Race. A Theological Account*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁹ CARTER, J. K. *Race. A Theological Account*, p. 386.

on skin color both preceded and complemented scientists’ providing a vocabulary to racial ideology.”¹¹⁰

5. Conclusion

“Malcolm X used to say that racism was like a Cadillac because they make a new model every year. The names change, he charged, but the game’s the same.”

(George Lipsitz: How Racism Takes Place, 2011)

Blackness is still the main “criterion” of a “lower” racial origin. The ancient environmental meaning of black skin as being caused by sunlight is diffused together with the meaning of black as a negation, death, bad nature and even illness. However, this ancient meaning is based on a “medical” (physiological) conception. The theologization of the colour black fully broke out in the Middle Ages when black (blackness) was associated with the meaning of darkness symbolized by the devil. Black skin acquired the status of being “cursed” and its bearer was seen as a sinful creature. The theologization of the colour black was abused due to the influence of the story about Ham’s condemnation, which was later used during the enslavement of Africa. The late modern era adapted the theological meaning of black in the theories of race. Thus blackness became a “scientifically” accepted fact of a “lower” status in the secularized natural scale. And finally, today there are still racial and even racist theories perceiving blackness in a negative way.

The meaning of blackness emerging in linguistic studies has not defended its scientific dimension. Regardless of this fact, there is a constant humiliation of human beings solely based on a wrong understanding of “black” skin. The concept analysis used by racial theory reveals an overall vagueness of the race concept acting as an artificial social and cultural construction.

As the author of *Skin: A Natural History* (2006), Nina G. Jablonski points out: “The best way to beat prejudice is not to dismiss skin as ‘just skin’ or to brag that one is ‘color blind’. Instead, the most effective way to defeat skin color bias is to foster an appreciation of skin function and the wonderfully adaptive roots of its variation. Prejudice cannot be eradicated by mere tolerance. It is only a deep understanding, which can eventually lead to the demise of racism.”¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ YUDELL, M. Making Race. Biology and the Evolution of the Race Concept in 20th Century American Thought, p. 26.

¹¹¹ DUNSWORTH, H. M. Review of Jablonski, N. G. -- *Skin: A Natural History*.

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