

Does 'race' science refute superior humans?

Superior: The return of race science

Angela Saini

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British-born journalist Angela Saini (b. 1980) has a Masters in Engineering from Oxford University, where she was a chair of the student union's anti-racism committee, and another Masters in Science and Security from King's College, London. *Superior* is her third book, the title of which cleverly follows that of her book *Inferior* (2018), about the female sex.¹ A review of *Inferior* pointed out: "Her very first chapter exposes Charles Darwin's prejudices and how his views on a woman's place in society tinted, or rather tainted, his theories."²

Superior covers a gamut of well-investigated topics with thorough historical background. These include:

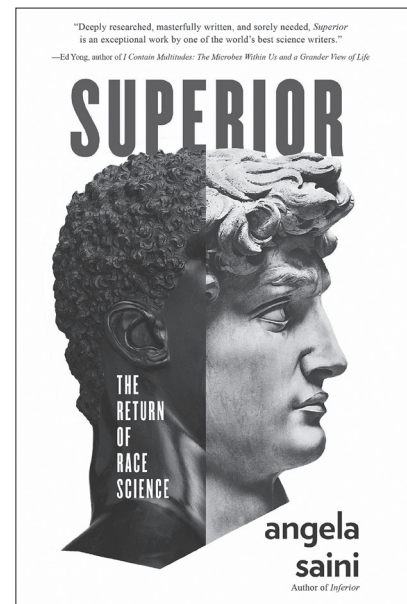
- Deep time: are we one human species, or aren't we?
- Scientific priestcraft: deciding that races could be improved, scientists looked for ways to improve their own
- Race realists: making racism respectable again
- Human biodiversity: how race was rebranded for the twenty-first century
- Roots: what race means now in the light of new scientific research
- Origin stories: why the scientific facts don't always matter

It is beyond the scope of this book review to cover all these subjects. However, one thing made very clear is that the term 'race' and everything associated with it, certainly

from a secular perspective, is rather complex. Culturally, the word 'race' has become engrained into our language, and this exacerbates matters. Angela Saini concludes that it is the culture of a people group that makes them different, but she fails to realise that her evolutionary worldview undermines what she believes.

The evolutionary multiregional (MR) hypothesis has the parallel evolution of separate populations of modern *Homo sapiens* from *H. erectus* in different geographical areas. This view holds that extant human populations worldwide are all the same species, but allows for different people groups to have a history—and thus identity—distinct from other people groups. For some, the MR "has political power ... [because it] feeds fresh speculation about the roots of racial difference" (p. 34). The alternative (evolutionary) view is called 'Out of Africa' (OOA). In this view, a population of modern *Homo sapiens* migrated from sub-Saharan Africa, out-competing and replacing more 'primitive' hominid species (*Homo erectus*, archaic *H. sapiens* and Neandertals).

Having rejected MR, and undoubtedly adhering to an evolutionary history with its accompanying *deep time* (the very title of chapter 1), she is left with OOA. However, this also should stand out to Saini as a worldview with racist roots. On two occasions she references the "Congolese 'pygmy' named Ota Benga" who "was put in the Monkey House at Bronx Zoo" (pp. 60, 80). She is clearly appalled by this horrific account, and rightly so. However, such actions actually make sense in her evolutionary worldview—which would place some beings in the genus *Homo*



closer to ape-like ancestors than to other human beings. Seemingly though, no conundrum exists in *her* mind.

What motivates racist beliefs?

This can be easily answered. It is either driven by pursuit of illegitimate (political) power, love of money or a desire to feel superior to others—or a combination of the above, which are often linked. Saini writes about these things. "The key to understanding the meaning of race is understanding power. [It] has shaped the idea of race and continues to shape it" (p. 3). Professor of Evolutionary Genetics at University College London, Mark Thomas, is quoted as saying: "it's not that [ancestry testing firms have] got particularly racist agendas. They want to make money, and you make money by servicing people's prejudice" (p. 162). Elsewhere she asks: "isn't this exactly what racism is? A dislike of others in the belief that they are biologically different?" (p. 156).

Nowhere in the book does the notion of sin come up, which clearly underpins these three factors (power, avarice, and desire for superiority). The crux of the matter is that

evolutionary thinking must seek an underlying material explanation for these factors. Although Saini might not like this idea—or even agree with it—she essentially has no choice, since she adheres to the molecules-to-man worldview (she has also written for the atheistic magazine *The New Humanist*). In that framework, any desire for racial superiority, for instance, must ultimately be explained by one’s evolutionary heritage. Naturalism has no good explanation for morality, on the grounds that matter is all there is.

Fruits of racism

However, the outworking of these beliefs takes different forms at different stages of history and in different geographic locations. Being of Indian origin, Saini discusses first-hand the caste system still prevalent in her family’s home country. Due to India’s sheer size, and being very populous, the country covers a plethora of skin ‘colours’; somewhat surprisingly she includes “paper white” (p. 213) in this. A prospective employer even suggested “wheatish” (p. 217) as a skin colour. But it is not just appearance that determines grouping. Not unlike the tradition in Western countries, it is still quite normal—perhaps expected—for children to follow in their parents’ footsteps. So the up-and-coming generation will have the same jobs, live out their lives with the same cultural outlook, and—not surprisingly, with little ‘inter-racial’ marriage—look similar, since they are family after all.

Saini does caution against the erroneous “conclusion that the human zoo is like an animal zoo, each of us defined deep down by our stripes and spots” (p. 220), a saying reminiscent of Jacob tending Laban’s sheep (Genesis 30:32ff.). It is understandable that certain physiques lend themselves better for specific jobs, but not so much for others. That does not mean

that a person’s career is therefore predetermined. Cognitive levels, as well as natural talents and learned skills, can vary greatly, even among members of the same family. Besides, even if the genes for being tall are present, a malnourished person will not grow to his or her full potential.

Within the Indian caste system, it is extremely difficult for someone born and raised in a lower caste to escape it. In other words: born in a caste, always part of that caste. This is unsurprising since it wasn’t the poor and oppressed that devised a class-based society; rather, it was the affluent that wanted to protect their belongings and look down upon the less ‘fortunate’. Yet, this millennia-old caste system comes as second nature to most of India’s inhabitants—few even think to question it. Even on a smaller scale, people of the same caste generally associate with their local community. So much so, that geneticist Sridhar Sivasubu even admitted that, “despite fully understanding the genetic problems, his culture was so important to him that he found a wife from within his own group” (p. 239). It seems generally true that human beings are drawn to people who are more physically alike (including similar shade of skin), therefore it makes sense to look for friends and spouses in the community you were raised in. Perhaps the advent of air travel and, more recently, the Internet are taking down some barriers in this respect.

Bespoke medicine

You’ll be forgiven if you have never heard of the ‘slavery hypertension hypothesis’ before. This ‘survival of the fittest’ story is as follows: slaves imported from Africa that actually survived the journey across the Atlantic Ocean (“Middle Passage”) have a higher salt-retention than those that died “along the way as a result of fluid depletion caused by

dehydration, vomiting and diarrhoea” (p. 243). Hypertension means blood pressure is too high, often due to high salt concentrations in the blood. Those that could not withstand this higher salt level were the weaker ones that did not survive the journey. Dr Clarence Grim, founder of the hypothesis, concluded that the Western diet was the culprit. How so? Well, research has shown that “rural Africans, have the lowest levels of hypertension in the world” (p. 248). Their local diets don’t include much salt. Case closed?

Some biologists were not so sure. They questioned whether natural selection could have such an effect in essentially just one generation. Just because a correlation is apparent, it might not be the root cause. Eating too much salt is bad for any human being, irrespective of the shade of your skin. Fortunately, there are medicines to choose from in treating hypertension. To release a new drug, it has to be approved first, which requires thorough



Figure 1. Ota Benga and Polly the chimpanzee, brought from the Congo to be displayed at the Bronx Zoo.

testing. This takes time and costs a lot of money.

Saini relates how a pharmaceutical company decided to test their new anti-hypertension medicine on a small group of ‘black’ people only—which preliminary testing had shown able to extend life expectancies. A small sample size because it would save time and money, but why choose those who were ethnically ‘black’? Because the traditional drug (of a different type) for this people group was statistically less successful than it was for ‘white’ people. The drug was tested only on 49 ‘black’ people, so it was marketed as such, “the world’s first black pill” (p. 255). Interestingly, “the Association of Black Cardiologists welcomed it as a positive move, finally recognising the historically neglected medical needs of black Americans” (p. 255)! Others recognised it for what it was—a way to make money from something that was on borrowed time, due to its patent ending soon.

If that sounds surprising (i.e. because it appears politically incorrect), how about the idea that cystic fibrosis is a ‘white’ disease? One ‘black’ girl repeatedly failed to be diagnosed for cystic fibrosis, until a passing radiologist recognised it on her X-ray, not knowing who it belonged to. Bias makes blind! The following statement by an epidemiologist and statistician at McGill University in Canada, Jay Kaufman, nicely sums up the ironies of this situation (p. 267): “We’ve had a decade of genome-wide association studies now, we’ve spent billions and billions of dollars, and we still are at the position that it looks like ninety-seven per cent of the mortality disparity between blacks and whites in the United States has nothing to do with genes.”

Concluding remarks

In the last chapter of *Superior* Saini reports on a survey of medical researchers in Californian laboratories.

For these people, “[r]ace was their bread and butter, the entire premise upon which they were doing their research, but they were unable to tell her what it was” (p. 288). Following the money often explains people’s behaviours. However, there is a more sinister aspect to the subject of this book: superiority. Unfortunately, Angela Saini misses the root cause: sin. If people can just compare themselves to others and come out superior, they feel better about themselves. Rather than putting others down or raising ourselves up, we should realise we are all one blood (Acts 17:26), but none of us is righteous (Romans 3:10).

Saini occasionally slurs the conservative right for being racist (pp. 137, 139, 145, 149). The following people (past and present) did not escape comment:

- Carl Linnaeus apparently “included two separate sub-categories within his *Systema Naturae* for monster-like and feral humans” (p. 47).
- Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln “believed that blacks were inherently inferior to whites” (p. 54).
- Gregor Mendel: In a cursory remark it is implied that the idea of eugenics has its origin in the work of this Augustinian friar, “that everything is inherited, that it’s in the genes” (p. 71).
- Ronald Reagan apparently praised Roger Pearson, a racist Darwinist, “for promoting scholars who supported ‘a free enterprise economy, a firm and consistent foreign policy and a strong national defense’” (p. 114).

Racial prejudice is nothing new, as the late Stephen Jay Gould famously pointed out:

“Biological arguments for racism may have been common before 1850, but they increased by orders of magnitude following the acceptance of evolutionary theory. The litany is familiar: cold, dispassionate, objective, modern science shows us

that races can be ranked on a *scale of superiority* [emphasis added].”⁴

Evolution made things worse. It does not provide a solution, rather it only exacerbates the inherent racial prejudice in the sinful heart of man. Saini admits:

“... those committed to the biological reality of race won’t back down if the data proves them wrong. ... They will simply keep reaching for fresher, more elaborate theories when the old ones fail. All this to prove what they have always really wanted to know: that they are superior” (p. 292).

Fortunately, God has provided the Way for individuals from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, to come before the throne of God (Revelation 7:9).

References

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4. Gould, S.J., *Ontogeny and Phylogeny*, Belknap-Harvard Press, Cambridge, MA, p. 127, 1977.