Chapter IV
A Technoethical Approach to the Race Problem in Anthropology

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that analyses of biological populations within species have become increasing sophisticated in recent years, the language used to describe such groups has remained static, thereby reinforcing (and reifying) outdated and inadequate models of variation such as race. This problem is further amplified when the element of human culture is introduced. Drawing on Mario Bunge's work on technoethics, in which he asserts that technology should be subject to social and moral codes, this chapter argues that the 'race problem' should compel anthropologists to exploit technology in order to find workable solutions. One solution to this problem may be found in modern approaches to human skeletal variation using advanced computing techniques such as geometric morphometrics, which allows for the comparison of bone morphology in three dimensions. Coupled with more complex theories of social and genetic exchange, technologically advanced methodologies will allow us to better explore the multidimensional nature of these relationships and to understand how group formation occurs, so that a dynamic approach to classification can be developed.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that the race concept has been vigorously critiqued by anthropologists for over a century, it remains both a conceptual and terminological artefact in contemporary studies of human variation. This is commonly known as the 'race problem.' Race not only has contentious sociological connotations, but the concept itself has been shown to be inadequate on a biological level (in terms of its classificatory or *taxonomic* utility), whether applied specifically to humans or to other geographically variable species. Nonetheless, the race concept continues to appear in a consistently

large minority of anthropological studies (Cartmill, 1998, p. 655). Do anthropologists therefore have an ethical obligation to abandon the race concept, or at least strive to find a workable solution? In order to answer this question, this chapter will focus on four subsidiary questions: (1) what is the role of race in anthropology; (2) is race solely an anthropological problem; (3) is there an ethical dimension to the race problem; (4) how can technology be used to solve the race problem? I will argue in this chapter that Bunge's (1976, 1977) notion of technoethics—that technology has inherent moral codes—compels us to utilize technologically sophisticated methodology for the resolution of ethical dilemmas such as the race problem. The solution I propose is a combination of old theory and new technology, using the example of 3-dimensional (3D) imaging and geometric morphometric analysis of skeletal morphology to explore the multidimensional nature of human biological relationships, moving beyond the outdated race concept.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF RACE IN ANTHROPOLOGY?

The race concept in general, and the use of racial classification in anthropology in particular, are well researched as theoretical problems, and remain popular topics of academic inquiry. The race debate that was initiated by such esteemed anthropologists as Ashley Montagu and Claude Levi-Strauss in the 1940s and 1950s[1] in response to the rising popularity of eugenics programs worldwide, seems to have reached its climax in mid-1990s, when much of the scientific world was appalled by the research coming out of the discipline of evolutionary psychology. Evolutionary psychologists such as Herrnstein and Murray (1994) and Rushton (1995) argued that inherent intellectual capabilities could be predicted by racial group membership. Much of the criticism of the race concept at that time was aimed specifically at this type of research, which drew a direct correlation between race, intelligence, and social achievement. It was presumed that these correlations were demonstrated by both differences in average brain size between racial groups and scores on intelligence tests.

Perhaps the most significant response to this line of argumentation was Gould's *The Mismeasure of Man* (1996), in which he attacked the fundamental premise of such evolutionary psychologists: that measurable differences in average cranial capacities and/or brain size seen between so-called racial groups were indicative of differences in cognitive and cultural capabilities. Gould collected and analysed craniological data to demonstrate that the racial differences in cranial capacities that were claimed by the early craniologist, Samuel Morton (1839), were created by numerous flaws and errors in his methodology. This struck a huge blow for racial science as it clearly demonstrated that Morton had purposely manipulated his data in order to promote socially-based theories of racial inequality. Similarly, Gould argued that evolutionary psychology is based on the same pre-conceptions found in Morton's work—misunderstood or misapplied evolutionary theory—ignoring such issues as the relationship between cranial capacity and overall body mass, sex-based differences in cranial capacities, as well as the cultural and linguistic problems inherent in applying intelligence tests to diverse groups. Unfortunately, Gould's work represents the pinnacle of the anti-race movement in science. The majority of critical perspectives on the science of race have served to shed light on the historical development of thought about human difference and the place of humans in nature while neglecting the development of methodological solutions. Rather than demonstrating the inadequacies of racial classification and proposing solutions for moving beyond the present state of stagnation in the race debate (Billinger, 2006), many contemporary approaches focus too narrowly on particular aspects of racism (as