



SPECIAL REVIEW

More on Race Differences

Michael Levin: *Why Race Matters: Race Differences and What They Mean*. Westport, CT: Praeger (1997). Hardback 432 pp. ISBN 0-275-95789-6

Michael Levin, a philosopher at City University of New York with a keen interest in the concept of justice, has written an important book about race. His main concerns, as the book's title indicates, are the implications of genetic race differences, not their existence *per se*. However, the first part of *Why Race Matters* is devoted to a review of many of the racial differences. Except for new and very worthwhile statistical analyses of his own, particularly about transracial adoption and the likelihood of environmental explanations of between-race phenotypic variance, all the evidence Levin cites can be found in the standard literature of the subject.

Why Race Matters provides an excellent summary of over 80 years of social science research. This research shows that White populations consistently outscore Black populations by slightly more than one standard deviation (about 15 IQ points). Despite some talk of the IQ gap narrowing, the most recent studies continue to demonstrate that the full 1 SD difference emerges by age four. Levin also considers (and then rejects) the hypothesis that the racial difference is due to test bias. Instead, he argues that the evidence should lead us to exploring differences in the size and functioning of the brain. One particularly useful aspect of this material is Levin's review of the post-*Bell Curve* literature.

Why Race Matters also reviews the literature on race differences in motivation. This begins with Walter Mischel's classic studies of Caribbean children who, when asked to choose between a small candy bar at that moment or a larger bar a week hence, overwhelmingly choose the smaller one. So marked was the Black children's preference for immediate gratification when compared to a matched non-Black sample that Mischel called tests of statistical significance 'superfluous'. What he termed 'orientation-to-present' remains a persistent theme in the literature on Black psychology.

Levin is at his analytical best as he reveals contradictions and faulty logic of pop sociology. For example, contrary to most media psychobabble, Black self-esteem is generally higher than White self-esteem, despite the poorer academic performance and lower social status of Blacks! Levin dismisses Black people's disinclination to follow rules and to be cooperative as a lower 'Kantianism' (not following Kant's categorical imperative, popularly known as the Golden Rule). Rather, Levin concludes that Blacks are, on average, less free and responsible than are Whites because of their lower mean intelligence and their higher mean time preference, which thus explains their lowered capacity for cooperation and rule following. Levin builds upon John Locke's conception of free will, according to which an agent is free when he is able to step back, examine his desires, and act on those desires he prefers to act on. Free will increases with reflectiveness and self-restraint. Liberals, Levin points out, without quite admitting it even to themselves, think of Black crime as akin to an amoral force of nature. This mindset, in turn, explains liberal lenience, since penalizing Black criminals would be punishing them for what they cannot help. This discussion should be intriguing to psychologists, as it rests on the assumption, popular among philosophers, that free will can be reconciled with universal determinism.

Having discussed the statistical evidence for the existence of race differences at length, Levin turns his attention to their cause, which he finds is largely genetic. Like a prosecutor presenting this closing argument to a jury, Levin traces seven lines of independent evidence that all converge on the same conclusion:

- (1) the high heritability of IQ and personality,
- (2) the early appearance of the race differences
- (3) the physiological race differences including those of brain size,
- (4) the IQ differences revealed in transracial adoption studies
- (5) the failure of intervention programs like Head Start to affect IQ,
- (6) the contrasting achievements of other minorities, and
- (7) the historical evidence from Africa.

Levin follows the work of Richard Lynn and this reviewer in arguing that cold winter climates acted as a selective force for greater cooperativeness and reciprocity. That is why Blacks, who evolved in hot savannas and tropical jungles are less cooperative or committed to the Golden Rule than Whites. However, Levin also takes pains to argue that he is quite 'neutral' as to which of these behavioral styles is 'better'. They are simply 'adaptations' to the requirements for survival in different environments.

In the second half of the book, Levin turns to explicitly political questions. He argues that a skeptic about absolute values can still engage fruitfully in moral debate by assuming the values of his audience. According to Levin, the basic Caucasoid norm is the Golden Rule, which he argues, implies maximum freedom of the individual and minimum interference by the State. In a pivotal chapter, 'Biology and Justice', Levin explains why the question whether race differences are or are not largely genetic has important consequences for any theory of justice. For example, if Black underachievement is genetic, Levin argues that affirmative action quotas can no longer be justified as compensatory action to redress injuries said to have been inflicted on

Blacks by Whites. (Much of this chapter is an exhaustive and perhaps exhausting demonstration that virtually all arguments for quotas do come down to compensation.)

This theme of 'genetic justice' permeates the remainder of the book. Levin defends himself and others most forcefully against the counterargument that playing the gene card is nothing but a gratuitous swipe at Blacks. Rather, Levin argues, this response has been forced on defenders of justice by the constant diabolization of Whites and the institutionalization of certain forms of Black preference. It is impossible to be silent, maintains Levin, when silence amounts to an admission of guilt and acceptance of penalties. Philosophically, Levin argues the case is no different from a hypothetical one in which Blacks would limp into court, berate Whites for having broken one of their legs, and demand damages. The principles of justice demand, Levin argues, that Blacks must be prepared to listen while Whites are allowed the opportunity to present vital evidence that shows the charge to be without substantiation. Blacks have in effect opened the door to alternative hypotheses about the causes of their deformity, for instance that it runs in their families. Levin concludes that Blacks cannot accuse Whites and then try to institute 'sensitivity' speech codes which would deny the other party the very right to acquit themselves of the initial charge.

In *Why Race Matters*, Levin often vaults inferences at a pace that may make many readers uncomfortable and by so doing opens himself to charges of being 'intemperate'. For example, he holds that the 'distributive baseline' that represents where he thinks American Blacks 'should' be, namely, the sub-Saharan African milieu they would have occupied had they never encountered Whites, is far less educationally stimulating than a plantation or a segregated school in the Jim Crow South, to say nothing of modern schools. As such, Levin may be even taken to imply that Blacks owe Whites for unpaid tuition, rather than Whites owing Blacks reparations!

Perhaps it is on the issue of crime that Levin, who was born and reared and still lives in New York City is most stridently outspoken. Blacks commit felonies at a rate 10 times that of Whites, and decidedly prefer White victims. Despite the enormous publicity given to any White-on-Black-felony, and the mantra that most Black crime is Black-on-Black, a Black is on average about 25 times more likely to victimize and kill a White than vice versa. Levin explores what, in light of this evidence, would constitute an appropriate philosophical response. Levin adopts a view that may not be shocking to libertarians but is considered scandalous in many other quarters, namely, that individuals have a right to consider race when assessing risk, and to be especially careful when dealing with Blacks. Levin argues that it is rational to avoid Blacks. It is rational even for Blacks to avoid Blacks.

Levin then goes beyond individual rights to discuss state enforcement of rights against aggression. He argues it is permissible for a police officer to stop and search young Black males under circumstances in which the officer may not stop and search a White male, on the statistical grounds that the Black is more likely to be up to no good. Tracing Black crime to genetic factors leads to the discussion about free will and responsibility. Levin defends the view that, while the lower mean level of responsibility of Blacks makes them by definition less punishable than Whites, it permits other measures to control Black crime. After all, he writes, homicidal maniacs, although not punishable, are not let free to roam. Above all, the discussion on crime seeks to discredit the idea that Black crime is an excusable payback for White misdeeds, an idea which encourages Black criminals and weakens the will to resist them.

Instead of ending his book with a conventional authorial compendium of conclusions, Levin asked himself what he would want an American President to say in a major speech about race. That speech concludes *Why Race Matters*. The chief message of the imaginary president is honesty. The facts about race must be faced unflinchingly, and Whites must stop being blamed for every Black statistical disability. More concretely, Levin's imaginary president lays out three basic approaches to dealing with race differences. But here is where I will stop. If you are fascinated to know more, read the book. Whatever else you may find it, it is a completely fresh start to thinking about America's most persistent and pervasive social problem! Levin must be congratulated for having written an unusually penetrating and highly heterodox book that adds high-powered intellectual force to the growing momentum for an open dialogue about racial variation.

J. Philippe Rushton