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## The Racism of 'Intelligence'

The first point I would make is that there is no single racism, there are *racisms* in the plural. There are as many racisms as there are groups who need to justify themselves in existing as they exist; this is the invariant function of all racisms.

It seems to me very important to bring analysis to bear on the forms of racism that are the most subtle, the most readily misrecognizable, and therefore the least often denounced, perhaps because those who ordinarily denounce racism possess some of the properties conducive to this form of racism. I am thinking of IQ racism, the racism of intelligence. IQ racism is a racism of the dominant class that differs in a host of ways from what is generally called racism, that's to say the petit-bourgeois racism which is the central target of most classic critiques of racism, including the most vigorous of them, such as that by Sartre.

This racism is characteristic of a dominant class whose reproduction depends to a large extent on the transmission of cultural capital, an inherited capital that has the property of being an *embodied*, and therefore apparently natural, innate, capital. The racism of intelligence is the means through which the members of the dominant class aim to produce a 'theodicy of their own privilege', as Weber puts it, in other words a justification of the social order that they dominate. It is what causes the dominant class to feel justified in being dominant: they feel themselves to be *essentially* superior. Every racism is an essentialism, and the racism of intelligence is the form of sociodicy characteristic of a dominant class whose power is partly based on possession of 'titles' which, like educational qualifications, are presumed to be guarantees

of intelligence, and which, in many societies, even for access to positions of economic power, have taken the place of earlier titles such as titles of property and of nobility.

This racism derives some of its properties from the fact that censorship of the crudest and most brutal forms of racism has become stronger, so that the racist impulse can only be expressed in highly euphemized forms, masked by denial (in the psychoanalytic sense). The GRECE 1 uses a language in which it expresses racism but in such a way that it does not express it. When brought in this way to a high degree of euphemization,

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racism becomes virtually *misrecognizable*. The new racists are faced with a problem of optimization: either they increase the overt racist content of their discourse (for example, by coming out in favour of eugenics), at the risk of shocking the audience and losing in communicability, transmissibility, or they decide to say less, in a highly euphemized form, conforming to the norms of the prevailing censorship (by talking about genetics or ecology, for example), and so increase the chance of 'getting the message across' by slipping it through unnoticed.

The most widespread form of euphemization nowadays is obviously the apparent scientificization of language. If scientific discourse is invoked to justify IQ racism, that is not only because science represents the dominant form of legitimate discourse, but also, and more importantly, because a power that believes itself to be based on science, a technocratic type of power, naturally asks science to be the basis of power; because intelligence is what gives the right to govern when government claims to be based on science and on the 'scientific' competence of those who govern (I'm thinking of the role of the sciences in educational selection, where mathematics has become the measure of all intelligence). Science is bound up with what it is asked to justify.

Having said that, I think one should purely and simply refuse to accept the problem of the biological or social foundations of 'intelligence', in which psychologists have allowed themselves to be trapped. Rather than trying to decide the question scientifically, one should try to look scientifically at the question itself and try to analyse the social conditions of the emergence of this kind of enquiry and of the class racism to which it points the way. In fact, the arguments of the GRECE are simply the extreme form of the arguments that have come for many years from some *grande école*

alumni associations; it is the language of 'leaders' who feel themselves to be legitimized by 'intelligence' and who dominate a society founded on discrimination based on 'intelligence', that is, founded on what the educational system measures under the term 'intelligence'. Intelligence is what is measured by intelligence tests, that is, what the educational system measures. That is all there is to be said in a debate which cannot be decided so long as one remains on the terrain of psychology, because psychology itself (or IQ testing, at least) is the product of the social determinations which are the source of IQ racism, the kind of racism specific to 'élites' whose position is bound up with educational success, a dominant class deriving its legitimacy from educational classification.

Educational classification is a euphemized version of social classification, a social classification that has become natural and absolute, having been censored and alchemically transmuted in such a way that class differences turn into differences of 'intelligence', 'talent', and therefore differences of nature. Religions were never so successful. In educational classification, a social discrimination is legitimized and given the sanction of science. And there we again find psychology and the reinforcement it has

brought from the very beginning to the functioning of the educational system. The invention of intelligence tests like the Binet-Simon test is linked to the arrival in the educational system, due to compulsory schooling, of pupils that the system could not cope with, because they were not 'predisposed', 'gifted', that is, endowed by their home background with the predispositions assumed by the ordinary functioning of the school system cultural capital and a positive attitude towards academic rewards and punishments. Tests which measure the social predisposition required by the school hence their capacity to predict scholastic success are a perfect instrument for legitimizing in advance the academic verdicts which in turn legitimize the tests.

Why now this new upsurge of IQ racism? Perhaps a good number of teachers and intellectuals who have been hit head-on by the crisis of the educational system are more inclined to express or tolerate the expression in the crudest forms of what was previously a discreet high-table élitism. But we also need to ask why the impulse that leads to IQ racism has also increased. I think it's largely due to the fact that fairly recently the educational system found itself confronted with almost unprecedented problems due to the arrival of people who lacked the socially constituted dispositions that it tacitly demands. Above all, these were people who, by their number, devalued academic qualifications and even devalued the posts they would occupy thanks to those qualifications. Hence the dream (already a reality in some disciplines, like medicine) of the *numerus clausus*. All racisms resemble one another. The *numerus clausus* is a kind of protectionist measure, analogous to immigration restrictions, a riposte to 'overcrowding' provoked by the fear of being 'overwhelmed' by invading hordes.

One is always ready to stigmatize the stigmatizer, to denounce the

elementary, 'vulgar' racism of petit-bourgeois resentment. But that's too easy. We must turn the tables and ask what contribution intellectuals make to IQ racism. We should study the role that doctors play in the medicalizing, that is, the naturalizing, of social differences, social stigmata, and the role of psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in producing euphemisms that make it possible to refer to the children of sub-proletarians or immigrants in such a way that social cases become psychological cases, and social deficiencies mental deficiencies, etc. In other words, we need to analyse all the forms of second-degree legitimation which reinforce educational legitimation as legitimate discrimination, not forgetting would-be scientific arguments, psychological discourse, and the very remarks we make ourselves.

#### Note

1. A group of right-wing intellectuals purporting to research on 'European civilization'. flourishing in the 1980s [translator].

## Further Reading

For further discussion, see Bourdieu, P. (1978) *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 7797.