

“races” in biology—with all of the complications we know so well, plus others unique to textual evolution. The author, who is an assistant professor of New Testament at the Pacific School of Religion, has degrees in literature and religious studies but has learned her biological systematics very well and makes cladistics comprehensible to humanists rather better than many of us do in introductory biology classes. She does a very competent job in presenting the nuances of “speciation” in the study of manuscripts and how her field both resembles and differs from what evolutionary biologists do.

One significant difference is that Biblical scholars in particular are not really sure what they are trying to do. For the believer, the goal would seem to be to work back through the additions and emendations to arrive at an “original” or “pure” text. Short of finding the actual written notes of the Evangelists—there almost certainly never were any, and the Gospels were first set down years after Jesus’ death—this is an impossible task in the formal sense. Putting aside Jeffersonian biases about what Jesus *should* have said, is phylogenetic reconstruction likely to get us closer to what he really *did* say? We reconstruct phylogeny in the firm belief that there is a true phylogeny to reconstruct, and our project is thus much more self-contained and self-defined than that of the philologist poring over ancient papyri.

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NATURE, HUMAN NATURE, AND HUMAN DIFFERENCE:  
RACE IN EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY.

By Justin E. H. Smith. *Princeton (New Jersey): Princeton University Press.* \$39.95. xi + 296 p.; ill.; index. ISBN: 978-0-691-15364-3. 2015.

The Linnean naturalist J. F. Blumenbach’s *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, first completed in 1775 and brought out in revised editions thereafter, introduced an influential fivefold classification of the human races. These days it is the conventional starting point for telling the history of physical anthropology. Yet in this fascinating survey of European thought on race after the discovery of the New World, Blumenbach appears at the end of the story—a late figure in a discussion whose parameters had long been settled, and by thinkers now often thought of as belonging to the history of philosophy rather than natural science.

Blumenbach backed what came to be known as “monogenesis”: the view that all humans descend from a common ancestral stock, with the differences characterizing the races as having arisen in the course of migration, thanks to the (largely degenerating) effects of new diets, climates, and so on. As Justin Smith shows, monogenesis was

the default position among European thinkers, who deemed it most straightforwardly compatible with two other widely accepted ideas: the Biblical-Christian notion that all humans descend from Adam and Eve and can therefore be saved; and the Cartesian notion that all humans, and only humans, have rational souls, fundamentally distinct from their physical, machine-like bodies. Smith sees the latter as especially important. Whatever dualism’s defects, it tended, in his view, to make human racial differences seem unimportant in the big metaphysical picture, serving as a brake on the essentializing, hierarchical racism that became unfortunately commonplace in the 19th century (and Smith is very alert to the ways in which better histories of the race concept might interact fruitfully with better philosophical understandings).

A number of major European philosophers of the era come up, including Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Hume—unusual in endorsing a multiple-origins, “polygenesis” account of race origins—and Kant. But Smith casts his net more widely, dwelling instructively on several lesser-known thinkers. None serves his purposes better than Anton Wilhelm Amo, a black African who, in the early 18th century, made the remarkable journey from slave to savant thanks to the Enlightenment ideals of his master, a German duke who had the boy baptized and educated. In his philosophical writings, Amo defended a Leibnizian version of dualism, stressing preestablished harmony as accounting for the tight relation between soul and body. Later in the century, Blumenbach cited Amo’s career to illustrate the heights to which people of his race could rise.

Just as this long-run debate on race illuminates the beginnings of racialist physical anthropology, so, Smith suggests, it does likewise for the beginnings of relativist cultural anthropology, which is here (as elsewhere) credited to another Leibnizian thinker and a contemporary of Blumenbach’s, J. G. Herder. In an age that saw growing interest in anthropoid apes, and a growing willingness to depict some races as more ape-like than human, it was, writes Smith, “Herder virtually alone, among Enlightenment European thinkers, who challenges his readers to identify anything that is truly more simian about non-European groups” (p. 252).

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