CONCLUSION

The Paradox Resolved

This book opened with references to the statement on race from the American Sociological Association in 2002. That statement can be read as a summary account of what US sociologists knew about race at that time.

The director of the Association stated that race was a changing social construct that 'shapes social ranking, access to resources, and life experiences'. It was a construct *used* in ways that had these effects.[1] The full statement declared that race was

> A sorting mechanism for mating, marriage and adoption;
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> A stratifying practice for providing or denying access to resources;
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> An organizing device for mobilization to maintain or challenge systems of racial stratification;
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> A basis for scientifically investigating proximate causes.

Sociological research had shown that race was related to workplace inequalities, to residential segregation and to persistent differences in life expectancy and the incidence of particular sources of ill health.

To this was added a warning that refusal to employ racial categories in the collection of data would not eliminate their use by members of the public. 'In France, information about race is seldom collected officially, but evidence of systematic racial discrimination remains', and there was reference to experience in other countries. This observation introduced additional issues. The parallels with the problems of data collection may be close, but the variables to be measured in different countries are not at all the same. The ASA's 2002 conception of race in the United States cannot be generalized to other countries. Nevertheless, the similarities and dissimilarities should be of great interest to the sociologist.

This book has contended that what 'we' (all of us in the Western world) now know about race includes much more than knowledge

at a particular point in time (like, say, the percentages of blacks and whites holding electoral office). It includes knowledge about historical or out-of-date uses of the word 'race', and knowledge of why these have been abandoned in favour of newer uses. This is sociological knowledge as opposed to knowledge organized to serve the purposes of social policy. Any such account leaves us with a challenge: given that we know a lot about the subject, should we regard it as knowledge about race, or as knowledge about some thing or things that we have not yet properly defined? Does not the study of human variation, physical and cultural, constitute a better starting point?

What we now know about ethnicity raises similar issues. The concept of an ethnic group was introduced for practical purposes. In public life it helped identify distinctive sections of the population (like hyphenated Americans). Within social science it helped identify culturally distinctive social categories (like, say, Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba in Nigeria). The difficulties that arose in equating race in the United States with race in France, and with generalizing about racism, were repeated when sociologists asked if there might be something to be called ethnicity that helped explain what distinguished ethnic groups from other kinds of group. Does our current knowledge about what distinguishes these groups constitute knowledge about ethnicity, or knowledge about something that we have not yet been able to define adequately?

These problems are the more testing because questions of race and ethnicity have parallels in the study of nationalism and other sources of social division. One possibility canvassed in chapter 4, and subsequently, is that it would be best to follow Max Weber's lead and concentrate on what it is that stimulates individuals to identify with others and to engage in collective action when this suits their purposes. Such a strategy would reinforce the emic/etic distinction, assigning race and ethnicity to the realm of practice while impelling social scientists to seek better concepts for their technical vocabulary.

A focus upon social science knowledge will have a distinctive quality in underlining the provisional nature of what passes as knowledge at any particular time. Study of how our knowledge has grown should teach lessons that will help us acquire further knowledge.

For knowledge to grow, we need words. A person who advances a new argument has to employ the vocabulary that is familiar to those he or she wishes to address. This often means taking a word in ordinary language and using it in a new sense, as, for example, the word

'nation' has been used for new purposes. The word's meanings multiply, as, in this example, they give rise to expressions like 'nationalism' (which is not easily defined). Those who seek to systematize the new knowledge then propose technical definitions that serve a special function.

A review of the scientific sources of the paradox (in chapter 1) concluded that towards the end of the eighteenth century a new kind of knowledge about race began to take shape. It was a form of theoretical knowledge, different in character from the practical use of the word to identify either a line of ancestry or, more simply, a set of persons. Some writers tried to persuade their readers that race was a valuable addition to the scientific vocabulary. Because science seeks a special kind of knowledge, based on causal explanation, they had to formulate a nominalist rather than a realist definition of race. It had to improve on the Linnaean taxonomy that centred on the concept of species, and to contribute to the discovery of new knowledge about the origin of species. This initiative demonstrably failed. Furthermore, the very concept of species became questionable. To explain the operation of natural selection, Darwin's hypothesis of inheritance as a process of the blending of ancestral qualities was superseded by Mendel's discovery of the inheritance of particulate qualities. Superior explanations banished their predecessors and laid the foundations upon which new theoretical knowledge was systematized.

Scientists are sometimes no better than non-scientists at abandoning ideas that have been outdated. Darwin and Mendel had destroyed the prevailing doctrine that knowledge grew by induction. According to one philosophy, the research worker's task was to assemble observations or specimens and classify them. From this process new knowledge in the form of explanations or theories was expected to emerge in some unspecified manner.[2] Some twentieth-century sociologists clung to this doctrine. Thus W. Lloyd Warner introduced his study of Yankee City with the declaration:

> In general, the three characteristic activities of modern science are the observation of 'relevant' phenomena, the arrangement of the facts collected by such observation into classes and orders, and the explanation of the ordering and classification of the collected data by means of so-called laws and principles. These several observations, ideally speaking, tend to take place in the described sequence. For example, our scientific knowledge of the heavenly bodies began with the observation of the different positions of the planets and their relative position to each other. Later classification

> showed that the planets moved around the sun, and, still later, the 'law of gravitation' grouped the observed phenomena and their classification into one formula.[3]

This interpretation of progress in cosmology found no place for the imagination of geniuses like Copernicus and Galileo.

Nor did it reflect the working methods of Charles Darwin. In 1834, at the age of twenty-three and in the course of his voyage on the Beagle, he noticed seashells on a plain in Patagonia 330 feet above sea level. The geology books he had read provided no good explanation for their presence. Darwin hypothesized that they were there because the land level had been elevated by geological action. This inference was a key step in the development of his thinking about processes of evolution. After his return to Britain he tested his hypotheses in a series of small experiments, many of them in his garden in the village of Downe. There, in a letter to a friend, he remarked: 'How odd it is that anyone should not see that all observation must be for or against some view if it to be of service.'

This method of research is at the heart of the philosophy of critical rationalism pioneered by the Austrian-born philosopher of science, Karl Popper. He emphasized the importance of distinguishing between what was to be explained, the explanandum, and that which did the explaining, the explanans. He has stressed the importance of conjecture and refutation in the discovery of new knowledge. In sociology there are advantages in thinking more simply of the logic of question and answer because this draws attention to the difficulty of finding a good research question in sociology, something equivalent to Darwin's puzzlement over the sea shells, as opposed to a question concerning social policy.[4]

While the claims for race as a possible concept in science were being debated, the word was put to new uses in the realm of practical knowledge where it had a history of use in popular literature, and in the everyday need of a means for classifying the different sections of North America's growing population. In the United States, as chapter 2 insisted, racial categorization was the product not of slavery but of its abolition. It took the place of categorization as free or slave. By the late nineteenth century, the word 'race' had secured an established place in ordinary language, becoming the default position. The one-drop rule came to be accepted by blacks as well as whites. Race in this new sense gained so strong a hold on the thinking of academics as

well as members of the public that too little thought was given to its use as an intellectual tool. It was utilized in new areas while retreating from others, for with technological innovations and a greater assimilation of local community life into national life, more situations have been socially defined in ways to which the black-white distinction is irrelevant.

The political use of racial categorization in Nazi Germany was accounted one of the causes of World War II. Chapter 3 summarized the steps by which, after that war, action against racial discrimination became part of international human rights law, most notably in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The treaty obligations assumed by states parties, and the manner in which fulfilment of their obligations is monitored, are not yet properly appreciated by social scientists. The ICERD has become 'a living instrument' addressing new political issues. The Convention and these procedures drew upon, and added to, practical knowledge.

The growth of social science knowledge about race and ethnicity depends upon institutional support, notably in academic institutions. Chapter 4 summarized how the lead came from the University of Chicago's department of sociology under Robert E. Park. He had two intellectual predecessors. One was Max Weber, who had discussed the way in which a sense of shared racial, ethnic or national origin could promote community identification and action. The other was W. E. B. Du Bois, who had written what is considered the first sociological monograph and had described the international colour line. Neither of them had the institutional support to develop a research programme like Park's. The impetus to the growth of knowledge was all US-based.

Park did not start from the US ordinary language conception of 'race relations'. He sought a more general conceptual framework, but the ordinary language conception was too strong for him and the sociologists who learned from him. By the late 1930s, for lack of a better, 'race relations' had become their central organizing idea. Thereafter, the history of this field of study can be read as a sequence of efforts to find a better framework. None of the attempts so far has succeeded. The task is enormously difficult.

In his studies of the organization of social life in the Deep South, Warner minimized reference to race by relying on conceptions first of caste and class; and then of ethnic group. Cox offered a further

perspective; he explained the everyday practice of racial categorization as an imposition that served a political function. Marxists have developed it further.

The intellectual tradition established by Park turned to the notion of racism in order to incorporate the ideological dimension to intergroup relations. Just prior to the challenges posed by the US Civil Rights movement, the present author attempted to summarize the prevailing state of sociological knowledge. He presented it as built upon three lines of research: upon the study of racism as an ideology, upon prejudice as a disposition and upon discrimination as a practice. His book offered nominalist definitions and explained variations in discrimination as the outcome of transactions between the parties, but, like the US work, it drew no sharp distinction between sociology and social policy.

That distinction is important to the issues discussed in chapter 5, where it was contended that public perceptions of black-white relations were profoundly influenced by the conception of racism advanced by Carmichael and Hamilton. Theirs was a realist definition suited to a political purpose that ignored the established legal definition of racial discrimination. Uncritical adoption of the Carmichael and Hamilton conception of racism caused confusion in the UN General Assembly and elsewhere. Several respected historians have since published histories of racism, using the word to serve their political purposes. Many sociologists now proffer only examples of what they consider racism; because they assume that its essence is evil, because they want to attack evil, and evil can take many forms, they cannot define racism. Their criticism of popular assumptions about what are perceived as policy problems can be seen as contributing to practical knowledge, but tacit assumptions that ordinary language suffices for the understanding of events and sentiments hinder the acquisition of new theoretical knowledge.

That the terms 'race', 'racism' and 'ethnic group' are employed differently in different countries should not disturb the sociologist, because they are policy words or emic constructs suited to political argument. In chapter 6, Riesman's innovatory use of the word 'ethnicity' was held to be realist in character, and therefore to be contrasted with the nominalist conception underlying Barth's arguments about the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. Glazer and Moynihan, by problematizing ethnicity rather than ethnic group, publicized a realist conception of ethnicity. Research into the ability of some townspeo-

ple in Uganda to identify co-ethnics, and the circumstances in which, as a result, they behave differently, has illustrated the need for studies in which the relevant variables can be permuted. How best may such knowledge be won in the study of industrial societies?

Chapters 6 and 7 have outlined an approach informed by the philosophy of critical rationalism. They maintain that research should start from whatever is perceived to be an interesting intellectual problem. The overarching problem in this field is that of accounting for the social significance attributed to phenotypical differences among humans, compared with that attributed to cultural characteristics such as ethnic origin and socio-economic status. Since social conditions change, this includes study of how relative significance changes or is prevented from changing. If research produces unexpected findings, they constitute a particularly valuable contribution to knowledge.

The intellectual demand for better identifiers, and the practical considerations that arise from changing circumstances, meet in the categories of the US census. The projections for 2050 have been noted (see chapter 2). The statement that 'Hispanic origins are not races' will have, one day, to be revised and brought into line with measures of ethnic origins. This will have a major effect upon popular US conceptions of race. A separate and important source of change in the near future will be the identity choices of persons with multiple ethnic origins, and the options that are open to them. Their choices will reflect their appraisals of the costs and benefits of alternative social paths. Studies in the US have shown that social ranking and access to economic and social resources are influenced by shade of skin colour as well as by the black-white division. Both whites and blacks discriminate on this basis. The US, like many other societies, observes a colour scale, often as part of a more general calculation of socio-economic status. Recent studies of the bonding and bridging forms of human capital illuminate some of the variables (like trust) and their relevance in given circumstances. The strength of one variable relative to others can be measured by the experimental permutation of preferences for association with co-ethnics.

When, in 1998, the American Association of Physical Anthropologists stated that 'there is no national, religious, linguistic or cultural group or economic class that constitutes a race', it was not announcing a discovery. There never had been any national, religious, linguistic or cultural group or economic class that constituted a race. With the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that the same statement could

have been made a hundred years earlier. It was an observation that belongs within the history of theoretical knowledge. Its truth was not manifest in 1898 because it took so long for Darwin's revolution to be completed and its nature to be understood. Since that revolution is of a technical character, even today it is understood by only a small section of the general public.

The 2002 ASA statement embodied a paradox. It acknowledged that, as a concept, race had no validity in the field in which it originated, but nevertheless advocated its continued use for data collection. It defended this position by asserting that, in the United States, race is a social construct. This response does not resolve the paradox because it does not consider the purposes of data collection and whether the methods employed are the best ones for those purposes. Was there not some alternative word or set of words that could be used in ways that did not deepen the divide? Instead of subjecting use of the word to critical scrutiny, by its reference to a social construct of race the ASA statement justified prevailing practice. Its rhetoric was suited to the policy problem of the moment.

To explain how the present situation has come about, it is necessary to acknowledge the enormous power of the ordinary language conception of 'race' in the American mind. It is thought to be 'common sense'. It is reinforced by the many circumstances in which residents in the United States are required to specify their 'race'. Seven of them were by the professor mentioned in chapter 1. There may be more. Ticking one of the options offered on a form is an easy step towards the main business. That gives the options their power. Is there any reason why such forms should not follow the census and indicate that those who wish may say that they are of more than one race? An increase in the options made available in official data collection could initiate a process leading to the dissolution of the one-drop rule, and help open a previously closed relationship.

That people answer questions on these forms is evidence of the operation of a social construct, but what is it a construct of? What should it be called? Whatever it may be, this construct is unique to the United States. It was created as an elaboration of the one-drop rule, and it may disappear in the future.

The paradox can be resolved by recognizing the distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge. Practical knowledge called for the continued collection of data on socio-economic differences. Theoretical knowledge demanded the more careful identification of

the objects of study. In present circumstances it is important firstly to ascertain for what public policy purposes statistics about social differences are required, and secondly to inquire into the best ways to collect them. For the further growth of social science knowledge, the focus must be on the discovery of better explanations of human behaviour in this sphere of social life.

What we now know about race and ethnicity is a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge. While both kinds of knowledge have grown greatly since the end of World War II, theoretical knowledge might have grown better had sociologists reflected more deeply on the relation between things and words. Too often they have started their accounts by discussing the meanings of words instead of considering the purposes for which the words are used and whether they are the most appropriate words for those purposes. This is a very simple argument, but it is fundamental.

Notes

1. The italics have been added to emphasize that the words that follow about 'the role and consequences of race in primary social institutions and environments' are not intended to represent race as something which itself acts upon persons and things.
2. Joseph Agassi, *Towards an Historiography of Science* ('S-Gravenhage: Mouton; *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Beiheft 2,* 1963).
3. W. Lloyd Warner and P. S. Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community,* Yankee City Series, vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 8–9.
4. See Popper's essay on 'The Logic of the Social Sciences' in *In Search of a Better World: Lectures and Essays from Thirty Years* (London: Routledge, 1994), especially the Sixth thesis, 66–67; the Tenth thesis, 69–72, can be ignored. Popper had little to say about the origin of hypotheses or about how experimentalists responded when their hypotheses were not confirmed. Thomas Kuhn's account of scientific revolutions suggested that science was most constructive when it upheld a system of popular, or 'normal', theories, even despite anomalous findings. Imre Lakatos combined Popper's adherence to empirical validity with Kuhn's appreciation for conventional consistency when he identified a 'progressive research programme' as based on a hard core of theoretical assumptions such that an apparent anomaly occasioned a problem shift rather than the abandonment of the core theory. See Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).