

'Race' in Light of Spiritual Science

Note on Terminology

The term 'race' was used in theosophical literature at the end of the 19th century without the connotations that were added during the 20th century. Whereas currently the word 'race' today is coupled immediately to judgements and implications of inequality and discrimination, in the spiritual scientific context it had a purely technical' explanatory meaning in an evolutionary framework.

Quotes from early theosophical sources such as Helena Blavatsky contain the terms 'root race' and 'sub-race' to denote the epoch and cultural ages, however in earlier epochs the different periods also had a very different constitution and were truly different races. Rudolf Steiner mentioned that for the Atlantean epoch, one could not talk about different races for each of the seven periods in that epoch, but that the term 'race' loses its meaning in the current Postatlantean epoch for a number of reasons (see eg 1908-08-16-GA105 and 1909-12-04-GA117 below). Hence for the current epoch the sub-periods are denoted by the term 'cultural age'.

Difference between soul development and race development

Rudolf Steiner talks about the sensitivity of the human race topic in 1910-06-11-GA121, and how a broader spiritual scientific perspective (including a view on reincarnation and evolution) is required versus the contemporary materialistic view. We need to contemplate our spiritual 'I' and look at all aspects of races and peoples in an objective way, knowing:

.. we may be sure that in our inmost being we shall receive the countless blessings of all races and all peoples since we ourselves are incarnated in different races at different times.

and

Since all men in their different incarnations pass through the various races, the claim that the European is superior to the black and yellow races has no real validity.

For a more extensive explanation, see 1912-05-29-GA155, from which the short quote below was taken.

A human soul can develop in such a way that in one incarnation it embodies itself in a particular race. If in this race it gains certain qualities, it may re-embody itself in a later incarnation in an entirely different one; so that we may find incarnated in Europe at the present day souls which in a previous incarnation were embodied in India, Japan or China. The souls do not by any means remain in the same race, for

soul development is quite different from race development, which goes its peaceful way forward. ... This is a definite process, which we must grasp. ... For this reason we must be careful to distinguish between soul development and race development. The souls reappear in the bodies belonging to higher races, the lower race bodies die out.

Sensitivity of the topic

The use of the term race shifted dramatically over time due to a multitude of developments whereby people discriminated because of colour and race came up for equality of human rights. This was especially the case in the 20th century (see examples below), but finds its longer origin in the historical concept of slavery. Slavery was common and widespread in ancient cultures upto Greece and Rome, and upto the middle ages. It was a result of the conquest by people and nations of other geographies and people, where they found or perceived people to be weaker or inferior and/or treated them as such. As milestone illustrations in recent history:

- the abolishment of slavery, eg in the United States (1789-1861) where the human chattel enslavement of africans and african americans was legally instituted
- the independance of people discriminated and supressed in the colonies by Western states, an example being India (1893-1947), see eg Gandhi and nonviolent resistance against the discrimination of the native Indian people by the British rule
- the use of the term in Nazi Germany (1933-1945), and the racial policy as a result of views of superiority of the notherwestern-european 'aryan' race as described by Hitler. Linked to this are often out-of-context erroneous interpretations of Nietzsche's writings or statements by Wagner.
- the civil rights movement against racial discrimination in the United States (1954-1968), see Martin Luther King
- the quest for equality by people discriminated and supressed because of colour and race within a state, an example being South Africa (1948-1990s), see eg Nelson Mandela and the institutionalized racial segregation called 'Apartheid'.

All human spirits are 'on the way' in their development, and human race should not be used in any discriminating way. To give a value judgement depending on how fast certain parts of a population evolve, would be as ridiculous as saying that only the fastest growing grapes are good, or only the best sportsmen are worthy of the sport. Nevertheless, the **parable of the Sower** remains as well, and can be meditated upon along with 1908-05-16-GA102.

The above is just a small part of a much larger study on the subject of 'race' and how it is used and meant in Spiritual Science. To read the study in full, it can be found on the [FreemanCreator website](https://anthroposophy.eu).

Source: https://anthroposophy.eu/Human_races



