
*The Cattell Controversy: Race, Science, and Ideology*
by William H. Tucker

**Original review:** Eugenicism, Bigotry, and Stirring the Embers of a Troubling Episode

**Author response:** Dearth of Evidence: Response to “Eugenicism, Bigotry, and Stirring the Embers of a Troubling Episode” (A Review of *The Cattell Controversy: Race, Science, and Ideology*)

William H. Tucker

Although Frank Dumont’s review of my book *The Cattell Controversy: Race, Science, and Ideology* notes that “there are several varieties” (Conclusion section, para. 1) of eugenics, he provides not a single word about Cattell’s version—the book’s central issue. Throughout his career Cattell believed that the morality of an act was to be determined by the degree to which it facilitated evolutionary progress. The role of scientists in his view—indeed, an important motivation for his interest in trait measurement—was to provide data necessary to determine which racial groups were best suited for evolutionary advance and which should be left behind. Such “scientific” judgments were then to be translated into action, producing elimination of the latter groups by what Cattell called “humane methods.”

Dumont states that over time Cattell “reworked his personal conceptualization . . . [of eugenics] into a less politically and ethically repugnant system” (Conclusion section, para. 1) and suggests that it is “bias” (Beyondism section, para. 2) on my part to conclude that his later writings were simply euphemistic versions of his earlier ideas. However, having provided neither information about Cattell’s belief system nor any example of my putative
bias, he thus leaves readers mystified about the substance of Cattell’s thoughts, either early or late in his career. Let me offer three brief comparisons of the former with the latter.

In the 1930s, Cattell argued for the “replacement of indubitably backward people by a more evolved stock,” a process in which, “by gradual restriction of births, and by life in adapted reserves and asylums, . . . the races which have served their turn [must] be brought to euthanasia” (Tucker, 2009, p. 94). In 1972, he again called for the extinction of “failing” races, lest the earth “be choked with . . . more primitive forerunners” and coined the neologism “genthanasia” for the necessary process of “phasing out . . . a moribund culture . . . by educational and birth control measures” (Tucker, 2009, pp. 118–119).

As one of the backward groups slated for elimination, in the 1930s Cattell named “the Negro,” who “has established a stable culture . . . but has contributed practically nothing to social progress and culture” (Tucker, 2009, p. 94). In 1972, he offered the hypothetical example of a society in which a capable race was threatened by the “parasitism” of a less-intelligent race with genes for resistance to malaria (Tucker, 2009, p. 112). The identity of the parasitic group is hardly a mystery to anyone familiar with elementary genetics.

In the 1930s, Cattell wrote that “repeopling, by more intelligent and alert peoples, of parts of the earth possessed by backward people is merely following the highest moral considerations” (Tucker, 2009, p. 89). In 1972, he called for “failing groups . . . to go the wall, or be radically re-constituted, possibly by outside intervention,” whereas “successful groups . . . should increase their power, influence and size of population” (Tucker, 2009, p. 118). I leave it to readers to judge whether Dumont’s charge of “bias” is warranted or whether Cattell’s later writing is “less politically and ethically repugnant” (Conclusion section, para. 1).

Dumont also claims that I made “ad personam attacks” (Cattell Convention section, para 5) on individuals. I certainly described instances in which Cattell’s defenders published gross distortions of events or outright fiction, but these are criticisms of their academic behavior, not their personal characteristics. In any event, Dumont offers neither example nor evidence of an ad personam attack on my part, so it is difficult to know what he has in mind.

Dumont terms it a “judgment call whether one’s science is separable from one’s related ideological convictions” (Crux of the Controversy section, para. 2) and summarizes my argument as insisting that Cattell’s “racism . . . must have seeped into his trait psychology” (Conclusion section, para. 1). The connection between Cattell’s racial ideology (nowhere do I refer to his “racism”) is neither a judgment call nor an inference on my part. It is Cattell, not I, who insisted throughout his career that a major purpose of his work on trait measurement—indeed, the reason that he relinquished a promising career in the physical sciences to pursue the relatively new field of psychology—was to be able to assess the value of both individuals and races so that the appropriate eugenic actions could be taken.

Moreover, Dumont calls Elie Wiesel’s comparison of Cattell’s ideas with Nazi theories a “calumny,” one that justified an “unscheduled intervention” (Cattell Convention section, para. 4) at the end of Wiesel’s keynote address to correct the error. Yet again he
offers no explanation of the basis for Wiesel’s remarks nor any evidence for his own characterization of them. During the Nazi era Cattell referred to the Jews in Europe as “parasites” and declared that “hatred and abhorrence . . . for the Jewish practice of living in other nations” was inaccurately considered “prejudice” only by those unable to appreciate the biological rationale for these sentiments (Tucker, 2009, p. 81). I find nothing calumnious about Wiesel’s observation, nor, a fortiori, do I see any justification for the disruption.

A final point of clarification: According to Dumont, my concern about Cattell’s views is that they “are anathema to the majority of people” (Crux of the Controversy section, para. 2). This is incorrect. As my book emphasizes, what I find troublesome is that Cattell’s scientifically derived morality calls for egregious violations of the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, among other foundations of social justice and individual liberties. Indeed, if his ideas enjoyed support from “the majority of people,” I would be even more concerned.

Having written books on controversial topics, I expect opposition. But serious charges—of bias, ad personam attacks, and calumny—completely devoid of supporting evidence constitute a pronouncement, not an academic argument, and do not seem to me to advance the discussion of these serious issues.

Editor’s note.

Frank Dumont reviewed these comments by William H. Tucker but believes that his original critique is still valid.