

Martin Luther King's Powerful Critique of Scientific Racism, Scientific Materialism

John G. West (<https://evolutionnews.org/author/jwest/>).

January 18, 2019, 3:35 PM



On this Martin Luther King Day weekend, I will be visiting Athens, Texas (https://www.athensreview.com/news/local_news/director-to-screen-human-zoos-here/article_b2dea09c-19cd-11e9-8acc-53c72a9c05b3.html) (a town south of Dallas) for a free public screening (<https://humanzoos.org/athens/>) of my documentary *Human Zoos* (<https://humanzoos.org/>), which explores the sordid legacy of scientific racism and eugenics in America. I'd like to think that the event will be a fitting activity for MLK Day weekend, because King was a powerful opponent of both scientific racism and scientific materialism.

Dr. King accepted the animal ancestry of humans as taught by Darwinian evolution, but he was sharply critical of the misuse of science to promote racial discrimination, and he also spoke forcefully against the idea that humans are the products of a blind material process.

Many of King's thoughts on science are interspersed throughout a short book titled *Strength to Love* (https://www.amazon.com/Strength-Love-Martin-Luther-King/dp/0800697405/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=strength+to+love&qid=1548184677&sr=8-1), a collection of sermons King originally

published in 1963. I've been reading the book on my trip to Texas, and much of its wisdom is just as pertinent today as when the book was first published.

Strength to Love

With regard to scientific racism, King lamented that "Science was commandeered to prove the biological inferiority of the Negro" (p. 37) and he spoke of how segregationists "turn to some pseudo-scientific writing and argue that the Negro's brain is smaller than the white man's brain." (p. 38) King argued that the real findings of science didn't support such claims: "They do not know, or they refuse to know, that the idea of an inferior or superior race has been refuted by the best evidence of the science of anthropology... although there may be inferior and superior individuals within all races, there is no superior or inferior race."

With regard to scientific materialism, King was searing:

To believe that human personality is the result of the fortuitous interplay of atoms and electrons is as absurd as to believe that a monkey by hitting typewriter keys at random will eventually produce a Shakespearean play. Sheer magic! It is much more sensible to say with Sir James Jeans, the physicist, that "the universe seems to be nearer to a great thought than to a great machine," or with Arthur Balfour, the philosopher, that "we now know too much about matter to be materialists." Materialism is a weak flame that is blown out by the breath of mature thinking. (p. 70)

King added in another chapter that "This universe is not a tragic expression of meaningless chaos but a marvelous display of orderly cosmos." (p. 128)

King and Intelligent Design

I have no idea what King would have thought of the modern theory of intelligent design, but many of the ideas he expressed in *Strength to Love* are certainly friendly to intelligent design.

Like C.S. Lewis (<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1936599058/?tag=discoveryinsti06>), King also was a fierce critic of scientism, the claim that modern science is the only route to truth and the accessory claims that we must now rely on science to save society from its problems. At one point, King mockingly wrote that modern man had rewritten the Twenty-Third psalm as:

*Science is my shepherd; I shall not want.
It maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
It leadeth me beside the still waters.
It restoreth my soul....
I will fear no evil: for science is with me;
Its rod and its staff they comfort me. (p. 71)*

“Then Came the Explosion”

King observed that “Those who formerly turned to God to find solutions for their problems turned to science and technology, convinced that they now possessed the instruments needed to usher in the new society.” King thought that Darwinian theory in particular had been used to promote this kind of utopian thinking: “Herbert Spencer skillfully molded the Darwinian theory of evolution into the heady idea of automatic progress. Men became convinced that there is a sociological law of progress that is as valid as the physical law of gravitation.” (p. 70) But things didn’t work out quite the way some had hoped:

Then came the explosion of this myth. It climaxed in the horrors of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and in the fierce fury of fifty-megaton bombs. Now we have come to see that science can give us only physical power, which, if not controlled by spiritual power, will lead inevitably to cosmic doom. (p. 71)

King was not anti-science. He acknowledged that “The achievements of science have been marvelous, tangible, and concrete.” (p. 70) But he warned that “The means by which we live have outdistanced the ends for which we live. Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power.” (p. 73)

Sobering words, but worth pondering — perhaps even more so now than when they were first written.

*Photo: Martin Luther King, 1963, via [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:USMC-09611.jpg)
(<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:USMC-09611.jpg>).*