

Nuance Lost in Translation

Interpretations of J. F. Blumenbach's Anthropology in the English Speaking World

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Nuancen, die in der Übersetzung verloren gegangen sind. Interpretationen von J. F. Blumenbachs Anthropologie in der englischsprachigen Welt

Johann Friedrich Blumenbach wird wegen seiner wegweisenden Arbeiten über menschliche Populationen als „Vater der physischen Anthropologie“ bezeichnet. Er entwarf eine Typologie, die fünf Hauptvarietäten der Menschheit unterschied. Seit den 1990er Jahren haben Londa Schiebinger und andere englischsprachige Autoren argumentiert, dass Blumenbachs Schriften über menschliche Populationen zeigten, dass er von Rassentheoretikern des 19. Jahrhunderts beeinflusst worden sei, die Europäer bzw. Kaukasier als höchste und schönste Menschen-„Rasse“ betrachteten. Die neueren Autoren bezogen sich hierbei jedoch weitgehend auf die englische Übersetzung von Blumenbachs ursprünglich lateinischen und deutschen Texten durch Thomas Bendyshe. Wie ich zeigen werde, enthält Bendyshe's Ausgabe zahlreiche Fehler, die einem bestimmten Muster folgen und die dokumentieren, dass er auf zwei Übersetzer zurückgriff. Während der erste Übersetzer im Einklang mit fünf früheren englischen Übersetzungen stand, fehlte diese Übereinstimmung bei dem zweiten Übersetzer. Doch auch dieser gebrauchte englische Begriffe, die Nicht-Europäer abwerteten und Europäer hervorhoben. Zudem verwendete Bendyshe's Übersetzung von 1865 durchgängig allein den Begriff „beauty“, um unterschiedliche lateinische Worte zu übersetzen, die Blumenbach gebrauchte, um seine differenzierten Ansichten über Ästhetik und körperliche Symmetrie auszudrücken. In Anbetracht der Widersprüchlichkeiten und der Fehler in Bendyshe's Übersetzung von 1865 sollte sie nicht unhinterfragt als eine zutreffende Wiedergabe von Blumenbachs Ansichten akzeptiert werden.

Schlüsselwörter: Blumenbach, Bendyshe, Anthropological Society of London, Rasse, Rassistische Überlegenheit

Johann Friedrich Blumenbach has been called 'The Father of Physical Anthropology' because of his pioneering publications describing human racial variation. He proposed a racial typology consisting of five 'major varieties/races' of humanity. Since the 1990s, Londa Schiebinger and other Anglophone scholars have argued that Blumenbach's writings on race show evidence that he was significantly influenced by nineteenth-century race supremacist beliefs which held Europeans/Caucasians to be the highest ranked and most beautiful race. However, these modern authors relied largely on Thomas Bendyshe's 1865 English translations of Blumenbach's Latin and German texts. As documented herein, Bendyshe's publication includes numerous translation errors which form a pattern indicating that he employed two translators. The first translator was consistent with five earlier English translations. The second translator was not consistent with the earlier translators. This second translator also used English terms that denigrated extra-Europeans while adulating Europeans. Furthermore, Bendyshe's 1865 translation regularly used the term 'beauty' to translate different Latin words that Blumenbach used to express his nuanced view of aesthetics and structural symmetry. Given the inconsistency and errors in Bendyshe's 1865 translations, they should not be unquestionably accepted as an accurate reflection of Blumenbach's views.

Keywords: Blumenbach, Bendyshe, Anthropological Society of London, Race, Race supremacy

Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840) was a pivotal figure in the early development of what is now called physical anthropology, specifically through his research relating to human polytypic variation (or ‘human biodiversity’), commonly known as ‘race’.¹ During his lifetime, Blumenbach’s research was highly respected by scholars throughout the world. It was praised by both those who accepted and rejected the proposition that racial supremacy was a naturally occurring phenomenon.² In recent decades, however, there has been a lively debate among Anglophone historians as to whether or not Blumenbach held strong personal or culturally informed ethnocentric biases; and whether said biases inordinately influenced his research on human biodiversity. It is my contention that Blumenbach’s writings were not significantly marred by ethnocentric bias, and that many modern Anglophone historians have misinterpreted Blumenbach’s views because they relied on poorly translated English renditions of Blumenbach’s major Latin and German writings as published in 1865 by Thomas Bendyshe (1827–1886) on behalf of the Anthropological Society of London (ASL). In the following paper, I will trace how Blumenbach’s once stellar reputation as a venerated scholar has become tarnished in the eyes of many modern authors. I will then document the presence of multiple translation errors in Bendyshe’s translation, which form a discernable pattern. Lastly, I will examine how these errors appear to have influenced modern Anglophone scholars into reaching conclusions about Blumenbach that warrant being revised or rejected, given the nature of Bendyshe’s errors as detailed herein.

The methodology used in this paper is somewhat unconventional. It was conducted by extensive cross-referencing of primary source materials without an initial hypothesis. In 1988, I conducted an osteological study of human skulls including those of West Africans and East Asian populations (Michael 1988: 349–354). When, in 2011, I read Bendyshe’s translation of Blumenbach’s text, which described East Asians as being characterised by an “apish” nose and West Africans as having a “knotty” forehead, I was puzzled (Bendyshe 1865a: 265–266). Such descriptions lacked even a remote relationship to any anatomical features I had ever observed in those populations. This led me to suspect a mistranslation of Blumenbach’s original texts, which were posted online at www.blumenbach-online.de. I consulted a professional Latin translator, who identified translation irregularities scattered throughout Bendyshe’s passages describing skull anatomy. I then located six English translations of the works of Blumenbach – now posted on the Internet – which were published between 1807 and 1852, well before Bendyshe’s translation.³ These early nineteenth-century texts provided six neutral translators who were, of course, blind to my inquiry. After reading these primary sources, I posited the hypothesis that Bendyshe, or the trans-

lators who assisted him, mistranslated Blumenbach's works to make them reflect the translator's bigoted outlook, and not Blumenbach's egalitarian views.

Blumenbach and His Research into Racial Variation

Born into a family of academics, young Blumenbach excelled in anatomy while at college (Marx 1841b: 8). After receiving his medical degree from Göttingen University, he was appointed as a curator of its natural history museum (Bendyshe 1865a: 44). Blumenbach was also the first western scholar to describe the platypus (Gascoigne 1994: 155). For decades, Blumenbach was a popular Göttingen anatomy professor, whose students appreciated his dry yet instructive sense of humor (Ticknor 1909: 80; Calvert 1857: 603). For example, his quirky tale of a sloth that disembarked from Noah's Ark and slowly crept all the way to Brazil reflected Blumenbach's distaste for the literal interpretation of the Bible (Bendyshe 1865a: 68). In time, Blumenbach rose to international fame, publishing popular and widely translated books (Weir 1831: 146). He was a leading Enlightenment era biological theorist praised by Immanuel Kant as well as a museologist who accumulated natural science specimens shipped to him from throughout the world (Brace 2005: 46, Gascoigne 1994: 155). Blumenbach was also notorious for giving joke-laden tours of the museum he so proudly helped to build (Weir 1830: 147). When he died at the age of 88, he was venerated for educating a generation of scholars, including the celebrated Alexander von Humboldt (Marx 1841a: 249).

Blumenbach's research into human anatomy – along with that of Carl Linnaeus, the Comte de Buffon, and Petrus Camper – served as the foundation for what nineteenth-century scholars variously called 'ethnology,' 'anthropology,' or the 'science of man' (Hrdlička 1919: 30; Vermeulen 2015: 4–5). Today, Blumenbach is best known for establishing a five part naming system (or typology) to describe what he (1795: 284) called "*generis humani varietates quinae principes, species vero unica* (five principle varieties of human kind, but one species)." Blumenbach (1779: 63–64) initially proposed that humanity was mostly composed of five interrelated populations in his 1779 *Handbuch der Naturgeschichte (Handbook of Natural History)*. He numbered these five varieties, giving them general geographical descriptors until 1793, when he gave them unique names (Vermeulen 2015: 372). A year later, writing in English, Blumenbach (1794: 193) described what he called the "five races of the human species, viz. 1. the Caucasian; 2. the Mongolian; 3. the Malay; 4. the Ethiopian; 5. the American."

Blumenbach popularized these five terms in his 1795 masterwork, *De generis humani varietate nativa* 3rd Edition (henceforth *De Generis III*). However, other scholars had previously introduced these five terms to describe racial or linguistic groups (Demel 2012: 61; Keevak 2011: 74; Augstine 1999a: 83 and 1999b: 64). *De Generis III*, also known as *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind* (Smith 2015: 253), represented the synthesis of twenty years' worth of research Blumenbach published in the fields of physical anthropology, comparative anatomy, and theoretical biology.

De Generis III included the now famous fold-out drawing of five skulls (see Fig. 1). Blumenbach (1795: 206–211) asserted that for humans, there was a spectrum of possible skull shapes, ranging from one extreme (his “Mongolian” variety represented by a Tungus to the far left) to the other extreme (his “Ethiopian” variety represented by Guinean to the far right). Blumenbach used this drawing to illustrate how the skull form of the Caucasian Variety was intermediate in shape relative to the two above noted extremes. To view Fig. 1 in proper context, one must keep in mind that within *De Generis III*, Blumenbach (1795: 172–173) also discussed the spectrum of human eye colours, from the extreme blue color to intermediate light brown, and then to the extreme dark brown. Blumenbach (1795: 166–167) also addressed the spectrum of hair types ranging from the extreme fair hair of Europeans to the black hair of Mongolians, Americans, and Malays, and then to the extreme black curly hair of his Ethiopian Variety. Additionally, Blumenbach (1795: 121) stated that skin color ranged from white (*albus*) to tan, and then to “*ad piceam usque nigrenem* (jet black).” For Blumenbach, human traits, including skull shape, had a tremendous plasticity of possible options, all ranging within two extremes.

As documented by Junker (2017: in press), the drawing in Fig. 1 has become a point of controversy. Authors from Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1835: 55–56) to Stephen Gould (1996: 410) have interpreted it as an illustration of genealogical lineage implying a hierarchical ranking of the Caucasian variety above the four others. Such interpretations are likely influenced by Blumenbach's speculation that the first autochthonous human population (*primos humani generis avtochthones*) probably originated in the Caucasian Mountains, and that modern Caucasus mountaineers possess a primogenital (*primigenia*) skull shape (Blumenbach 1795: 303–304). Indeed, it can be tempting for modern readers to view Fig. 1 as sort of flattened out Darwinian-style family tree, with Caucasians situated at the base or the center. But such an interpretation risks veering into presentism. For as Gren and Depew note, pre-Darwinian era scholars openly accepted “an order of nature [...] simply as the order it is” (Gren & Depew 2004: 136) without the assumption that two species or subspecies with similar features had to be somehow related. No doubt, historians will continue to contemplate

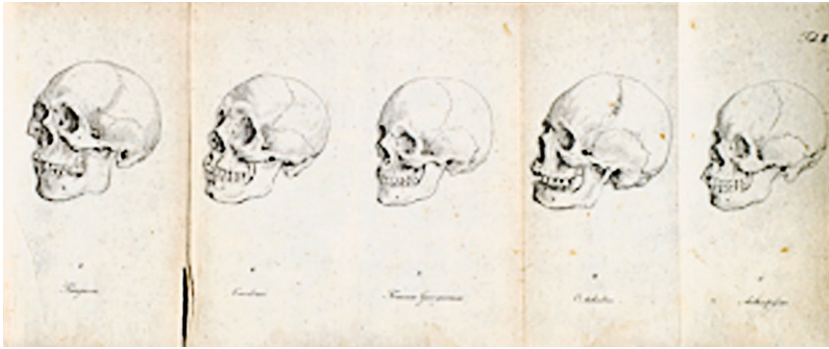


Fig. 1 The spectrum of potential human skull shapes as published in *De Generis III*. (Image courtesy of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Project “Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – online”)

the philosophical significance of Fig. 1. However, for the purposes of this paper, Fig. 1 is presented to document Blumenbach’s assertion that humanity possessed a gradually changing, rainbow-like spectrum of anatomical features.

***De Generis III*: Human Biodiversity as a Biological Cline**

The genesis of *De Generis III* can be traced to 1775, when Blumenbach completed his Göttingen University doctoral dissertation pioneering the use of comparative anatomy to analyze human diversity. In 1776, this dissertation was published in book form as *De generis humani varietate nativa liber* (henceforth *De Generis I*). Montague (1942: 369) hailed *De Generis I* as “marking the birth” of physical anthropology. *De Generis I* discussed human biodiversity differently from philosophers Henry Hume and Immanuel Kant, whose prior writings on race were more theoretical, with limited references and scant discussions of internal anatomy (Augstine 1996: 10; Mikkelson 2013: 55, 125, 169). Like most of Blumenbach’s publications, *De Generis I* was rigorously footnoted, but verbose. As his friend, the Jewish German physician K. F. H. Marx noted, “Grammar had sometimes to give way” when it came to Blumenbach’s “cursory discourse for his immediate subjects (*Die Grammatik musste zuweilen in der flüchtigen Rede seinen momentanen Zwecken dienen*)” (Bendyshe 1865a: 30; Marx: 1840: 36).

For Blumenbach, the principle focus of *De Generis I* was simply to determine if humans “of all times and of every race” belonged to one species

or multiple species (Bendyshe 1865a: 98; Blumenbach 1776: 39). His conclusion was:

For although there seems to be so great a difference between widely separate nations (*inter remotiores gentes interesse videatur differentia*) [...] yet when the matter is thoroughly considered you see that all do so run into one another, and that one variety of mankind does so sensibly pass into the other, that you cannot mark out the limits between them (*ita omnes inter se confluere quasi et sensim unam in alteram transire hominum varietatem videbis ut vix ac ne vix quidem limites inter eas constituere poteris*). (Bendyshe 1865a: 98–99; Blumenbach 1776: 40–41).

As this quote indicates, Blumenbach asserted that all forms of humanity sprang from one origin, a theory known as ‘monogenism.’ According to Blumenbach, the human species was a continuum of slightly different, inter-related adjacent populations that would now be called a ‘biological cline’ or ‘racial spectrum.’⁴ In *De Generis I*, Blumenbach emphasized that any man-made typology used to describe human biodiversity would be fundamentally arbitrary. He noted: “Very arbitrary indeed both in number and definition have been allotted the varieties of mankind accepted by eminent men (*Maxime arbitrariae ideo et numero et definitione euaserunt quas Cl. Viri receperunt generis humani varietates*).” (Bendyshe 1865a: 99; Blumenbach 1776: 41)

In *De Generis I*, Blumenbach’s typology included only four primary varieties, roughly corresponding to Americans, East Asians, Sub-Saharan Africans, and Indo-European/North African Peoples (Blumenbach 1776: 41–42). However, Blumenbach eventually received field reports – and even some human skulls – brought back from the South Pacific by explorers (Gascoigne 1994: 150–153, Vermeulen 2015: 372). Based on this evidence, Blumenbach concluded that Pacific peoples (Polynesians, Micronesians, Papuans, native Australians, and others) constituted a variety that was sufficiently different from all other Asians as to warrant being designated as a unique variety. Thus, when Blumenbach (1781a: 52) published an updated second edition of *De Generis* (henceforth *De Generis II*), he split the peoples of the Old World Pacific watersheds into two groups: Australians/Pacific Islanders (which he later called the ‘Malay Variety’) and Far Easterners from northern/central Asia (later given the name ‘Mongolian Variety’).

De Generis II also included a new first chapter in which Blumenbach (1781b: 1) discussed his theory of *Bildungstrieb*, often translated as “formative drive”. According to Blumenbach’s theory, there was a force that caused living organisms to grow in various ways, just as there is a gravitational force that caused inanimate objects to move in various directions

(Lenoir 1980: 77). Blumenbach proposed that *Bildungstrieb* could explain why embryos developed, new-borns matured, wounds healed, and adults aged.

In 1789, Blumenbach wrote about his biological theories in a more digestible form in a paper entitled “*Über Menschen-Racen und Schweine-Racen* (On Human Races and Swine Races),” which was later published in English as “Comparison between the Human Races and Swine.” (Blumenbach 1789: 1–13, 1799a: 284–290). In this publication, Blumenbach proposed that wild pigs lived in an environment that was relatively uniform. But when populations of physically uniform wild pigs were raised by humans in different settings and with different diets, they transformed into the anatomically diverse domesticated breeds of Old World pigs whose spectrum of skin colours parallels those of humans (Blumenbach 1789: 10, Banton 1998: 6). Blumenbach further noted that when European pig breeds were introduced to the diverse environments of the New World, it only took a few centuries for even more breeds to develop with unique features like fused toes or enormous overall size (Blumenbach 1789: 13). Blumenbach proposed that same environmental process that modified pig breeds also modified human populations.

Blumenbach asserted that the anatomy of humans is akin to that of domesticated animals. Thus, “Man is a domesticated animal” (*Der Mensch ist ein Hausthier*) (Bendyshe 1865a: 340; Blumenbach 1811: 43). However, humans were unique among domesticated animals in that they were “created by nature immediately a domestic animal. The exact original wild condition of most of the domestic animals is known. But no one knows the exact original wild condition of man (*Aber man kennt nicht einen bestimmten natürlichen wilden Zustand des Menschen*)” (Bendyshe 1865a: 294; Blumenbach 1806: 40). In other words, humans had no wild progenitor. Humanity’s innate domestication explained why they showed the same sort of diverse variation as domesticated animals, and not the anatomical uniformity of a wild species. Although Blumenbach admitted to knowing little of humanity’s original population, he nonetheless wrote that the first humans were a light-skinned population (Spencer 1997: 184).

As an anatomy professor, Blumenbach examined a collection of human skulls used in classroom demonstrations. This collection, housed in Göttingen University’s museum, numbered 85 specimens when Blumenbach began to curate it. When he died in 1840, it had grown to 245 “whole skulls and fragments (*ganze Schädel und Schädelfragmente*)” (Bendyshe 1865a: 348; Wagner 1856: 235). Between 1789 and 1828, Blumenbach published a series of seven papers describing selected skulls and crania from his collection (Blumenbach 1789). He wrote like a biologist describing a newly discovered species of plant or animal. The first six of these articles pre-

sented a description and drawing of ten skulls or crania. Today, all these articles are jointly known as the *Decas Cranorium* (Skulls in Groups of Ten). Blumenbach published three of these papers (henceforth *Decas I–III*) in 1789, 1792, 1795 (Blumenbach 1789). Thus, he possessed 30 rigorously examined specimens, which he could possibly include as illustrations in *De Generis III* of 1795. However, 11 of the specimens were immature, jawless, or mostly toothless.⁵ Thus, Blumenbach’s collection, only included 19 skulls complete enough for him to use when illustrating the craniofacial features for his ‘primary varieties.’ He only had 19 skulls to use for what modern anthropologists call a ‘type specimen’ or ‘holotype.’⁶ Blumenbach (1795: 324–326) chose five of these 19 skulls to use as holotypes for the American, Caucasian, Ethiopian, Malay, and Mongolian racial varieties he discussed in *De Generis III*.

Blumenbach was also interested in the intangible functions of the brain. In 1787, he published a paper whose English title was “Observations on the Bodily Conformation and Mental Capacities of the Negroes” (Blumenbach 1799b: 141). Blumenbach’s conclusion was that “the negroes, in regards to their mental facilities and capacity (*natürlichen Geistesanlagen und Fähigkeiten*), are not inferior to the rest of the human race” (Blumenbach 1799b: 143, 1787: 4). Blumenbach (1806: 88–91) collected books written by West African-born authors like Phillis Wheatley (1753–1784) to document the high mental capabilities inherent in people of West African ancestry. To that end, Blumenbach also corresponded with West African-born Britons including the author Olaudah Equiano (1745–1797) and the stage actor Ignatius Sancho (1729–1780), whom Blumenbach eventually met (Blumenbach 1806: 90).

When the abolitionist Jesuit Henri Grégoire (1750–1831) was preparing his classic ‘pro-Negro’ treatise, *De la Littérature des nègres*, Blumenbach lent him a book of Wheatley’s poems (Shields 2008: 52).⁷ The German philosopher Johann Gruber (1774–1851) credited Blumenbach with defending “the unity of mankind (*die Einheit Menschengeschlechtes*)” when “slave traders (*Sklavenhändler*)” needed to be woken from “their slumber” (quoted in Junker 2017: in press; Gruber 1798: viii–ix). The German physiologist Friedrich Tiedemann (1881–1861) described his “venerable friend Blumenbach and Bishop Gregory” as “defenders of the intellectual powers of Negroes” (1836: 524). The Quaker abolitionist Wilson Armistead (1819–1868) argued that Blumenbach’s research indicated that “there is no characteristic whatever in the organization of the skull or brain of the Negro, which affords a presumption of inferior endowment either of the intellectual or moral faculties” (1848: 52). The French physiologist Jean Pierre Flourens (1794–1867) wrote that for Blumenbach “all men are born or might have been born from the same man. He calls the negroes our

black brothers (Il appelle les nègres nos frères noirs)” (Bendyshe 1865a: 60; Flourens 1847: 17, emphasis in the original). Marx (1841a: 226–227, 1840: 10) recalled that:

At a period when negroes and savages were regarded as half animals, and when the idea of the emancipation of slaves had not begun to excite interest, Blumenbach raised his voice in order to shew [sic] that their psychical [sic] qualities were not inferior to those of Europeans.

In 1795, Blumenbach synthesized the above noted publications along with other research and created *De Generis III*. According to Demel (2012:64), this book differed so much from *De Generis II* that it was essentially an altogether new publication. Today *De Generis III* is mostly remembered for popularizing Blumenbach’s five-part typology.

Interpretations of Blumenbach in the Late Nineteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries

During the early nineteenth century, Blumenbach’s biological theories were embraced by leading scholars (Vermeulen 2015: 376). Tiedemann (1816: 3) dedicated a book to him, as did the British scholars of racial variation, William Lawrence (1819: v) and James Prichard (1826: iii). Blumenbach was hailed as the paramount authority on ‘race,’ even by those who supported polygenism. The French zoologist and polygenist Isidore Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire (1805–1861) incorrectly claimed that “*La valeur inégale de ces races au point de vue taxonomique est aussi au moins implicitement reconnue par Blumenbach* (The unequal importance [value] of these races in a zoological point of view is also at least by implication admitted by Blumenbach)” (1860–1863: 15; Bendyshe 1865a: x).

During the Darwinian era, Blumenbach’s non-evolution based theories were largely abandoned. The ardent evolutionist Henry Huxley (1825–1895) also criticized Blumenbach’s fivefold typology as arbitrary. Huxley, who was a monogenist, described Blumenbach as one of a number of “rational monogenists” who were nonetheless “not worthy of much attention” (Huxley 1865: 273). Ironically, Blumenbach was celebrated by one of Huxley’s intellectual adversaries, James Hunt (1833–1869), a fervently polygenist speech therapist (Sera-Shriar 2013: 126). Hunt’s wealth was such that he was able to fund the foundation of the Anthropological Society of London (Sera-Shriar 2013: 111). Hunt’s ASL published Bendyshe’s 1865 English translations of *De Generis I* and *III*, which became

become the standard text quoted by modern Anglophone scholars from Montague (1964: 41) to Gould (1996: 411–412).

The ASL was dedicated to the study of physical anthropology from a race supremacist perspective influenced by the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox (1791–1862) (Sera-Shriar 2013: 111). According to Knox the “human character, individual and national, is traceable solely to the nature of that race to which the individual or nation belongs” (1850: 7). Hunt unambiguously wrote that “the Negro is inferior intellectually to the European,” and that “there is as good reason for classifying the Negro as a distinct species from the European” (Hunt 1863: 51–52). In 1865, the ASL published a mission statement, which called for the publication of a “series of works on Anthropology” that would “tend to promote the objects of the Society. These works will generally be translations” (ASL 1865: appendix 1). ASL meeting minutes (1865: appendix 1) show that they intended to translate race supremacist authors including Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) and Karl Vogt (1817–1895).

In 1921, Edmund Gosse (1848–1928) reported that Hunt also presided over gatherings of the so-called “Cannibal Club,” a collection of leading ASL members who met at raucous banquets in which they “dined in front of a mace, which represented the ebony head of a negro gnawing the ivory thigh bone of a man” (Gosse 1921: 64). De Groot (2015: 145) described the club as a venue where “explicit and iconoclastic discussions of ‘savage customs’ and sexualities combined the pleasures of learned conversation with those of gentlemanly after-dinner ribaldry (or sexual ‘frankness,’ depending on one’s viewpoint).” As Flint (2016: 199) wrote, the club’s membership included men of letters who “produced pornography that depended in part for its thrills on racial subjugation.”

Gosse reported that Hunt’s “chief cronies” at the Cannibal Club included Thomas Bendyshe, “a fantastic character” (Gosse 1921: 65). Bendyshe was an ASL vice president who published a few papers in the ASL’s journal including “The History of Anthropology,” arguably the first detailed history of the field (Weber 1974: 206, Bendyshe 1865b: 335). Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) told Charles Darwin (1809–1882) that Bendyshe was the most talented man at the ASL (Desmond & Moore 2009: 346). Bendyshe once publicly argued in support of Vogt’s contention that each human race had evolved separately from a different species of ape (Reddie 1867: 176). However, Desmond and Moore (2009: 415) cautioned that Bendyshe was only “inclined to believe the multi-ape theory.” In 1864, Bendyshe wrote a paper titled “On the Extinction of Races.” He argued that in places like America, Polynesia, and Australia, “the numbers of the aborigines must in all these countries continue to decline until none of them are left” (Bendyshe 1864: xcix). One year later, he translated *De Generis I* and *III* along with other

works by Blumenbach in an anthology entitled *Anthropological Treatises of Blumenbach and Hunter*.

Little is known about Bendyshe. He was an Eton educated lawyer from a wealthy family who translated and published antiquarian books. Wilkinson charitably described Bendyshe as an “eccentric” (Wilkinson 1980: 3). More often he is remembered as “aggressively atheistic” and “a notoriously strong-minded, and (apparently) unpopular fellow of King’s” (Lang 1974: 227). In 1926, James described Bendyshe as the “most virulent person I remember to have heard of” and noted that Bendyshe was unwelcome at Kings College after writing a “profane letter” to the dean (James 2011: 158). James also reported that Bendyshe once “edited a paper called the *Reflector* which was so outrageous in its sentiments that the compositors refused to set up the copy” (ibid.).

In his introduction to *Anthropological Treatises*, Bendyshe announced that he had undertaken the translation to demonstrate that that Blumenbach regarded the five races as distinct and separate units which were not equal; a clearly biased interpretation of Blumenbach. Bendyshe bogusly stated that “if all the five must be considered as natural groups, is it proper to place them in the same rank and allow them all the same zoological value? Blumenbach himself did not think this” (Bendyshe 1865a: x–xi). Bendyshe then quoted a passage from the polygenist Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire which falsely claimed that Caucasian race was “for Blumenbach the most beautiful (*le plus belle*), and that to which the pre-eminence belongs” (ibid: xi; Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire 1860: 130). Bendyshe also quoted Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire’s unwarranted claim that Blumenbach was “more or less aware” of supposed truths that:

[...] one can dispute in anthropological taxonomy, that is to say, the plurality of races of man [...] and the necessity of not placing in the same rank all the divisions of mankind, which bear the common title of *races* (Et la nécessité de ne pas placer sur le même rang toutes ces divisions du genre humain qu on désigne également sous le nom de *races*). (Bendyshe 1865a: xi; Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire 1860: 130; emphasis in the French original).

Interpretations of Blumenbach in the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries

By the mid-twentieth century, Blumenbach was recalled infrequently as an antiquated egalitarian who developed an arbitrary five-fold typology

(Montague, 1964: 44, 64; Coon 1962: 11; Boyd 1950: xiii). However, during the late twentieth century, some scholars began to argue that Blumenbach had, at least inadvertently, expressed conventional European ethnocentric race supremacism in his writings. In 1993 Schiebinger proposed that “Blumenbach’s coining of the term *Caucasian*” (1993: 129–133, emphasis in the original) to describe Europeans was due to his cultural aesthetic bias. She wrote that, for Blumenbach, “the Caucasian’s great beauty simply revealed them as the original humans – the archetype from which all other races degenerated” (Schiebinger 1993: 130). Similarly, Gould (1996: 410) asserted that Blumenbach “decided to rank people by physical beauty alone” and established a hierarchical racial model that “placed a single race at the pinnacle.” According to Dain (2002: 61) Blumenbach’s choice of “whites” as the first humans was evidence of “Blumenbach’s patent ethnocentrism.”

Drawing on Schiebinger’s and Gould’s work, Bindman concluded that:

Europeans and Caucasians were for Blumenbach simply the most *beautiful* peoples, and in their whiteness preserve a potential for moral purity and a memory of humanity before the Fall. By effectively removing the races of mankind from their association with differing continents and reordering them into an aesthetic hierarchy, Blumenbach inadvertently provided a further argument for European superiority over the rest of mankind. (Bindman 2002: 201, emphasis in the original).

Subsequently, Keevak wrote about Blumenbach’s research as a “hierarchical arrangement” favoring the “Caucasian ideal” (Keevak 2011: 5). Meanwhile, Bhopal noted that “Blumenbach’s legacy is tarnished by biases and errors, and it teaches us that even great scientists can be led astray by personal views (such as notions about beauty) shaped by the ethos of their times” (Bhopal 2007: 1309). Citing Gould, Collins referred to Blumenbach’s “most destructive” theories that arranged Caucasians “at the top” (Collins 2010: 145). Sussman wrote that the very concept of the Caucasian race was based on “purely aesthetic grounds” derived from Blumenbach’s “own set of aesthetics” (Sussman 2014: 19).

Conversely, Spencer wrote that Blumenbach “made no effort to rank the five ‘racial’ varieties” (Spencer 1997: 185). Likewise, Zammito concluded that Blumenbach “stood sturdily against arguments [...] which would affirm the racial inferiority of other ‘races’” (Zammito 2006: 49). Demel questioned Keevak’s assertion that Blumenbach’s research “must necessarily be interpreted as conveying a ‘hierarchy of races’” (Demel 2011: 231). Barzun even quipped that “[m]odern French writers who want to prove that race-dogmas are all of German origin blame Blumenbach for having started the business of differentiating skulls as a means of race classification” (Barzun 1965: 35).

In this debate, some modern scholars have staked a middle ground. They argue that Blumenbach was an internally conflicted individual who genuinely strove for what we would now call scientific objectivity, yet was unable to escape the influence of the race supremacist culture in which (so it is assumed) he was raised. Baum wrote that the “egalitarian and universalist side” of Blumenbach was evident in some of the illustrations in his text, while his “aesthetic ordering of races conveys a different method” (Baum 2006: 89). In describing the opposing forces pulling on Blumenbach, Painter wrote “By turns, he embraces Enlightenment sciences – the measurement of his skulls – then lets go to reach for romanticism’s subjective passion for beauty” (Painter 2010: 82).

For Smith, Blumenbach’s conflict pitted logical thinking against arbitrary assumption: “Blumenbach’s influential work on racial difference” notes Smith, “is riddled with the same fundamental inconsistencies” seen in other scholars of race during that era (Smith 2015: 253). Similarly, Baum argued that Blumenbach “implicitly suggested” that races were separate distinct units observable in nature (Baum 2006: 89). For Brace (2005: 46) and Thompson (2014: 183) Blumenbach’s conflict was one of secular science opposing sacred revelation and medieval philosophy. Brace described Blumenbach as “a good Enlightenment Scientist” who nonetheless accepted “the biblical account of human origins” and a “limited version of the Great Chain as continuum” (Brace 2005: 46).

A Pattern of Errors in the 1865 Translations Suggests at Least two Translators

Most of the above noted scholars relied on Bendyshe’s translations to interpret Blumenbach’s views without consulting his original texts. The accuracy of Bendyshe’s translation, however, is questionable. Demel described Bendyshe’s version of *De Generis* as a “problematic, and still frequently used translation” (Demel 2012: 67). According to Mario Marino the Italian translations of Blumenbach’s works presents his views as humanistic, in “sharp contrast to Bendyshe’s later interpretation” (Marino 2014: ix). Engelstein (2008: 232) observed that Bendyshe’s (1864: 210) English translation dropped the words “*etsi arbitraria* (although it is arbitrary)” from a sentence in which Blumenbach (1795: 122) describes how classifying peoples based on skin color is arbitrary.

Bronwen Douglas aptly noted that Bendyshe’s translations do not use a vocabulary set which sufficiently reflects the potentially significant nuances of Blumenbach’s original text. She observed that the English word

“race” had “persistently infiltrated” Bendyshe’s translation, such that “*varietas* and *gens* are sometimes ‘race’; adjective inflections of *gens* are usually ‘racial’; and even *stemma* and *stirps* are frequently ‘race.’” (Douglas 2008: 43, emphasis in the original.) Similarly, Bindman (2002: 195) questioned Bendyshe’s use of the word “race” to describe a “people” or “nation.” Bindman (2002: 219) also favored the word “stem” for “stemma.” In the context of Blumenbach’s era, Vermeulen (2015: 29) saw “gens” as the equivalent to a “nation” or a “people.”

Bendyshe’s translations also lack nuance when representing Blumenbach’s sense of aesthetics. Bendyshe uniformly used adjective inflections of the word ‘beauty’ to translate a number of Latin terms. Chapters 61 and 62 of *De Generis III* (Blumenbach 1795: 202–207) include the different phrases:

1. “*et venustissimum,*”
2. “*eleganter angustata,*”
3. “*optime symmetricum,*”
4. “*elegantissimum cranium,*” and
5. “*venusta cranii.*”

However, Bendyshe (1865a: 237) translated these respective phrases as

1. “and beautiful,”
2. “beautifully narrowed,”
3. “beautifully symmetrical,”
4. “a most beautiful skull,” and
5. “this beautiful form.”

Thus, Bendyshe homogenized the nuanced meanings of the vocabulary Blumenbach specifically chose. Bendyshe eschewed the conventional translation of “*eleganter angustata*” as “gracefully narrowed” or “*optime symmetricum*” as “ideally symmetrical.” Instead, he equated the adjectives in these phrases to the words “*venustissimum*” and “*venusta*” which indicate a ‘Venus-like’ charming quality (see Glare 2006: 599, 1250, 2032). Although determining the most historically accurate translations for these terms is beyond the scope of this paper, the weakness of Bendyshe’s work is still quite evident.

Flaws in Bendyshe’s translations are also evident in Section IV (Chapters 80 through 90) of *De Generis III*. As detailed herein, Bendyshe’s 1865 translations of these chapters are notably different from six other English translations of the very same text published in the early nineteenth century. Furthermore, Bendyshe’s translations of *De Generis III* Chapters 80–90 differ from Bendyshe’s own translations of Chapter 56 of *De Generis III*, even though these two parts of the original book contain Latin phrases that

are remarkably similar, if not identical. In fact, Bendyshe translations of Chapters 80–90 versus Chapter 56 are so inconsistent as to suggest that these two sections were translated by different people.

Bendyshe's inaccurate translations have caused some modern Anglophone authors to misconstrue Blumenbach's views on race. For example, Baum (2006: 36) asserted that Blumenbach regarded Mongolians as having an ape-like nose, which is a pejorative aesthetic bias. Baum based his contention on Bendyshe's translation of *De Generis III* Chapter 82, which describes the "Mongolian variety" as having "face broad, at the same time flat and depressed, the parts therefore less distinct, as it were running into one another; glabella flat, very broad; nose small, apish; cheeks usually globular, prominent outwardly" (Bendyshe 1865a: 265, emphasis by author).

However, within the *Encyclopaedia Londinensi*, Blumenbach's Latin text describing Mongolians is rendered as follows: "[...] broad and flattened face, with the features running together; the glabella (interval between the eyebrows) flat and very broad; nose small and flat; cheeks projecting externally" (Blumenbach 1816: 247, emphasis by author).

In Bendyshe's translation, the Mongolian nose is "apish." Conversely, the *Encyclopaedia Londinensi* renders it as "small and flat," which appears a preferable rendering because the following pre-Bendyshe translations all agree with it. Pitta's translation of the equivalent text refers to Mongolians as having a "nose almost flat" (Pitta 1812: 33). Both Pilkington (1807: 214) and Lawrence (1819: 555) tell of a "nose small and flat." Malte-Brun (1834: 559) describes "the nose small and flat." Goldsmith and Anonymous (1852: 242) reads "nose flat." Six independent translations all agree that Blumenbach intended to say that Mongolians have a "flat" but not "apish" nose. Simply put, Bendyshe mistranslated the Latin word "*simus*" in Blumenbach's phrase "*naso parvo, simo*." It appears that Bendyshe confused the Latin word "*simus*," which means "flattened," with the Latin word "*simius*" which refers to "an ape" (Glare 2006: 1767, 1764).

Furthermore, in *De Generis III* Chapter 56, Blumenbach (1795: 179) describes the Mongolians as having "*Nasus simus*." This phrase uses the same Latin vocabulary as in Chapter 82. Yet Bendyshe's English version of Chapter 56 (1865a: 228) translates these words as "Nose flattened." In other words, Bendyshe's Chapter 56 agrees with the six pre-Bendyshe translations, but not Bendyshe's own translation of Chapter 82. Significantly, this nose-related error by Bendyshe was not a random or isolated mistake. In Chapter 82 Blumenbach (1795: 294 and 180) describes the nose of the American variety as "*naso subsimo, attamen prominente*" while in Chapter 56 their noses are "*nasus subsimus quidem, attamen prominens*." Yet Bendyshe (1865a: 266 and 288) renders the Chapter 82 text as "nose some-

what apish” while Bendyshe’s Chapter 56 describes the American nose as “somewhat turned up.”

The author of Chapter 82 (henceforth ‘Author 80/90’) favored a translation that depicted Mongolians and Americans as having a somewhat simian appearance. In Bendyshe’s era, such a comparison was aesthetically pejorative and suggested a lower state of intellectual development. Thus, Baum, who only read Chapter 82 in English, was led to assume that Blumenbach held Mongolians in low esteem. However, the author of Chapter 56 (henceforth ‘Author 56’) and six other translations indicate that Blumenbach did not compare Mongolians to apes. To add more confusion, there are no available records that can identify if Bendyshe was Author 56, Author 80/90, or if he simply hired both of them.

Blumenbach’s Ethiopian variety, a demographic crosswalk to today’s West Africans, was also discussed in *De Generis III*. The *Encyclopaedia Londinensi* presents a translation of Chapter 82 of *De Generis III*, which describes the “Ethiopian Variety” as having “head narrow, and compressed laterally; *arched forehead*; cheek-bones standing forwards; prominent eyes; thick nose, *confused with* the extended jaw [...] the lips, and particularly the upper one thick” (*Encyclopaedia Londinensi* 1816: 247, emphasis by author).

Pitta’s version of this passage agrees that Ethiopians have a forehead that is “gibbous and arched” along with a “thick nose” that is “somewhat confused with the extending jaws,” and also an upper lip that is “tumid” (Pitta 1812: 32). Similarly Pilkington describes a forehead that is “convex and arched,” with large nose that is “almost confounded with the upper jaw” and “thick” lips (Pilkington 1807: 214). Lawrence tells of a forehead that is “low, narrow, and slanting” and a nose that is “broad, thick, flat, and confused with the extended jaw” (Lawrence 1819: 559). Malte-Brun speaks of a “very convex and arched” forehead and a “nose large, almost confounded with the upper jaw” (Malte-Brun 1834: 561). Goldsmith and Anonymous describe a “low, narrow, and slanting” forehead, with a “broad, thick, and flat” nose that is “confused with the extended jaw”, and a “thick” upper lip (Goldsmith & Anonymous 1852: 242).

These six sources all agree with Author 56 who, in a clinical tone, writes of Ethiopians with a “Forehead short” and a “Nose thick and half confused with extended cheeks” (Bendyshe 1865a: 228). However, Author 80/90, who viewed Mongolians as “apish,” departs from the formal language of the above translations. Author 80/90 describes a forehead that is “knotty, uneven,” with a nose that is “thick, mixed up as it were with the wide jaws,” and an upper lip that is “very puffy” (Bendyshe 1865a: 238). This passage by Author 80/90, which sets West Africans in a negative light, has been quoted by O’Brian (2004: 230) and Baum (2006: 77) as evi-

dence that Blumenbach harbored an anti-African bias. This same passage was described as being “a caricature” by Pieterse (1992: 46), “unflattering” by Jahoda (1999: 65), and “stereotyped” by Marks (1995: 54). Given how Author 80/90’s translation so deviates from all the others, it would be prudent to accept the previously noted testimony of Marx, Tiedemann, and Flourens, who stated that Blumenbach held no anti-African bias.

The distinctive marks of two translators can also be observed in Bendyshe’s rendering of Blumenbach’s descriptions the Caucasian variety. A sentence in Blumenbach’s Latin from Chapter 82 reads, “*In universum ea vultus specie quam ex nostratim de symmetria **judicio maxime venustam et formosam censemus***” (Blumenbach 1795: 178, emphasis by author). Blumenbach’s (1795: 289) Chapter 56 includes a variation of this sentence in which the only difference is that the Latin word “*specie*” is replaced with “species.” But before we discuss that minor difference, it warrants noting that the *Encyclopaedia Londinensi* (1816: 247) described the “Caucasian Variety” as having white skin that is “inclining to brown” with hair ranging from black to “the various lighter colours,” and other features which exhibit “*our notions of beauty*” (emphasis by author).

Pitta’s translation is quite similar except it describes a Caucasian “countenance which, according to our ideas of symmetry, is thought most handsome and beautiful” (Pitta 1812: 29). Malte-Brun largely agrees with the *Encyclopaedia Londinensi* passage, describing a “countenance, which is that of the European, causes it generally to be considered as the most handsome and agreeable” (Malte-Brun 1834: 558). Pilkington describes a “countenance, which is that of the European, causes it to be generally considered, by them at least, as the most agreeable” (Pilkington 1807: 213). Goldsmith and Anonymous describe the Caucasian face as “most constant with our views of beauty, and is characteristic in greater or lesser degrees of perfection of the Caucasian tribes” (Goldsmith & Anonymous 1852: 242).

Author 56’s translation, which agrees with the above translations, describes “that kind of face which, according to our opinions of symmetry, we *think becoming and beautiful*” (emphasis by author). However, Author 80/90 provides a somewhat different wording: “In general, that kind of appearance which, according to our opinions of symmetry, is *thought most handsome and becoming*” (emphasis by author). Curiously, Author 56 and Author 80/90 agree with each other in terms of content. And yet, when translating two nearly identical sentences they used a different English vocabulary, suggesting there were two individuals who gave inconsistent translations without coordinating with each other. As noted previously, Bendyshe’s translations of texts relating to aesthetics from Chapter 60 and 61 also used inconsistent vocabulary.

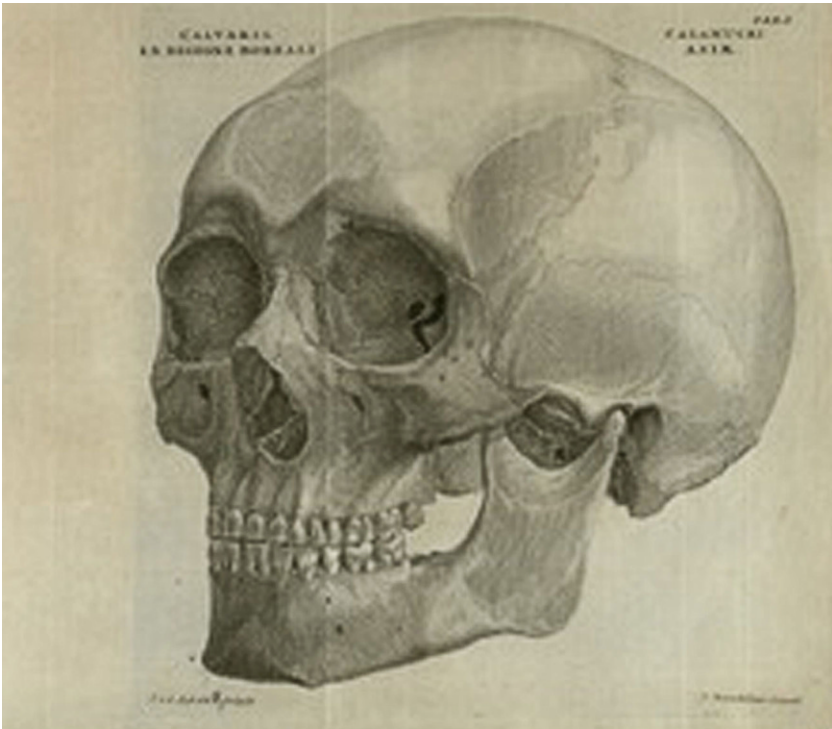


Fig. 2 De Fischer’s anatomically inaccurate drawing of a Calmuck skull. (Image is used by the kind permission of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia Historical Medical Library)

Blumenbach’s views on aesthetics also surfaces in a passage from *De Generis I*, which focuses on the peoples of Siberia and Central Asia. In this passage, Blumenbach (1795: 62) cites an anatomy textbook entitled *Dissertatio osteological* written by Joannes de Fischer in 1743. De Fischer’s book included an image (see Fig. 2) of a Calmuck skull which clearly has an unrealistically square chin due to being poorly drawn (de Fischer 1743: Fig. 1). De Fischer’s text describes this drawing as an “ugly skull (*calvaria horrida*)” that was “approaching a square shape (*quadrata[m] prope speciem [sic] accedit*),” and “testified itself to barbarity (*barbariam ipsam testator*)” (de Fischer 1743: 24). In *De Generis I*, Blumenbach (1776: 62) notes that, J. B. de Fischer’s drawing showed a Calmuk, which “J. B. de Fischer said” was “ugly, nearly square, and indicative of barbarity (*eamque horridam et ad quadratam prope speciem accedentem, imo multis modis barbariam ipsam testantem, dixit I. B. de Fischer*).” Blumenbach then refutes what de Fischer “said (*dixit*),” and instead asserts that this single example of a Calmuck skull:

[...] shows how unfair it is to draw conclusions as to the conformation of a whole race from one or two specimens. For Pallas describes the Calmucks as men of a symmetrical, beautiful (*symmetricae et elegantis imo rotundae*), and even round appearance, so that he says their girls would find admirers in cultivated Europe. (Bendyshe 1865a: 116–117, Blumenbach 1776: 62).

Thus, Blumenbach is finding fault with de Fischer for relying on too little evidence. Instead of believing de Fischer's claims that Calmucks were ugly, Blumenbach accepted the first-hand observations of Pallas – who twice explored Central Asia – and reported that Calmucks were attractive (Vermeulen 2015: 335; Demel 2012: 71). Bendyshe's translation contained a small error implying, incorrectly, that Blumenbach agreed with de Fischer. Bendyshe's rendering reads: "J. B. de Fischer has published a drawing of a Calmuck's skull, *and it is ugly*, and nearly approaches a square in shape, and in many ways testifies to barbarism." (Bendyshe 1865a: 116–117, emphasis by author).

Citing Bendyshe's mistranslation, Bindman (2002: 161) commented that Blumenbach "sets against this 'ugly skull' evidence of the beauty of some Calmucks." Similarly, Zammito wrote that:

Blumenbach showed the influence of this (that is, previous scholars') aesthetic orientation: "J. B. de Fischer has published a drawing of a Calmuck's skull, and it is ugly [...] and in many ways testifies to barbarism." But he [Blumenbach] quickly provided counterevidence from Pallas. (Zammito 2006: 48).

Unfortunately, the false perception that Blumenbach held Mongolians to be ugly is due not to Blumenbach's original words, but rather to a translator's grammatical error. Furthermore, it is plausible that Blumenbach's view of Mongolians was influenced by Johann Georgi who wrote a field report about Siberia and Central Asia, which Blumenbach had read (1795: 241). Georgi noted that "Kalmouk" women were so famously attractive that they were "valued as harem girls, and even wives," by neighboring nations like the Kyrgyz, who believed that Calmuck women retained "the marks of youth" (Georgi 1780: 294).

Another of Bendyshe's grammar mistakes gave the false impression that Blumenbach found West Africans to be unattractive. In 1799, the *Philosophical Magazine* (Blumenbach 1799b: 141) published an anonymously translated English version of an article written by Blumenbach in which he detailed a visit to Yverdon, Switzerland. It reads:

I entered the court yard of the house, I saw only a woman, standing with her back towards me, whose elegant form attracted my notice. But how much was I surprised, when on accosting her she turned round, to find a Negress [...] Her face was such, that even the nose, and somewhat thicker lips, had nothing peculiar, **certainly nothing unpleasant in their appearance**; and had the same features occurred in a white skin, they would have excited very general admiration. (*Ein Gesicht, das durchaus – selbst in der Nasse und in den etwas stärkern Lippen, – doch sogar nichts auffallendes, geschweige denn unangenehmes hatte*, dass die gleichen Züge bey einer weissen Haut gewiss allgemein gefallen haben müssten.) To this were added, the most sprightly and cheerful vivacity, a sound judgment, and as I afterwards discovered, peculiar knowledge and skill in midwifery. The pretty Negress of Yverdun (*lieben hübsche Negresse von Yverdun*) is widely celebrated as the best midwife in that part of Switzerland. (Blumenbach 1799b: 142, Blumenbach 1787: 3, emphasis by author).

This woman was Pauline Hippolyte Buisson, who was born in West Africa and enslaved on Santa Domingo, but eventually lived free in Europe (Debrunner 1979: 142–143). The *Philosophical Magazine* report is consistent with Armistead (1848: 44) who wrote that Blumenbach described Buisson as having “a countenance, of which no part, not even the nose, and rather strongly marked lips, were very striking, much less, displeasing: the same features, with an European complexion would certainly have been generally agreeable” (emphasis by author).

However, when Bendyshe (1865a: 307) translated Blumenbach’s *Beyträge zur Naturgeschichte*, the description of Madame Buisson reads, “if one could have set aside *the disagreeable skin*, the same features with a white skin would have been universally pleased [sic]” (emphasis by author). Citing Bendyshe’s translation, Dain postulated that Blumenbach had a conflicted view of West Africans. Dain wrote that “Blumenbach’s approach, for all its reliance on comparative anatomy, remained essentially visual [...] Although he found black skin repugnant, Blumenbach could see fineness in relative terms” (Dain 2002: 61). Dain’s assertion that Blumenbach found black skin to be “repugnant” is contradicted by the majority of translations of the Buisson narrative.

The notion that Blumenbach did indeed find Buisson attractive has been supported by Debrunner (1998: 7), Jahoda (1999: 54), and Goodwin (2009: 92). Under their shared scenarios, Blumenbach held conventional race supremacist views of West Africans early in his career, but rejected them upon meeting the engaging Buisson. Conversely, Zammito contends that even early on, Blumenbach never had any demonstrable anti-Negro

bias. Zammito wrote: “I must dissent from the widely shared view that Blumenbach expressed a strong ‘racialist’ bias in his early texts and came later [...] to the defence of blacks.” (Zammito 2006: 49).

A final example of Bendyshe’s translation errors is found in Chapter 81 of *De Generis III*. In this text, Blumenbach (1795: 285) explained how humankind’s various populations could be classified in any number of arbitrary methods, but that the most preferred of these arbitrary methods was the one with a five-fold typology, which he himself had invented. His exact words were: “*Quinae varietates principes generis humani constitutae. Cum tamen et inter arbitrarias ejusmodi partitionum rationes altera alteri utique praestare dicenda et praeferenda sit*” (Blumenbach 1795: 285). Author 80/90’s version of this passage reads: “Five principle varieties of Mankind may be reckoned. As, however, even among these *arbitrary kinds of divisions, one is said to be better and preferable to another*” (Bendyshe 1864: 264, emphasis by author). Thus Author 80/90’s wording suggests that one of the ‘divisions’ or ‘races’ was superior to all the other races.

Author 80/90’s translation was in error, however. A modern English translation of this text reads: “Five principal varieties of the human species established. However, since *from among the arbitrary methods for these kinds of divisions, one [arbitrary method] may be said to stand out and to be preferred over the other.*” (Translation and emphasis by author) In other words, Blumenbach deemed one typological ‘method,’ namely his own, was preferable, not one ‘race.’ This modern translation is supported by Müller (1842: 1667) who asserted that Blumenbach regarded his own classification method as arbitrary but preferable to others. Similarly, Brace (2005: 46) wrote that Blumenbach “declared that his five part scheme seemed the best to him.”

A Reinterpretation of Blumenbach is Warranted in Light of Bendyshe’s Errors

The significant errors found in his Bendyshe’s translations cast substantial doubts on modern interpretations of Blumenbach that rely on Bendyshe as a significant source. As noted above, a number of authors who relied on Bendyshe have argued that Blumenbach’s view of racial variation was inconsistent (Smith 2015: 253) or that his works indicated an internal conflict.⁸ The evidence indicates that Bendyshe’s two or more translators were inconsistent *with each other*; therefore, the claims that Blumenbach was conflicted or inconsistent must be re-examined based on his original texts, not Bendyshe’s mistranslations. A similar form of re-examination is also

needed to verify the arguments of those noted herein (Debrunner 1998: 7; Jahoda 1999: 54; Goodwin 2009: 92), who propose that Blumenbach's views on racial variation or aesthetics changed throughout his career.

The assertion that Blumenbach found Mongolians to be unattractive (Bindman 2002: 161; Zammito 2006: 48) is not supported by sufficient compelling evidence. In addition to being grammatically incorrect, Bendyshe's rendition of Blumenbach's text regarding Mongolians is not consistent with the writings of either de Fischer (1743: 24) or Georgi (1780: 294). Similarly, the above noted assertions that Blumenbach had an ethnocentric bias against or stereotypical view of West Africans should be rejected.⁹ Dain's (2002: 61) claim that Blumenbach "found black skin repugnant" is wholly unjustified. It appears that Dain and others were misled by the bogus characterization of Blumenbach as a race supremacist as set forth by late nineteenth-century authors such as Bendyshe (1865a: x–xi) and Geoffroy-Saint-Hilaire (1860: 130). In fact, the evidence indicates that Blumenbach should be viewed as a man who actively participated in pro-Negro advocacy, which is how he was described by the early nineteenth-century scholars – like Tiedemann, Flourens, and Marx – who actually interacted with him.

The presence of Bendyshe's translation errors as documented herein weakens Schiebinger's already criticized argument that Eurocentric aesthetics was a key, if not the key driver, in Blumenbach's research. Schiebinger's work had previously been scrutinised by Cook (2006: 32), who stated that Schiebinger's study of Blumenbach's aesthetics did not give sufficient consideration to the historical context in which Blumenbach was writing. Schiebinger's assertion that Blumenbach coined the term Caucasian has already been disproven by Demel (2012: 61), Keevak (2011: 74), and Augstine (1999a: 83; 1999b: 64). Furthermore, Schiebinger (1993: 126–127) glossed over Blumenbach's ardent opposition to the overtly race supremacist theories of his fellow Göttingen professor Christoph Meiners (Jahoda 1999: 65). According to Meiners, humans came in two categories: "beautiful people" who were European and Middle Eastern peoples, and "ugly people" who were all other ethnicities (Rupp-Eisenreich 2014: 78). Cook (2006: 32) stated that she "prefers to read the gushing language" that Blumenbach used to express the visual attractiveness of skulls as a satirical jab at Meiners, which is consistent with Blumenbach's legendary sense of humor. And indeed, Blumenbach's penchant for irony is displayed on page 304 of *De Generis III*, where he wrote that he was presenting his major conclusions at the end of this "little work (*ad calcem opusculi*)" (Bendyshe 1865a: 269; Blumenbach 1795: 302).

Undeniably, Schiebinger was correct in observing that Blumenbach had an interest in aesthetics. However, because Schiebinger relied on

Bendyshe's poor translation, it is possible that Schiebinger perceived Bendyshe's perspective of beauty, not Blumenbach's. Schiebinger also documented that Blumenbach found the Woman of Georgia's skull to be attractive, but in what sense? Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) once described “*ein sehr schöner Elefantenschädel* (a very beautiful elephant skull)” (Goethe 1909: 57), while Hermann Burmeister (1802–1892) wrote about “*der schöne Schädel von Mastodonsaurus* (the beautiful skull of a mastodonsaurus),” which is an amphibian (Burmeister 1849: 42). Like these two scholars, Blumenbach may have viewed the skull of the Woman of Georgia as a sculpturally beautiful object on its own, much as a coin collector might value a rare doubloon. Given that Blumenbach was a famed acquirer of objects, proud of showing off his collection, this interpretation is no less implausible than Schiebinger's. Ultimately, Schiebinger's research needs to be re-evaluated based on the wide range of Blumenbach's original texts, while also evaluating the aesthetic sensibilities of his associates and his intellectual opponents.

Gould's (1996: 410) assertion that Blumenbach's research was corrupted by his aesthetics and a culturally influenced unconscious bias for ranking races has already been substantially dismissed. Thomas Junker (1998: 499) and later Francisco Bethencourt (2013: 253) independently identified two major statements presented by Gould that were misinformation. Cook (2006: 3) called Gould's un-footnoted critique an “inappropriately quantitative reading of Blumenbach's work” from a “popular magazine” not subject to peer review. The fact that he relied on, and quoted, Bendyshe is the final blow, which invalidates Gould's conclusions. Because so much of Gould's evidence regarding Blumenbach is dubious, his essay should only be viewed as an editorial expression of his personal opinions. Publications that still cite Gould's essay should be accordingly revised.¹⁰

The Need to Revisit the Modern Interpretations of Blumenbach

In recent decades, Blumenbach scholars have relied too heavily on Bendyshe's translation, especially his translation of *De Generis III*, Section IV (Chapters 80 through 90), which used stereotypical phrases common to the late nineteenth-century race supremacist lexicon. Similarly, modern scholars have largely overlooked the six sufficiently well informed translations cited herein. Too often, modern scholars overemphasized the influence of aesthetics in Blumenbach's writings, which are undeniably evident in his discussions of Madame Buisson and the Woman of Georgia. However, rather than stereotyping Blumenbach as a one-dimensional

Eurocentric, he should be understood as a unique character who valued conventional beauty, but also greatly appreciated the odd and unusual, like the three-legged goat he kept as a pet in his courtyard (Brandl 1887: 244). Blumenbach's use of irony, his pro-Negro advocacy, and his dispute with Meiners need to be more rigorously researched by examining all of Blumenbach's works, not just those focusing on racial variation.

The modern Anglophone evaluations of Blumenbach that rely on Bendyshe's poor translations should be revisited, and in some cases rejected. Although Göttingen University is planning a new English translation of *De Generis III*, it will take years to years to complete.¹¹ Until such a rigorous translation of Blumenbach's works is finished, Bendyshe's publication is the only practical way for Anglophone readers to access *De Generis I* and *III*. However, if Bendyshe's translations are to be quoted, they should be verified against Blumenbach's original German or Latin texts. To use a courtroom metaphor, Bendyshe's translations are so untrustworthy that, on their own, they should not be accepted as admissible evidence.

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Endnotes

- 1 The observation that some species are monotypic (where all individuals share one largely uniform set of physical traits) while others are polytypic (showing a diverse spectrum of traits) can be traced to Mayr's (1964: 111) studies of birds and Dobzhansky's (1947: 70) studies of Eurasian ladybugs. Dobzhansky (1962: 221) asserted that "mankind is a polytypic species."
- 2 It can be problematic to use the words 'racist' and 'antiracist' when discussing Blumenbach's work since these terms originated in the 1930s, long after he died (Simpson & Weiner 1989 Vol. 13: 74–75). However, the term 'white supremacy' appears as far back as 1825, and 'superior race' was used during the late eighteenth century (Winn 1825: 8; Winterbotham 1796: 111). Thus, in this paper, the term 'race supremacist' will be used.
- 3 See Pilkington (1807); Pitta (1812); *Encyclopaedia Londinensis* (1816); Lawrence (1819); Malte-Brun (1834); Goldsmith & Anonymous (1852).
- 4 Livingstone's (1962: 279) contention that "there are no races, only clines," was endorsed by Dobzhansky. Skull anatomist C. Loren Brace wrote that "there is a spectrum of variation" in humans that is "rarely taken into account in appraisals of human evolution in general" (Brace & Hunt 1990: 341).
- 5 These 11 specimens are illustrated in *Decas I–III* in Figures 3, 5, 9, 15, 20, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, and 30.
- 6 The first unearthed Neanderthal fossil discovered in 1865 is now known as the Neanderthal 'type specimen' or 'holotype' (Kring et al. 1999: 581; Serre & Pääbo 2008: 212).
- 7 The term "pro-Negro" is used as found in Curtin (1964: 241) and Dain (2002: 115).

- 8 See Dain (2002: 61); Brace (2005: 46); Baum (2006: 89); Painter (2010: 82); Thompson (2014).
- 9 See Pieterse (1992: 46); Jahoda (1999: 65); Marks (1995: 54); O'Brian (2004: 230); Baum (2006: 77).
- 10 See Bindman (2002: 201); Bhopal (2007: 1309); Collins (2010: 145); Keevak (2011: 5); Sussman (2014:19).
- 11 Lauer, Gerhard (2016). Leiter des Projekts Johann Friedrich Blumenbach – online (Universität Göttingen), personal communication.

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