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Essay review

Of Vikings and Nazis: Norwegian contributions to the rise and the fall of the idea of a superior Aryan race

Adam Hochman

Measuring the Master Race: Physical Anthropology in Norway, 1890-1945

Jon Røyne Kyllingstad, Open Book Publishers: Cambridge, U.K., 2014, pp. xxii + 251, paperback, Price: UK £17.95, ISBN: 9781909254541

1. Introduction

Nazi ideology was premised on a belief in the superiority of the Germanic race. However, the idea of a superior Germanic race was not invented by the Nazis. By the beginning of the 20th century this idea had already gained not only popular but also mainstream scientific support in England, Germany, the U.S., Scandinavia, and other parts of the world in which people claimed Germanic origins (p. xiii). Yet how could this idea, which is now recognised as ideology of the most dangerous kind, be given the appearance of scientific legitimacy by some of the leading physical anthropologists of the day?

This is the question that Jon Kyllingstad sets out to answer in his excellent new book *Measuring the Master Race*. Kyllingstad traces the Scandinavian contributions to the rise and the fall of the idea of a superior Germanic/Nordic/Aryan race, with a focus on Norwegian physical anthropology between 1890 and 1945. The book is the first comprehensive treatment of Norwegian physical anthropology in the English language. It is essential reading for students of Scandinavian physical anthropology and related topics, such as Scandinavian prehistory and eugenics, and Norwegian national identity. Yet this fascinating book will be of great interest to a much broader audience as well. It is an important contribution to the history of racism and racial science, and its lessons are pertinent to current philosophical issues to do with ‘race’.

It might seem strange to use the history of Norwegian physical anthropology as a prism through which to see the rise and fall of the concept of the Germanic ‘master race’. Why not

look to German science? The Norwegian focus makes sense, however, when we see that the so-called Germanic race was believed to have its roots not only in northern Germany, but also in southern Scandinavia (either via Central Asia or as an indigenous race). Indeed, while this ‘race’ was labelled ‘Germanic’ during the nineteenth century, the term ‘Nordic’ became more common in the early 20th century. “Scandinavia”, explains Kyllingstad, “was of primary importance in the worldview of those advocating Nordic racial supremacy, especially German nationalists including the Nazis, who proved to be deeply fascinated by all things Scandinavian” (pp. xiii–xiv). Southern Scandinavia was thought to be the cradle of a pure and superior Nordic-Germanic race.

2. The notion of a Germanic/Nordic/Aryan ‘master race’

Measuring the Master Race begins by tracing the origins of the notion of a long-skulled Germanic race. “In the 1830s and 1840s”, explains Kyllingstad, “Scandinavian anatomists, archaeologists, linguists, historians and ethnographers put forward a grand theory claiming that a succession of different races had migrated to Europe in prehistoric times and had given rise to the various European nations” (p. xix). Linguists led the way. A historical connection between Sanskrit and European languages was established in the early nineteenth century, and comparative Indo-European linguistics was born: “It was commonly assumed that the various Indo-European languages had spread through human migration and that successive waves of migration to Europe had given rise to the European peoples” (p. 3). The linguistic approach was soon complemented by craniological evidence. Swedish anatomist Anders Retzius had devised the cephalic index, which measured the ratio of the breadth to the length of the skull, and supposedly mental capacity. His European racial taxonomy, which drew together craniological and linguistic evidence, corresponded to linguistically-defined groups, including the Celts, the Slavs, and the Germanics.

In this scheme, the Germanic ‘race’ was tall, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, and, in the language of the cephalic index, *dolichocephalic* (long-skulled). Kyllingstad covers the many different theories about the origins of the Germanic race throughout the book. The existence of a Germanic-Nordic race was never questioned by the book’s central Norwegian figures; its reality was taken for granted.

One of the earliest theories, advanced by Retzius and his collaborator, the Swedish zoologist and ethnographer Sven Nilsson, was a grand explanation of the rise of European civilisation:

They proposed that the Sami and the Basques were the descendants of inferior Stone Age peoples that had originally inhabited all of Europe. These short-skulled autochthones had later been overrun by successive waves of Indo-European invaders who brought increased levels of civilisation to Europe: the Celts introduced the Bronze Age, and the Germanics the Iron Age. Thus, the growth of European civilisation was explained by the successive invasion of races with increasingly advanced brains. (p. 12)

This theory had a great impact between the 1840s and the 1860s, and the practice of classifying human skulls and human races into superior long-skulls (dolichocephalics) and inferior short-skulls (*brachycephalics*) was prevalent for the next hundred years, even as the cephalic index lost its scientific justification—a point which Kyllingstad discusses insightfully, and to which we shall return.

The concept of a superior Germanic race was of great interest to Norwegian historians. The early nineteenth century was a period of breakthrough for Norwegian scholarship. Norway had been under Danish rule for around 400 years. Independence was won in 1814, and in the following decades the national identity was bolstered by the work of folklorists, poets, artists, historians and philologists who were engaged in a movement of romantic nationalism. Yet Danish rule had lasting effects on Norwegian national identity:

In the nineteenth century, Norwegian nationalism was characterised by a wish to signal Norway's equal status with its more powerful Swedish partner and by the need for symbolic liberation from joint Danish-Norwegian historical and cultural traditions. Instead of studying the royal dynasties, wars and high culture of the previous centuries, [which were not uniquely Norwegian] Norwegian historians and philologists began to turn their attention to a perceived Norwegian golden age in the Iron Age and Middle Ages. (p. 18)

The Norwegian historian Rudolf Keyser drew on the idea of Germanic origins to create a national narrative that gave Norway a distinct and important role in Scandinavian prehistory. Keyser argued that Scandinavia had been settled by two waves of Germanic tribes: first by the South Germanic Goths, and second by the North Germanic Norwegians (*Nordmenn*), who conquered the Goth population, and were the true originators of the Norse culture. The Nordmenn who had conquered the Goths in Denmark set up a feudal system, whereas those

who ventured into Norway found no farmers to subjugate (the population consisting of the ancestors of the nomadic Sami), and thus cultivated the land themselves. “Keyser believed that patriarchal households had been the core social institution of the ancient Germanic society”, explains Kyllingstad (p. 19), and Norwegian households were entitled to a piece of conquered land. “Keyser’s narrative implied that the present-day Norwegian state embodied both the reawakening of ancient Germanic traditions and modern ideas of liberty and democracy” (p. 20). Narratives of Germanic origins were thus mobilised in the formation of an idealised Norwegian identity.

Another important contributor to the Norwegian School of History was Peter Munch, who in his textbook *The Major Events in World History* argued that humans had originated in Central Asia and then split into four races: the Iranians (Indo-Europeans), the Turanians (Mongolians), the Malays, and the Negroes. The Iranians (note the linguistic connection to the term ‘Aryan’) were the most ‘advanced’. Yet their true racial brilliance was forged on the march from Central Asia to Europe. “Exposure to a challenging environment and conflicts with other peoples had made them strong and warrior-like, and had given them their sense of freedom and their ‘aristocratic-democratic’ social structure” (p. 24). As Kyllingstad observes, a consequence of this theory was that the Germanic character was considered to be already fully developed by the time Norway was conquered, meaning that it was a stable entity that could be studied.

Munch placed the indigenous people of northern Scandinavia, the Sami (then called ‘Lapps’ or ‘Finns’) within the Turanian race, as a supposedly inferior ‘sub-race’. While the main narrative of *Measuring the Master Race* is the Norwegian role in developing and then discrediting the idea of a superior Germanic-Nordic race, it is also a general account of physical anthropology in Norway between 1890 and 1945, and debates surrounding the Sami feature prominently in the book. “Even though Norwegian physical anthropology at the turn of the century was mainly concerned with the origin and racial identity of the Norwegians, this issue was intertwined with the question of the prehistory of the Sami” (Kyllingstad, 2012, p. 49).

The Norwegian School of History, as represented by Keyser and Munch, fell out of favour after their deaths in the mid-1860s due to the influence of a new generation of historians who drew on evidence from philology, linguistics, geography and history to disprove Keyser’s and Munch’s settlement theories. These young scholars “generally dismissed the notion of the nation as a static and ancient entity, and were inclined to see it as a social organism undergoing slow, incremental evolution” (p. 30). They rejected the Germanic narrative: national identity was “not explained in terms of an invasion by a ‘Norwegian’ people with certain innate mental

dispositions, but as an internal process of cultural growth culminating with the Vikings” (p. 32). However, with the rise of physical anthropology in Norway in the 1890s, racialised explanations of national identity, drawing on Germanic theories of national origins, were once again topics for serious academic debate.

Racial taxonomies differed amongst the early Norwegian physical anthropologists, but they all identified a ‘race’ equivalent to Retzius’ Germanics. Justus Barth, who worked in the Department of Anatomy in Oslo’s University of Kristiania, called this the *Vikingtypen* (Viking type), while Carl F. Larsen, an army doctor, called it the ‘Norse-Germanic dolichocephalic type’. Another army doctor, Carl Oscar Eugen Arbo—who was to become Norway’s foremost pioneer physical anthropologist—also agreed that a blond long-skulled race was at the core of the nation. While Arbo’s work can be seen as a revival of Munch and Keyser’s national narrative, there is, as Kyllingstad observes, a major point of difference: Arbo acknowledged a significant amount of mixing between short and long-skulls in the composition of the Norwegian peoples. He saw this as a process of ‘racial degeneration’ (p. 46).

Arbo became increasingly influenced by the field of anthroposociology, a borderline discipline between physical anthropology and the social sciences, which made use of the inferior short-skull/superior long-skull distinction, and was characterised by racist fears about the consequences of miscegenation. “A key building block in the theoretical edifice constructed by the anthroposociologists”, explains Kyllingstad,

was the notion of a convergence between the Aryan and the Germanic races. In contrast to Anders Retzius and his generation, the anthroposociologists did not believe that the original speakers of the Aryan or Indo-European language had wandered into Europe from somewhere in Central Asia. Instead, they held that the original Indo-Europeans were an indigenous European race that had arisen in northern Germany and southern Scandinavia during the Stone Age, and that the Germanic peoples were their true descendants. Thus, the Aryans were identical to the Germanics, and it was this Aryan-Germanic race that was responsible for European civilisation. (p. 51)

Anthroposociology was initially met with resistance in Germany, but from the 1890s it began to make a strong impact not only in the academy, but also on public discourse surrounding nationalism. It was not Arbo but the scientific freelancer Andreas Hansen who popularised anthroposociology in Norway. Hansen’s work was well received by leading German anthroposociologist Otto Ammon. Kyllingstad describes how impressed Ammon was

with Hansen's psychological assessment of the long and the short-skulled 'races': the dolichocephalics were aristocratic and freedom loving; the brachycephalics lacked a sense of freedom, but yearned for an unreasonable amount of equality (p. 56). For Ammon this difference proved that the short-skulls were by nature slaves to the Aryans.

At this point in *Measuring the Master Race* Kyllingstad makes an important observation that plays a key role in his conclusion, that while Ammon and Hansen (and later others) rejected the rationale behind the cephalic index, it continued to be central to their research (pp. 56–57). There was no direct relationship between skull shape and mental faculties, as Retzius had believed, but his cephalic index was still useful, because it could help to identify race, and races were thought to differ in their innate psychologies. Interestingly, these were statistical differences: there could be brave, heroic short-skulls, but they were outliers. The often repeated historical claim that race theory was essentialist until after the holocaust is mistaken.

Indeed, *Measuring the Master Race* contains a brief and useful history of the modern concept of race spread throughout its pages. Kyllingstad describes, for instance, the rise of Mendelian genetics and eugenics and their impact on anthropology and racial science. The scope is international, but the focus is of course German, Scandinavian and especially Norwegian. Eugenics found its Norwegian mouthpiece in the chemist Jon Alfred Mjøen, who advocated both positive eugenics—promoting the reproduction of supposedly superior individuals—and negative eugenics, including forced segregation and even sterilisation of undesirables. His book *Racial Hygiene* was criticised severely by university-based scientists in Norway, who painted Mjøen as a pseudo-scientist and a dilettante. “This led to a lasting conflict that thwarted the establishment of a unified eugenics movement in Norway and hindered the International Federation of Eugenics Organizations from establishing a proper foothold in the Norwegian scientific community” (pp. 100–101).

In the second half of the *Measuring the Master Race* the focus turns to the three professional Norwegian anthropologists in the interwar years: Kristian Emil Schreiner, who was head of the anatomy department at the University of Kristiania (and had been an influential critic of Mjøen), his wife Alette Schreiner—who despite pioneering lab-based biology in Norway and being a member of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters, never held an academic position—and their collaborator, Halfdan Bryn. Kyllingstad describes Bryn as the leading Norwegian physical anthropologist of the 1920s. The Schreiners, and Bryn in his early career, were primarily advocates of social hygiene and positive eugenics, in which racial hierarchy played a less important role than it did in the more explicitly racist 'racial hygiene' movement. In the mid-1920s Bryn turned from social to racial hygiene, inspired by the idea of

a Nordic master race and a vision of world where social organisation reflected racial hierarchy, in which a natural order was restored, and where the 'Nordic race' would flourish at the expense of those considered less advanced.

Despite their political differences, the Schreiners and Bryn were to collaborate on a major anthropological survey of Norwegian military conscripts, with the aim of understanding the racial composition of Norway. The Schreiners were primarily interested in understanding Norwegian prehistory, while Bryn wanted to establish "eugenically relevant data to document superior and inferior racial elements in the population" (p. 145). It was this difference that led to the dissolution of the project, although it played out through scientific disagreements about the interpretation of data, especially skull measurements. Alette Schreiner criticised both the scientific value of the cephalic index and the claim that long-headedness was an indication of racial superiority. The cephalic index, she argued, was a crude construct that did not take into account the ontogenesis of the brain and the skull. The connection between long-headedness and superiority was orthodoxy for Bryn. He argued (like Arbo before him) that short-headedness had become dominant in Norway as a result of miscegenation and racial degeneration. Schreiner argued that as the Norwegian population had become more civilised, the average brain had grown and the skull had rounded to fit it. Kristian Schreiner also rejected Bryn's racial degeneration theory, arguing that the Nordic race was never 'pure': it was and always had been a product of admixture.

Scientific and ideological differences eventually soured the relationship between Bryn and the Schreiners; the aims of their project became less ambitious, and the publication of its results were delayed, with no conclusion or even a summary. The break harmed Bryn's academic reputation in Norway, and he began publishing more frequently in German journals. "The Schreiners were thus instrumental in redefining Bryn's status—from 'scientist' to 'pseudoscientist'—and in redrawing the boundary between science and non-science, which in turn helped to finally debunk the 'Nordic idea'" (p. 225).

Kyllingstad is never seduced by simple narratives of devils and angels. The figures in this book are complex. Kristian Schreiner rejected hierarchical ranking between the Nordic, the Mediterranean, and the Oriental 'races', but he and Alette Schreiner continued to assume the inferiority of the Sami. Bryn was a sloppy and a dogmatic scientist, but Kyllingstad insists that he was not a fraud. "Bryn appears extreme, but it can be claimed that he only drew logical conclusions from ideas that had had scientific legitimacy within the Norwegian academic community for several decades" (p. 214). Indeed, he was following in the tradition of Arbo and Hansen, discussed above.

This is a worrying observation. Bryn was, after all, lending scientific credibility to the concept of a Nordic-Germanic master race. The joint project between Bryn and the Schreiners was meant to be descriptive science, but this was, as Kyllingstad shows, “largely a delusion, since the very selection of the ‘traits’ listed in anthropologists’ typologies was based on the fact that there existed techniques to describe them. These techniques had been created as part of changing and often incompatible theories on heritability, brain anatomy and evolution” (p. 223). Rejecting outmoded methodologies, such as the cephalic index, would have meant abandoning huge amounts of data and starting from scratch. This goes some way to solving the central problem this book seeks to explain—how mainstream Norwegian scientists could lend support and credibility to the notion of a Nordic/Germanic/Aryan master race.

Measuring the Master Race also makes an insightful contribution to the history of racism. As Kyllingstad observes, “Racism in science has often been portrayed as the influence of commonly-held prejudices, prejudices that in the long run have been unmasked through growing scientific insights” (p. 222). Even the most astute philosophers and historians of science have endorsed this story. “Ordinary people remain contentedly oblivious to all these professional disagreements”, wrote David Hull, referring to disagreements surrounding ‘race’, “and racism is first and foremost a fact about ordinary people reasoning the way that ordinary people reason” (Hull, 1998, p. 364). As Lisa Gannett has commented, this falsely assumes that scientists are to some extent immune to racism—or perhaps that when they are being racist they are not being scientists—which makes the difficult topic of scientific racism an easy one to avoid (Gannett, 2010, p. 376). Kyllingstad tackles the issue head-on. His book evinces a complex, multi-directional relationship between scientific and everyday racist thinking. It is not only that scientists can be influenced by personal racist beliefs. The beliefs of common folk are also influenced by science, by what science legitimates. While Kyllingstad doesn’t use these terms, this relationship can create a feedback loop, strengthening the hold of racism in a society.

It would perhaps be comforting to think that racist science only takes place when scientists take off their professional hats, and don their prejudiced caps. That way it would be more or less easy to distinguish between racist and regular science, but Kyllingstad questions this simplistic picture:

Even granting that Halfdan Bryn was a sloppy scientist who was quick to jump to conclusions when confirming his own prejudices, his conflict with Schreiner cannot be understood solely as a story of false science being debunked by true science. By drawing

on different anthropological research traditions, Bryn and Schreiner used the same set of data to construct conflicting scientific truths. Thus the results they produced helped confirm preconceived and conflicting perceptions of reality instead of leading to new insights. In that, the conflict between Bryn and Schreiner mirrored a tension within the anthropological research tradition itself, a discipline devoid of a coherent set of theories on how to interpret empirical data. (p. 225)

There is still tension within physical anthropology when it comes to questions of ‘race’. Kyllingstad covers the rise and fall of the idea of a Nordic *master* race, but the reality of a Nordic *race* is not a topic that he weighs in on (although there are indications of his scepticism about racial taxonomy). Given his conclusion regarding the continued use of scientific concepts after they have lost their scientific justification, and the uncertain position that the concept of race continues to have within physical anthropology, it is worth considering how the book might add to the current metaphysical debate about the reality of race.

3. Implications for philosophy of race

When it comes to ‘race’, current physical anthropology is not so much a “discipline devoid of a coherent set of theories on how to interpret empirical data” (p. 225) as it is a discipline without agreement on which set of theories to use. This has led to widespread disagreement and confusion about whether race is biologically real. When Lieberman et al. (1992) sent out surveys to physical anthropologists asking whether they agreed with the claim that race is biologically real, half responded ‘yes’, half responded ‘no’ (see Morning, 2011 for a more recent study, with similar results). Those who responded ‘no’ probably thought of race as the way to talk about subspecies in humans, as there is general agreement that there are no human subspecies (for a discussion on the relationship between race and subspecies see Hochman, 2014). Those who responded ‘yes’ probably thought of race as a way of talking about human populations. Kyllingstad describes this tradition when he discusses the outcome of the 1950/1951 UNESCO Statements on Race: “After an intense international debate, especially among anthropologists and geneticists, it was agreed that the concept of race should not be abandoned. Instead, race was defined as the equivalent of biological populations or ‘isolates’ that were genetically different” (p. 218).

There is a parallel, I believe, between Kyllingstad’s account of the retention of the cephalic index into the 20th century and the retention of race into the 21st. The cephalic index lost its

scientific justification—its rationale—while retaining its scientific support. The same has happened, I would argue, with race. Race was supposed to describe the major biological groupings within the human species. It was defined in contradistinction to the Linnean category ‘variety’, which was not a part of the Linnean taxonomic system, but was a purely practical, artificial category, allowing for small and numerous varietal distinctions (Doron, 2012). In the nineteenth century ‘race’ was conflated with ‘nation’ (Hudson, 1996). In the 20th century it was conflated with ‘population’. “One might expect”, suggests Kyllingstad, writing of the beginnings of the modern synthesis in the 1930s, “that the concept of race would be replaced by those of ‘population’ and ‘genes’. Something along these lines did happen, but not until the 1940s and 1950s, when a number of influential geneticists began criticising traditional physical anthropological race research for being based on outdated nineteenth-century ideas” (p. 88). Yet the replacement of the concept of race by that of ‘population’ is far from complete: the terms continue to act, for many, as something like synonyms. ‘Races’ are the populations we choose to call races.

Like the cephalic index, the idea of race survived after it lost its scientific justification. The geneticist L. S. Penrose wrote that he was unable to “see the necessity for the rather apologetic retention of the obsolete term ‘race’, when what is meant is simply a given population differentiated by some social, geographical or genetical character, or... merely by a gene frequency peculiarity” (Penrose, 1953, p. 252). One could argue that the populationist approach is just keeping racial science in line with developments in modern biology, but the problem with this is that ‘population’ is not operationalised by the population naturalists about race. As Theodosius Dobzhansky explained the view, “Races are defined as populations differing in the incidence of certain genes but actually exchanging or potentially able to exchange genes across whatever boundaries (usually geographic) separate them” (Dobzhansky, 1944, p. 252). There is nothing about how much genetic difference is needed for a population to be a race; any genetic difference can count as racial. This has a strange consequence: race is no longer about *major* human groupings. When I pressed Neven Sesardic on this point (Hochman, 2013b) he conceded that “In principle we might introduce names for hundreds or even thousands of human groups that we could call races on the grounds of their genetic differentiation” (Sesardic, 2013, p. 290). Evolutionary biologist Armand Leroi (2005) has expressed the same view. These authors accept that the so-called ‘major races’ have no special or privileged biological status.

The reconceptualisation of races as genetically defined populations has been hugely influential, including in Norway, where it was endorsed by Kristian Schreiner’s successor,

Johan Torgersen. “Notwithstanding the loss of scientific credibility for the notion of a superior blond race”, writes Kyllingstad, “the Nordic type survived as a scientific concept into the post-war era” (p. 219). Is there a Nordic race? If we accept the populationist definition of race, then the answer is probably ‘yes’. Novembre et al. (2008) have shown that there is a close correspondence between genetic and geographic distance within Europe, meaning that genetic differentiation has a map-like structure (which is what we should expect, given an isolation by distance model). This does not mean that there is very much genetic differentiation. On the contrary, Novembre *et al.* estimate F_{st} (a measure of genetic differentiation) = 0.004 between geographic regions within Europe. In other words, there would have to be over 60 times the amount of actual genetic differentiation for there to be human subspecies within Europe, using the standard—but arbitrary—threshold for subspecies classification ($F_{st} = 0.25$ or above). Yet there could still be European races, including a Nordic race, if races are simply genetically distinguishable populations.

This is how Torgersen understood the concept of race. Torgersen, explains Kyllingstad, “thought that race was a matter of the different frequency of genes in populations. He maintained that there were no clear boundaries between races, that race was a statistical abstraction, that intermixing between populations was common and that the racial history of humankind was characterised by changing periods of isolation and gene flow between populations, by population boundaries that were constantly coming into being and disappearing” (p. 219). In other words, for Torgersen, and many anthropologists and biologists since, ‘race’ is a synonym for ‘population’. Given the massive meaning change required to achieve this synonymy relation—and the lack of scientific justification for its retention—perhaps it is time to reject race as a scientific kind, just as the cephalic index has been rejected. Concepts such as ‘population’, ‘geographic ancestry’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘racialisation’, and ‘racialised group’ can do all the work ‘race’ does across a range of disciplines, with the benefits of being more specific, and without implying that there are any major and privileged biological groupings within our species, which there are not.

Since the first UNESCO statements on race were released in the early 1950s the concept of ‘biological race’ has been watered down to the extent that, if you accept the population-genetic definition of race that the statements promoted, it is *trivially true* that race is real (Hochman, 2013a). Yet for all the watering down of the concept, and for all of the condemnation of racist science, there is still conceptual room for something similar to the kind of racist ideology that *Measuring the Master Race* helps us to understand. There is still room for what has been called *statistical racism*, a non-essentialist kind of racism which claims that

'races' differ in their 'innate' intelligence and morality *on average*. This is not just a possibility; it is the kind of 'bell curve' racism that keeps on rearing its ugly head. These hereditarian claims, it is worth emphasising, are not supported by current evidence (Kaplan, 2015).

“One of the reasons racist ideas have been able to thrive and influence”, writes Kyllingstad, “is the fact that they were once considered to be scientifically sound” (p. xxii). And one of the reasons they have been considered scientifically sound is that the biological category of race has been considered (and continues to be considered by many) to be scientifically sound. Scientific support for race is a key prop of scientific racism. Kyllingstad shows how the cephalic index lost its scientific justification while retaining scientific support into the 20th century. Race, I would argue, is a similar case. *Measuring the Master Race* demonstrates how easily ideology can masquerade as descriptive science, giving us all the more reason to engage in a multidisciplinary debate about the meaning and reality of 'race', and the ongoing presence of scientific racism.

4. Conclusion

Measuring the Master Race is a superb contribution to the history of the concept of a superior Germanic/Nordic/Aryan race, and it serves as the first comprehensive account of Norwegian physical anthropology in the English language, opening up a new and fascinating literature to the English reader. It is well written, well structured, and engaging to read. Kyllingstad manages to offer an extensive and authoritative account of his subject without going into the kind of historical detail that might overwhelm the non-specialist. He paints the figures in this book in three dimensions: their motivations, and what shapes their beliefs—scientific and political—are complex, and the socio-cultural context is always present. Kyllingstad makes an insightful contribution to the history of racism, and one that has relevance to current debates about race and racist science. For anyone interested in the history of race and racism, the history of physical anthropology, Scandinavian prehistory, Norwegian national identity, or Sami studies, *Measuring the Master Race* will be a compelling read and a valuable resource.

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