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Book Review: Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy

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The following review appeared in the November 2015 issue of CHOICE:

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Smith, Justin E. H. **Nature, human nature, and human difference: race in early modern philosophy.** Princeton, 2015. 296p bibl index afp ISBN 9780691153643, \$39.95.

In this innovative, thought-provoking book, Smith (history and philosophy of science, Université Paris Diderot, Paris 7) looks at the construction and evolution, in natural science and anthropology, of 17th- and 18th-century modern views of racial difference—views that led to racial typing, racial profiling, prejudice, and implicit bias. The taxonomy that resulted from these views was based on hidden agendas and political presuppositions surrounding the belief in, as Smith writes, “the non-equality between Europeans and non-Europeans” and the “[denial of] human nature’s universality.” This rationalization into categories of “people of reason versus people of nature” contributed to the justification of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and modern racism. The author also looks at social contract theory of private property, which in part developed alongside Native Americans’ lack of a concept of private property encapsulated in “God owns the horizon.” In deconstructing modern beliefs in “nature, human nature, and natural difference,” Smith charts the discriminatory discourse on human race constructed in the 17th and 18th centuries—discourse that contributed to implicit biases in perceptions of social reality and rationalizations of the social order. This is a valuable book for those interested in philosophy, sociology, cultural studies and multiculturalism, the history of race, and the history of natural science and anthropology.

—D. B. Levy, *Touro College, Lander College for Women*

Summing Up: Recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through faculty; general readers.