



PETITION: Against 'Race Realism'

written by Allegra
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Justin Oakley and Michael Selgelid
Editors in Chief, Monash Bioethics Review



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Sydney, 20 November 2018

Dear Professors Oakley and Selgelid,

We are writing to you as the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association to express concern about the publication in the *Monash Bioethics Review* of an article entitled 'Defending Eugenics' by Jonathan Anomaly.

In our view, this article normalizes a practice that has been, and continues to be, associated with the discipline and punishment of racialised people since the 19th century when it was first suggested by Francis Galton, a 'race scientist' whose 'spirit' the author wishes to 'reclaim' in the interests of reducing the 'consequences of people reproducing at random.'

The author attempts to avoid the charge of racism by arguing that the virtues of eugenics should not be tempered by the ends to which these ideas were put by the Nazis during the Holocaust. There are a number of problems with this proposition which we would like to outline:

1. It is impossible to dissociate an idea from the context in which it emerged and the practices which it led to. The very idea of manipulating the population in order to attempt to facilitate a 'eugenic utopia' comes to fruition within the context of European colonialism, and the increased power of European states to quantify and manage populations. The main targets were the poor, the disabled and those considered racially



‘inferior’.

2. Anomaly’s discussion of the Holocaust attempts to avoid racism by making the argument that it was ‘dysgenic’ to eliminate the Jews as ‘arguably among the most intelligent and productive people of the twentieth century.’ Such an argument, while attempting to avoid racism, still operates with racially essentialist terms by generalizing about all Jews; it is notable too that Jews of colour are omitted from Anomaly’s claims.
3. Anomaly clearly believes in race differences, arguing that it was only the ‘the racist direction the eugenics movement took in the United States and Germany’ that led scientists to ‘deny that races exist.’ It is our contention that it is impossible to disentangle the belief that the human population can be divided into so-called races from the injustices that continue to be associated with that belief. And in the specific case of the article, it is impossible, to argue that races exist while claiming that one’s proposal to introduce eugenics into policy making is not racist.
4. Eugenic practices of the type discussed by Anomaly in the paper, are still in practice. The author believes that the language of eugenics was merely used to mask the ‘morally abhorrent policies and pseudo-scientific claims’ of the Nazis. However, eugenics principles were applied much more widely than that. In our context [here in Australia, the Eugenics Society of Victoria was in operation until 1961](#). The practice of removal of Aboriginal children, which is still ongoing, [reaching unprecedented levels today, has its roots in eugenics as its ultimate aim was the control of the Aboriginal population](#). The practices of forced sterilisation are still in use against [Indigenous women in Canada for example](#). Dorothy Roberts has documented the extent to which the US welfare system has been restructured to inhibit the reproductive freedoms of poor Black women (<https://penntoday.upenn.edu/research/revisiting-killing-the-black-body-20-years-later>). Therefore, the policy proposals, presented by Anomaly, to improve what he calls the troubling ‘current demographics of Western countries’ are not mere hypotheticals.
5. In fact, Anomaly makes clear what troubles him when he remarks that



pronatalist policies put in place by the Swedish state have resulted in higher births among those of Somali origin rather than ‘native-born Swedes.’ He also makes reference to ‘impulse control’ as hereditary, an argument also made by the conservative US publication, The National Review, which argued that [Black children had less impulse control than white children, thus justifying their exclusion from school](#). Therefore he cannot claim that racism does not motivate his argument.

At a time when so-called ‘race realism’ is booming, despite being thoroughly debunked by [the great majority of scientists](#), the scholarly community must take responsibility for the ideas it endorses. There are serious questions to be answered about how an article that proposes that ‘future people would be better off if people with heritable traits that we value had a greater proportion of children’ passed peer review.

It is our view that there is absolutely no way of separating the notion of there being ‘more valuable heritable traits’ from the fact that modern western societies have associated value with whiteness, abled-bodiedness and prosperity to the detriment of racialised people, the disabled and the poor.

We seem to have entered a phase in academia and public life where debate for its own sake has trumped any commitment to the principle of protecting those most vulnerable and creating the conditions for a more just society for all. As critical race scholars who are only too painfully aware of the practices to which ideas of race have been put, we suggest that it is never the time for an article that defends eugenics to be published in a reputable international scientific journal.

We hope that you will consider this letter and take the necessary steps to address the processes of peer review that led to this misguided decision.

Yours sincerely on behalf of the Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association



Alana Lentin

Associate Professor, Western Sydney University and ACRAWSA President (2017-19).

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