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HISTORICAL OUTLINES OF EUGENICS AND ITS INFLUENCES ON EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper discusses the term eugenics and sheds light on this concept through different historical periods. Although almost forgotten, historically, this doctrine has had a significant influence on the concept of education. The paper is an attempt to clarify the doctrine so as to show the misguided nature of the times when the basic right to life, development, and education was not available to everyone. According to certain ideas and visions, education was considered a category meant only for the chosen, and these ideas later resurfaced with the transhumanists.

Key words: eugenics, education, Sparta, transhumanism

ИСТОРИЈСКИ ОБРИСИ ЕУГЕНИКЕ И ЊЕНИ УТИЦАЈИ НА ОБРАЗОВАЊЕ

Апстракт

Суштина рада огледа се у разматрању термина еугенике и расветљавању овог појма кроз историјске периоде. Иако готово заборављена ова доктрина је у историјској перспективи имала значајан утицај и на концепт образовања. Рад представља покушај њеног разоткривања, ради указивања на странпутице времена када није било доступно основно право на живот, развој и образовање свима. Образовање је према неким идејама и визијама била категорија намењена само одабранима, док се ове идеје појављују касније и код трансхуманиста.

Кључне речи: еугеника, образовање, Спарта, трансхуманизам

THE CONCEPT OF EUGENICS

The aim of this paper is to shed some light on the ideas from which eugenics developed and its influences on education and upbringing, as well as to present certain implications which emerged in certain disciplines. The ideas of eugenics' advocates, although presently seen as unacceptable and discarded in their primary form, have become a topic of interest in certain scientific disciplines and still intrigue scientists from the areas of genetics, pedagogy, biology, psychobiology, medicine, sociology, literature, developmental psychology, and philosophy.

The term eugenics originates from the Ancient Greek words: *eu* – good and *genos* – birth. The modern definition of eugenics as a science was given by I. I. Gottesman, a former director of the American Eugenics Society: "The essence of evolution is natural selection; the essence of eugenics is the replacement of 'natural' selection by conscious, premeditated, or artificial selection in the hope of speeding up the evolution of 'desirable' characteristics and the elimination of undesirable ones" (American Advisory Bioethics Commission-Eugenics, retrieved on May 15, 2014 from <http://www.all.org/abac/eugen02.htm>).

EUGENICS THROUGH HISTORY

A presentation of historical limitations of certain ideas initiates contemplation on the paths which should not be followed in the future, but it still constitutes a testament to the ideas from a certain period. Among the tendencies to improve the human race, Francis Galton, who is considered the father of eugenics, discusses the idea of the right to love, and later of the right to education. The roots of eugenics are not traced back to Galton's time but as early as the time of Plato. Some elements of eugenics can also be found in Spartan upbringing.

According to Roper (Allen G. Roper, 1913) eugenics has its roots in the killing of deformed or weak children within tribal communities all over the world. This idea occupied the minds of philosophers such as Plato, writers such as Thomas More, and scientists such as Galton, who gave eugenics its name and scope.

The eugenic ideas have been adopted not only by philosophers, but also by writers, rulers throughout history, and later by scientists, such as Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and others. The roots of eugenics and its quest for a "fine, healthy race" can be found in the ancient civilizations of Sparta, Rome, and Greece. The primary goal of eugenics is the "improvement of mankind" through medical control of future generations, by eliminating the "bad" and promoting the "good" individuals. In Ancient Greece, the theory of eugenics was transferred into practice in the form of negative eugenics (which comprises methods for discouraging reproduction of persons with genetic defects or with presumed inheritable undesirable

traits, either through sterilization or killing). Sparta practiced systematized infanticide. The destiny of a newborn child was decided by the Elders of the state. The baby was bathed in wine, and if the baby was weak, the Spartans would take the child to Mount Taygetus or the child would become a slave (helot). In Sparta, parents had no influence on their child's education and the right to develop. Lycurgus, the famous Spartan lawmaker, saw children in Sparta not only as parental property, but as property of the state as well. The development of the children was, therefore, decided by the oldest members of the tribe.

“If a child was weak and undeveloped, the order was to throw it down in the abyss of Apoteta, on the slopes of Mount Taygetus, because a child which has a weak and crumbling body at birth is of no use to itself and the state” (Zaninović, 1985, p. 14).

Roper wrote the following on the infanticide in Sparta:

“Selective infanticide can only rest on a physical basis; there is no speculation in latent capacity. There was no list of unhealthy geniuses in the annals of Sparta, no St. Paul, no Mohammed, no Schumann, no De Quincey. Even if selection had been less rigorous, and genius had been conceded the right to live, environment would have denied it the right to develop. Sparta, content that Athens should be the Kulturstaat of Greece, cared only that the military hegemony should be her unchallenged right. Once infanticide had become a system, its recognition as a *finis* would suggest regulation of marriage” (Roper, 1913, p.16).

When the children are born, Plato proposed that “the offspring of the brave and fair will be carried to an enclosure in a certain part of the city, and there attended by a suitable nurse” while “the rest will be hurried away to places unknown” (Plato, 2012, p. 71). Thus, the unwanted children are “hurried away” from the eyes of the public, which is a euphemism for infanticide. Plato thought that in his ideal state progeny must be connected to mothers' and fathers' age boundaries. For men that period is 30-50 years, while for women it is 20-40 years. Children of parents younger or older than that were destroyed (Zaninović, 1998, p. 29).

Plato also insisted this was not meant for all the classes in his society, so craftsmen and farmers were stripped of any right to education. Plato saw education as a category meant only for the special classes. That is why he stressed the need to “create an educational system which recognizes educational differences, teaches the dominant part of the soul, and thus satisfies our needs for a just state with balanced order” (Milutinović, 2008, p 61). In so doing, Plato himself supports the selection process in education and prolongs the idea of education of individuals to whom the state has appointed the role of participants in the educational process. Individual rights are put in service of the state, which limits the possibility for the development of

individuality and personal choice. Although the primary ideas of eugenics are criticized and severely condemned today, traces of these ideas still exist in cases “when individuals are trained for various professions which are necessary for the successful functioning of society” (Walker, Soltis, as quoted by: Milutinović, 2008, p. 62).

Today, eugenics and its ideas are seen as unacceptable, but its former advocates found excuses for its survival. For instance, Charles Darwin pointed to the possibility of evolutionary regression, which would arise if the unfit started having more children than the fit (Paul, as quoted by: Polšek, 2004, p. 17). Darwin’s ideas influenced Francis Galton, who presented eugenics as a means of social progress, and therefore asked:

“Could not the race of men be similarly improved... Could not the undesirables be got rid of and desirables multiplied? Could not man actually take charge of his own evolution? ...What nature does blindly, slowly, and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly, and kindly” (Galton, as quoted by: Kevles, 2004, p. 3, 12).

Galton became famous by studying gifted individuals in the 19th century, reaching a conclusion that giftedness and ingenuity are hereditary. Conclusions of this kind strengthened his belief that “it would be quite practicable to produce a highly-gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations” (Galton, 1892, p. 1).

Yet, it was only in the second half of the 19th century that eugenics got a proper definition, scope, and aims. However, the theory of population control and elimination of the weak reaches back to the end of the 18th century. The proponent of this view was Thomas Robert Malthus, a 19th-century scholar best known for “An Essay on the Principle of Population” (published from 1798 to 1826). In this essay he wrote about his worries that such an endless growth of population would hinder the progress of what he deemed a utopian society. For this reason he thought that the population must be kept in check. Measures which Malthus saw as “positive” for the control of population are:

“extremely various...all unwholesome occupations, severe labour and exposure to the seasons, extreme poverty, bad nursing of children, great towns, excesses of all kinds, the whole train of common diseases and epidemics, wars, plague and famines” (Malthus, 1826, p. 15).

Malthus saw the solution to the “problematic” number of the poor in gradual abolition of poor laws and wrote a shocking passage in which he states that a man born into the world that cannot get subsistence from his parents, and is not needed for labour by society has no right to claim the smallest portion of food and has “no business to be where he is” (Malthus, 1803, p. 531). He added that in “nature’s mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her orders” (Malthus, 1803, p. 531).

Galton was followed by a myriad of scientists who broadened the subject, and, unfortunately, some of them repeated ancient history and applied eugenic principles to society with devastating effects, especially in Nazi Germany.

The work of British eugenicists certainly had an impact upon Aldous Huxley when he wrote "Brave New World" (1932). Unlike Galton, who saw eugenics as means of reaching utopia, Huxley saw eugenics in a different light. Huxley used his work to show how the use of eugenics as a state tool can lead to a dystopian state. In such a state individuals are created and molded according to state needs, while dystopia goes with, rather than against, the human grain.

This state is animated by "progressive" aspirations of the eugenicists. Following those aspirations to their ultimate realization, Huxley enables the readers to recognize evils that are inextricably linked to the successful attainment of partial goods. The plot of the novel is set in the distant future of 632 (AD 2540 in the Gregorian calendar). The world is unified in a single technocratic state, whose population is limited to no more than two billion people. In London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre the state practices an operation which they deem necessary "for the good of Society" (Huxley, 2006, p. 5). The procedure involves changes in the development of embryos (by reducing oxygen levels during their growth, "the lower the caste the shorter the oxygen" (Huxley, 2006, p. 14)). The embryos are classed and treated differently depending on the position they will hold in society. After the fertilization process

"the fertilized ova went back to the incubators; where the Alphas and Betas remained until definitely bottled; while the Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons were brought out again, after only thirty-six hours, to undergo Bokanovsky's Process" (Huxley, 2006, p. 6).

The process allows making multiple embryos from a single one, thus enabling faster "production line" constantly producing twins, a uniform line of men and women who will together carry the motto of the state "Community, Identity, Stability".

Conditioning of involuntary reflex is used so as to evoke loathing of books and nature, because "a love of nature keeps no factories busy" (Huxley, 2006, p. 23). Through hypnopaedia – sleep teaching – the citizens are taught to love their position in society and they never question the whole automatized and dehumanized process of citizen production. In other words, this method bypasses the need for forceful subjugation of citizens and the state apparatus makes citizens who unconsciously accept the system and the ideology.

When Huxley wrote "Brave New World" he warned about the future that may come if eugenics is applied on a massive scale. Even though this Brave New World does not suffer from famine, wars, diseases, and

overpopulation, it represents a gloomy prospect for humanity. Eugenic ideas threaten the liberty of human beings and enable the state to produce and manage the whole world population to its whim. The humanity becomes enslaved in perpetual substance abuse, cheap entertainment, and state managed eugenics. Even though it eliminates famine, war and disease, eugenics builds its ideal world on the elimination of “lower” humans, slavery, and subjugation of the individual. Soon after the publication of Huxley’s “Brave New World”, an ominous political movement gained power in Germany: the Nazi movement started applying eugenic ideas on a massive scale.

Throughout the historical development of education there were considerations, although minor, that education is intended exclusively for the chosen few and that it ought to have a selective character. Apart from Plato’s ideas on the right to live and develop, which do not depend on parental wishes, there arose in pedagogical sciences ideas that education cannot be accessible to all. Thus, in his most famous work “Some Thoughts Concerning Education”, John Locke, although a proponent and representative of enlightenment, cannot be seen as its typical representative, as he did not support education for the masses. Even in his “Some Thoughts Concerning Education” he wondered: “how fathers cannot see that in schools their children will be exposed to the influences of a bunch of badly raised children” (Lok, 1950, p. 70).

Herbert Spencer, a prominent representative of positivism in pedagogy and philosophy, stressed the idea of unnecessary education for workers’ children. Since the poor parents could not pay education for their children, Spencer described the situation of the time in the following manner:

“If Providence wanted to set the world so that some members of society cannot pay for their children’s education, than this means that it is unnecessary to provide them with education” (Spencer, as quoted by: Zaninović, p. 1988).

Herbert Spencer transferred Darwin’s theory onto the socio-economic environment. Darwin focused primarily on the biological evolution of animal species and almost never addressed the cultural or social consequences of evolution for humans. Spencer coined the phrase “survival of the fittest”. He argued that Darwinist principles were intended to support the notion of biological evolution’s equal application to human societies. Spencer also supported the idea that human societies, like biological species, operate according to the principles of natural selection. They are governed by competition and fitness, and evolve from an undifferentiated (homogeneous) and primitive state to one of differentiation (heterogeneity) and progress (Rutledge, 1995, p. 244). Like Plato, he thought that those who are too weak or ill-equipped to compete, as well as those who are unwilling and unable to do so, ought not to be given an artificial boost to keep them on Nature’s battlefield.

TRANSHUMANISM AND GENETIC ENGINEERING

The eugenic principles from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century are repeated in transhumanist theory (final decades of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century). Transhumanism is a cultural and social movement whose goal is to surpass the boundaries of human body and reach the posthuman state via technology. Transhumanists' ideas include genetic engineering as a means of "enhancement" for future humans and repetition of previous ideas on eugenics.

Fears of the abovementioned authors justify their findings on the influence of education and its strength, which could change the consciousness of those who were oppressed and helpless when compared to the ruling classes. With transhumanists, eugenics comes in the form of genetic engineering, which for them represents one of the ways to reach the posthuman state. Nick Bostrom thinks that genetically engineered children will get

"more love and parental dedication. Some mothers and fathers might find it easier to love a child who, thanks to enhancements, is bright, beautiful, healthy, and happy" (Bostrom, 2003, p. 499).

Critics of transhumanism rightfully find fault with this stance. They warn of the problem of child objectification. The child becomes an object, a lump of clay which can be molded to the parents' wishes. Jürgen Habermas writes:

"For as soon as adults treat the desirable genetic traits of their descendants as a product they can shape according to a design of their own liking, they are exercising a kind of control over their genetically manipulated offspring that intervenes in the somatic bases of another person's spontaneous relation-to-self and ethical freedom. This kind of intervention should only be exercised over things, not persons... This new structure of attribution results from obliterating the boundary between persons and things" (Habermas, 2003, p. 13).

Habermas is joined in this observation by Leon Kass, who notes that the problem with parents and scientists tampering with children's genetic makeup is a change in the relationship between children and creators. This author stresses the fact that children:

"stand on the same plane as its makers. As with any product of our making, no matter how excellent, the artificer stands above it, not as an equal but as a superior, transcending it by his will and creative prowess" (Kass, 2001, p. 8).

Scientists and these "parents" adopt a technocratic attitude toward human children. "Human children become their artifacts. Such an arrangement is profoundly dehumanizing, no matter how good the product"

(Kass, 2001, p. 8). Therefore, transhumanists repeat eugenicists' ideas and strive towards a technocratic attitude which was described by Huxley in his novel "Brave New World". Not only do transhumanists lean toward this objectification but they also limit the effects of genetic engineering on themselves and their progeny. Tom Koch thinks that transhumanists:

"do not seek general betterment as a socially supported good, however, but instead the right to personal advantage for themselves or their offspring. If they believed in the "enhancements" they promote, they would argue them as entitlements for everyone, goods so important that societies would be obliged to make them available to all" (Koch, 2010, p. 695).

Also, they repeat eugenicists' mistakes by thinking that undesirable traits can be easily found and removed. Therefore, transhumanists have a nativistic attitude towards education and upbringing of children because they think that genetic predispositions alone are enough for children's advancement. Koch criticizes this attitude and stresses the importance of environment and individual:

"Real intelligence requires...work. One may have quickness of mind or body but without the desire and will to develop it those potentials remain inactive. Potential may be nurtured but that requires a range not of genetic or chemical attributes but a social context that is nurturing. Without that one is left with half the story" (Koch, 2010, p. 693).

He gives Mensa members as an example: "They may believe themselves worthy but that self-aggrandizing claim has no formal substantiation" (Koch, 2010, p. 692). There is no proof that the intelligence manifested by Mensa members has greatly contributed to humanity or Mensa members themselves.

"Mensa meetings are filled with high-scoring individuals whose social contributions have been at best minimal and whose personal achievements at best pedestrian... Mensa members may be good test takers, but the correlation between that skill and any real personal or socially desirable ability may be wholly incidental. Nor can we assume society-at-large much wants its future generations to be Mensa-like" (Koch, 2010, p. 692).

CONCLUSION

Ideas of eugenics include a multitude of scientific spheres and they are a subject of debate for experts with a variety of interests. The fundamental ideology of eugenics sees the individual as a dependent person whose faith should be decided by the state. In this fashion selectivity of education is emphasized. In pedagogy nativistic theory is mentioned as one of three

personality development theories. The representatives of this theory ascribe the current and future development of an individual to heritage. They have connected the entire concept of personality development to genetics and hereditary characteristics. These ideas were especially suited for nobility and rulers, so hereditary right had a paramount role in many areas. These theories were criticized primarily on the basis of their limiting the development of a child through inherited positive or negative genes and predispositions.

Today's tendencies towards pluralism in education rely on completely opposite ideals, in which there is the right to difference, so alternatives are being found to reduce present inequalities. School systems are intensively directed towards research which would improve their development, without taking into account the current abilities of the participants. The thing that is particularly emphasized is the respect for the developmental possibilities of an individual, regardless of the present differences. Group identity and group interests are exchanged for individual interests. Educational context today is "doomed" to respect for individuals and their needs. Today, in order to achieve quality, education has a developmental mission of constant change, which is made through active change of its participants.

Ideas of eugenics were accepted in different times and historical frames, so nowadays it is illusory to talk about their application. They remain as an ideological testament of the time and certain spaces in which they were produced and implemented. Some of the primary motives for appearance of ideas of this kind are efforts to improve human world, but the ways of these improvements deserved condemnation and were met with disapproval.

The building blocks of eugenics were criticized in the second half of the 20th century. Representatives of developmental biology and psychobiology point to a complex interrelation between genes, environment, and individual's activities. Contemporary critic Susan Oyama criticizes nativist approaches to evolution of man and points to the influences of environment as an equal partner in the development of humans. "Vital patterns are the result of interactive systems at many levels" (Oyama, 2000, p. 29). In addition to genes, she stresses the role of a larger developmental context, which can include maternal reproductive system, parental care, and other interactions with animate or inanimate worlds (Oyama, 2000).

Richard Lewontin (2000) points to the fallacy of genetic determinism. The basic principle of developmental biology is that organisms are in a constant development from conception until death and that development is a result of interaction of genes in cells, time spans of the environment in which an organism lives, and random cellular processes which determine life, death, and cell transformation.

“...even the fingerprints of identical twins are not identical. Their temperaments, mental processes, abilities, life choices, disease histories, and death certainly differ despite the determined efforts of many parents to enforce as great a similarity as possible” (MacKinnon, 2000, p. 38).

Patrick Bateson and Paul Martin think that experience, education, and culture have a substantial role in human behavior, despite their genetic origin. “Change the environment, and the outcome of an individual’s development may be utterly different” (Bateson and Martin, 2000, p. 222-223). They think that individuals do not inherit their parent’s developmental environment along with their genes and that they cannot adapt to the condition in which they find themselves. In addition, Bateson and Martin stress that factors of individual’s development (environment, parents, and upbringing) play a significant part in human development.

Many theorists and researchers have confirmed that, apart from genetic predispositions, which were stressed by eugenics, there exist other significant agents for the psycho-physical development of a person. Despite its original pursuit of the creation of a better man, and in that sense a better human kind, eugenics had major flaws. Modern theories from a variety of disciplines indicate the importance of environment, individual’s activity, and interaction with others. In that sense, they clearly show that a unilateral view of individual’s development cannot be the right way of their development.

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ИСТОРИЈСКИ ОБРИСИ ЕУГЕНИКЕ И ЊЕНИ УТИЦАЈИ НА ОБРАЗОВАЊЕ

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Резиме

Имајући у виду чињеницу да еугеника има корене у далекој прошлости, овај рад тежи да прикаже њене обресе од најранијих почетака до данас. Еугеника као дисциплина интересовала је многе научнике, филозофе, књижевнике па самим тим и оне који су се бавили образовањем. Неки од примарних мотива за појаву идеја ове врсте јесу настојања да се људски свет побољша, али су свакако начини тих побољшања заслуживали осуду и наилазили на неодобравање. Стога, се разматрају различита дела оних који су подржавали еугенику како би се указало на недостатке и недоследности. Сагледавани су и начини путем којих су еугеничке идеје утицале на образовање као и последице које је имала и које су од утицаја на образовање.

Иако су идеје еугенике данас потпуно неприменљиве, данас се појављују у виду трансхуманистичких идеја о коришћењу генетског инжињеринга, као начина за достизање пост-хуманог стања. У тежњи да достигну такав после људски стадијум развоја, трансхуманисти подају у замку еугеничарског нативизма. Управо их због овог става одбацују критичари попут Коха, Каса и Хабермаса. Они истичу предност слободног развојца појединца, негирају нативистички поглед, дају предност вољи и друштвеном контексту.

Данашње тенденције у образовању јасно одбацују тежње еугеничара и оних који желе да крену њиховим стопама. Школски систем интензивно је усмерен на трагања којима би се попустио индивидуални развој, без обзира на постојеће способности ученика. Групни идентитет и групни интереси замењени су интересима појединца. Образовни контекст данас је „осуђен“ на поштовање и уважавање индивидуалности и потреба појединца.