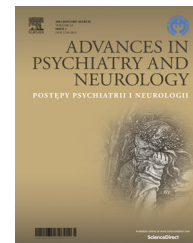


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Review/ Praca poglądowa

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ABSTRACT

The revival of disputes on establishing eugenics as an independent scholarly discipline triggered current discussions on euthanasia, cloning and in vitro fertilisation. At the edge of the 19th and 20th centuries, people marked with eugenic risk were considered unproductive in terms of the state undisturbed functioning. Usually, such assumption was enough to have the stigmatised person forcibly sterilised.

After WW I, Polish elites encountered the modern idea that the newly born Polish state had a chance of fast development thanks to eugenics. Soon, the negative one that applied much cheaper methods replaced positive eugenics. It was enough to legitimate sterilisation, giving consent to contracting marriages and having abortions in order to successively eliminate the factors contributing to 'the deterioration of hereditary traits'. In 1930–1935, large efforts were made to pass a Polish eugenic law, which eased off a little following Hitler's signing the Nuremberg Laws. Negative consequences of eugenic laws were more and more explicit, and discussions with regard to passing a similar legislation in Poland were carried on until WW II.

How is it possible that, despite considerable pressure supported with examples of smooth passing the eugenic laws by other states' parliaments, the Polish eugenic law was never passed?

It is hard to justify any form of accepting negative eugenics taking place after 1936. Regardless of the motives underlying the tacit attitude of the Polish psychologists towards eugenic projects, from the time perspective their silence should be assessed negatively.

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[☆] The paper is an enriched synthesis of the views presented in the texts of T. Rzepa and co-authors listed in the bibliography.

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Introduction

In the context of the current discussions on such vital problems as euthanasia, cloning, in vitro fertilisation, etc., there is a revival of disputes initiated by Francis Galton (1822–1911) from the moment of establishing eugenics as an independent scholarly discipline. Examination of mental talents and their inheritance in famous families led Galton to a conclusion that a nation's intellectual level may be raised by perfecting the innate traits of its members. He believed the idea should be promoted by the national government, providing financial support to marriages contracted by genetically valuable persons (positive eugenics), at the same time not permitting marriages between people without such values or the disabled (negative eugenics, which later – mainly in the Third Reich – evolved into the racial hygiene). Galton [1], being a declared supporter of the positive eugenics, meant to have reproduction controlled in such a way so that each subsequent generation could excel the previous one, inheriting the valuable traits that guarantee better adaptation to the environment and elimination of negative genetic deviations [1].

In the world

Thus, the presented assumptions of eugenics could hardly be considered dangerous by the citizens living at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in view of the fact that, according to the cultural tradition prevailing customs and religious standards, parents were expected to thoughtfully participate in the process of selecting spouses for their offspring. From that perspective, Galton's eugenic ideas may have been treated by his contemporaries as a scientific proof justifying the tradition of arranging marriages.

The eugenic ideas, referring to the social Darwinism propagated by Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), met with a particularly favourable response in the United States flooded by massive immigration. It was mainly Charles Davenport (1866–1944), a biologist researching the laws and limits of inheritance, who contributed to the assessment and selection of newcomers. In 1910, he founded the Eugenics Record Office – an institution for gathering statistical data on genetically impaired families. It was managed by Harry Laughlin (1880–1943), a teacher of agriculture experimenting with cattle and maize breeding, who in 1936 was awarded *honoris causa* title by the university in Heidelberg for his work in the science of 'race hygiene'. Davenport and Laughlin had properly trained pollsters who visited mental hospitals, prisons, orphanages, hospitals or schools for the blind and the deaf to identify useless individuals and then to segregate and stigmatise them. Usually, it was enough to have the stigmatised person forcibly sterilised, which had been legitimised in the state of Indiana since 1907, in Connecticut – since 1909 and successively in the other states and other countries [2–5].

People marked with eugenic risk were the ones considered unproductive in terms of the state undisturbed functioning, usually chronically ill (epilepsy, mental illnesses, heart

diseases, tuberculosis, etc.) and venereal diseases (mainly syphilis and gonorrhoea). This category also included the so called sexual perverts, the blind, the deaf and the mute, the mentally and physically disabled, alcoholics, addicted tobacco smokers, drug addicts, beggars, criminals, prostitutes and also the poor and persons with 'unfavourable ethnic origin'. At the same time, they tended to disregard the fact there was no evidence that defects, diseases or even bad habits or low financial status may be transmitted by genes [6, 7].

In the atmosphere of general support, eugenics advocates were perceived as progressives caring for the citizens' health status and the nations' adaptive capabilities. They tended to treat their mission as a noble thing to do, and intentions harboured by most of them had nothing in common with the Nazism, which is nowadays associated – stereotypically and irresponsibly – with eugenics and its supporters [4, 5]. Naturally, noble intentions may not be ascribed to those eugenics supporters who, after passing on (1 January 1934) the German law on "Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring," lobbied for passing similar laws in their own countries, even though they realised the meaning of the growing number of court decisions regarding sterilisation and the volume of cruel consequences. At that time, it was already common knowledge that the law served the state, but not the nation. After all, journalists in the Third Reich proudly and openly quoted the eugenics office supervisor, Prof. Fritz Lenz (1887–1976), who said, *inter alia*, that sterilisation is far less expensive for the state than supporting the people affected by hereditary diseases. They also quoted the professor's calculations, according to which in order to obtain a really valuable Germanic race, it would be necessary to sterilise all the "cacogenic" citizens, i.e. one tenth of the whole German society [8, 9].

It was known then that the mortality rate during the sterilisation process, often carried out in an unprofessional and unhygienic manner, was very high. It was also known that sterilisation may lead to serious behavioural disorders and that there are no genes responsible for inheriting unemployment, poverty, orphanhood, indecency or unwillingness to work [5]. There were even calculations saying that even if it was planned to achieve a 4-fold decrease in the number of cases of manic-depressive psychosis (i.e. from 0.04% to 0.01%), which in those times was indisputably considered hereditary, "it would be necessary to perform diligent sterilisation of 50 generations of the sick, which would take 1250 years" [10]. Therefore, the negative side of the negative eugenics was already revealed in the 30s of the 20th century. However, all the information and findings did not stop the eugenics transforming into *Rassenhygiene*, especially in the areas seized and occupied by Nazis during WW II.

In Poland...

Just after WW I, the Polish elites encountered the modern idea that the Polish state reborn in 1918 had a chance of fast development thanks to eugenics. Answering the question what needs to be done to make it true, Leon Wernic

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