

# The Eugenic Mind Project

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## Preface and Acknowledgments

*The Eugenic Mind Project* derives from some unexpected twists and turns in my professional and personal life over the past ten years or so. Prior to that time, I had worked primarily in the philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and biology, and was turning to complete a projected trilogy of books on the individual and individualism in what I called “the fragile sciences.” Having published *Boundaries of the Mind* on cognition in 2004, and *Genes and the Agents of Life* on biology in 2005, it was a matter of turning to the third book—on sociality. While I had had to absorb some new literature from the cognitive and biological sciences between 1998 and 2003 in writing *Boundaries* and *Genes*, moving to complete this trilogy on the role and conception of individuals in the cognitive, biological, and social sciences involved a more dedicated program of study. About cognition, I antecedently knew a reasonable amount, having completed a doctorate in the philosophy of mind and worked primarily in the cognitive sciences during the 1990s. About biology I knew passingly enough, chiefly from teaching the philosophy of biology from 1995 while at Queen’s University, and then by benefiting from several programs for faculty aimed at promoting the depth of one’s interdisciplinary scholarship, sponsored by my next erstwhile employer, the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Extending some ideas in *Boundaries* about individuals in the cognitive sciences into the biological sciences in *Genes* primarily relied on a good enough match between my own partial, growing bioknowledge and the inherently integrative (and forgiving) nature of the interdisciplinary field covering the history, philosophy, and social study of biology.

But my own ignorance ruled the day when it came to sociality and the social sciences. Here the learning curve was to be a fair bit steeper. In fact,

it only gradually became clear over a number of years that the proposed third book in the trilogy, *Relative Beings*, could not adopt the smorgasbord approach that governed the second book—a little bit of this, a little bit of that. *Relative Beings* would focus instead on kinship as a primary structure governing individuals and the forms of prosociality in which they were immersed. But then eugenics, and a different kind of learning curve, came along shortly after moving to Edmonton, Alberta, in 2000.

The initial drafts of what have become the chapters in the first half of *The Eugenic Mind Project* were written while I was the principal investigator for the Living Archives on Eugenics in Western Canada project, a role that provided a wealth of experiences that inform the book. As will be clear from the introductory chapter, the collaborative work that emerged from this project, and particularly the contributions of eugenics survivors to that project, were the sine qua non for my own thinking here. I would especially like to thank Judy Lytton, Leilani Muir, Ken Nelson, Glenn George Sinclair, and Roy Skoreyko not only for their courage in sharing their experiences and lives in detail in a variety of settings, but also for their resilience and commitment to working together with community advocacy organizations, academics, and students on eugenics past and present. I am also grateful to the project's other team leaders—historian Erika Dyck, community advocate Nicola Fairbrother, disability studies scholar and activist Gregor Wolbring, and humanities computing specialist Natasha Nunn—and to the multitasking project manager, Moyra Lang, for their co-direction of the project over a five-year period.

I would also like to acknowledge the important role that students and former students played here, especially Jacalyn Ambler, Emma Chien, Luke Kersten, Bart Lenart, Colette Leung, Ben McMahan, Faun Rice, Aida Roige, Amy Samson, Josh St. Pierre, and Mark Workman. All contributed significant content to the project's ongoing website, [EugenicsArchive.ca](http://EugenicsArchive.ca), a site that I have drawn on repeatedly in my writing and teaching.

These collaborations would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through their award of a Community-University Research Alliance grant for the project in 2010, as well as from our major university and community partners, particularly the universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Saskatchewan, and Neighborhood Bridges.

The book as a whole was drafted in January 2016 in Melbourne, Australia, and revised in light of reviewer and other peer feedback during the course of the remainder of that year. I would like to thank three anonymous reviewers for MIT Press for their distinctive, encouraging comments on what was, at that time, a manuscript without notes at about two-thirds its final length, and the philosophy editor at the press, Phil Laughlin, for his support for publication. I am indebted to Luke Kersten, Matthew J. Barker, Faun Rice, and Mary Horodyski for comments on penultimate versions of the chapters in part I, and to Michael Bérubé, Ken Bond, Maria Kronfeldner, Sandra Harding, Julie Maybee, Milton Reynolds, Susan Schweik, Alexandra Minna Stern, and Alison Wylie for more general guidance in shaping up the final version. More nascent forms of the material here were presented at a variety of venues, including in talks each year during Alberta Eugenics Awareness Week (2012–2014); at the biennial or annual meetings of Cheiron, the International Society for the History, Philosophy and Social Studies of Biology, the International Society for the History of Neuroscience, and the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association; at keynote addresses to the Australasian Association of Philosophy in Wollongong, the Atlantic Canadian Philosophical Association in Halifax, the Philosophy of the Life Sciences Network in Gut-Siggen, and the student-led Philosophy-History-Politics-Conference at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops; and at invited talks at the Central European University in Budapest, the University of Vienna, Pennsylvania State University, Lewis & Clark College, Concordia University in Montreal, the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of British Columbia, Okanagan, in Kelowna. I would like to thank my hosts in each case, and audiences for their interest and probing questions and comments.

I have drawn on joint work with Luke Kersten, Joshua St. Pierre, and Matthew J. Barker, and I am grateful for their permission to do so, as well as for the collaborations themselves. The material in chapter 7 draws on both “Eugenics and Disability,” written with Josh, with sections 7.5–7.8 stemming from Josh’s contributions most directly, and a paper written with Matt, “Well-Being, Disability, and Choosing Children.” The material in chapter 3 draws on work undertaken with Luke Kersten. I am grateful to Garant Publishing for permission to use material from “Eugenics and Disability,” which appears in *Rethinking Disability: World Perspectives in Culture and Society*, ed. Patrick Devlieger, Beatriz Miranda-Galarza, Steven E.

Brown, and Megan Strickfaden (Antwerp: Garant Publishing), 93–112. The vignettes from eugenics survivor stories that appear in section 10.8 have been reworked from my “The Role of Oral History in Surviving a Eugenic Past,” which appears in *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence*, ed. Steven High (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2015), 119–138.

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