JOURNAL OF CONTROVERSIAL IDEAS

Editorial

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Submitted: 23 October 2024, accepted: 23 October 2024, published: 30 October 2024

How to cite: McMahan, J.; Minerva, F.; Singer, P. Editorial. *Journal of Controversial Ideas* **2024**, *4*(2), 21; doi:10.35995/jci04020021.

This seventh issue of the *Journal of Controversial Ideas* marks the third year since we launched the journal. Over the past six issues, we have published 57 papers (our acceptance rate is around 13%) on a variety of topics, and we hope we have succeeded in providing a forum for interesting and controversial ideas, as well as promoting careful, rigorous, and unpolemical discussions. Our overarching goal has always been to help to protect and preserve academic freedom, as well as freedom of thought and expression in general, both of which have been increasingly threatened in recent years. Although the threats continue to increase, a number of organizations have been mobilizing to address them.

Recently, there have been more cases of academics being investigated or sanctioned for voicing controversial ideas. Professor of Sociology David Miller was fired from Bristol University for holding anti-Zionist views, even though in 2021 a university investigation had concluded that Miller's comments were not unlawful. Subsequently in February 2024, an employment tribunal found the dismissal unfair and discriminatory. Several years ago, philosophy professor Stephen Kershnar was suspended from teaching and banned from campus at SUNY Fredonia for comments he made about paedophilia, about which he had earlier published a book, in an online interview. In the summer of 2023, the Mayo Clinic subjected Professor Michael J. Joyner to disciplinary action over his comments to the *New York Times* about transgender athletes. Earlier this year, Nathan Cofnas, a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the Faculty of Philosophy at Cambridge University, lost his affiliation to Emmanuel College because he had published on his Substack newsletter an article defending "race realism". Around the same time, the University of Pennsylvania suspended Professor Amy Wax for one year, removed her from her endowed position, and ended her summer pay permanently for making comments deemed to be racist and sexist.[1] Also early in 2024, Maura Finkelstein, a

[1] One of the members of our editorial board, John McWhorter, has explained why he thinks Prof Wax shouldn't be punished in an article recently published in *The New York Times:* link to the article

tenured, Jewish professor of Anthropology at Muhlenberg College in Pennsylvania, was fired by the college for reposting a statement by a Palestinian-American poet along with a few sentences condemning Zionism. Later, in the spring of 2024, Professor Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, a Palestinian, was suspended from her position at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and placed under criminal investigation for making similar statements critical of Zionism. It seems, therefore, that academic freedom and free speech are still under threat and that, for the time being, there is still a need for this journal (as well as for other initiatives with similar aims).

Among the controversial questions discussed in this new issue of the *Journal of Controversial Ideas* are 'Is Clinical Psychology really racist?'; 'Should we return all human remains and artifacts from past people to Native American tribes?'; 'Should we really stop talking about agency with respect to obese people?'; and 'Why didn't the naturalists from 19th century think of applying Bergmann's rule to human beings'? Another paper discusses the blameworthiness of combatants fighting on the unjust side of a war, arguing that the moral differences between them and low-level participants in the Nazi holocaust are not nearly as great as virtually everyone supposes. Also in this issue we have a paper that discusses issues related to transgender men and women. In this case, the author argues that trans women cannot experience characteristically female phenomenal states. We are also publishing a paper which completes an article published in our very first issue. The author argues that even though it might be immoral to discuss certain controversial ideas in universities, there are still good reasons to discuss them, in part because of what universities are and are meant for, and in part because of the concept of "admirable immorality". Another paper in this issue examines liberal education in Britain, arguing that the country has moved away from it, and discusses possible implications for the future. Yet another argues that a form of "enlightened tribalism" could promote positive values better than liberal cosmopolitanism.

We are also publishing a paper that deals with one of the most controversial topics in academia: group differences in IQ. Academic freedom exists (or should exist) to protect exactly this kind of discussion, the kind that makes many of us uncomfortable, angry, shocked, and even disgusted. This doesn't mean, of course, that this kind of discussion, or any discussion on a controversial topic, should be taken lightly. Indeed, we think the opposite is true: taking it lightly means automatically dismissing it, rather than responding to it with good counterarguments.

This paper was originally submitted to the journal in September 2021, so it took us an unusually long time to complete the review. In part, the delay was due to the fact that the paper involves empirical research and analysis of raw data in German, which required us to find a trusted German-speaking data analyst to check the raw data and ensure the results could be reproduced. We had also sent the paper to an English-speaking data analyst who had conducted a preliminary analysis and provided the authors with some initial feedback about the more technical parts of the paper, which the authors incorporated, but we felt that it was important to find someone who could rerun the analysis in the original language.

As we understand it, not all journals go to these lengths when reviewing a paper. But we believe that having an external data analyst rerun the analysis of the raw data is good practice, and we plan to continue to do this in the future to guard against faulty or distorted analysis of data. The topic itself adds a second layer of complexity. Because the topic of group differences in IQ is so taboo, there are not many qualified academics working in this area, so it took us some time to find qualified reviewers. But we are confident that the four reviewers were highly qualified for the task. The paper went through three rounds

of reviews, and at each round of review, the paper was amended and sent back to the reviewers. After three rounds, the four reviewers were satisfied with how the authors had addressed their comments. We editors also read the paper twice and sent our comments to the authors at various stages of the review process.

The paper argues that asylum seekers coming from some Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and African countries have a lower average IQ than Germans. The authors consider various possible explanations, from genetic factors to trauma and lack of education in the country of origin, but they don't come down in favour of one or more of these explanations. They also find that refugees who moved to Germany have a higher average IQ than their co-citizens who didn't flee the country, and consider at least two plausible explanations: the people who found a way to flee the country have higher IQs, or education in Germany is of better quality and facilitates an increase in IQ. It makes sense that in countries ravaged by war, where schools are often closed for reasons of safety or are destroyed by bombs, children don't develop their full cognitive potential. According to the authors, each year of education is associated with two additional IQ points, so it's not surprising that people who haven't attended school for several years don't fare as well as those who attend school regularly. In the paper, the authors report an interview with a teacher, in which it is said that "About 80% of these young people have missed nine years of schooling". There could also be something about the quality of the education system in these countries that makes the education less effective even when it's regularly provided. At the very least, this paper raises the important issue of education in countries where the education system does not provide continuous (and perhaps not high-quality) education.

The authors also argue that people scoring relatively low on IQ tests are less likely to be economically productive than people who obtain higher scores. The implication of the second claim seems to be that immigration to Germany from groups whose members have lower average scores on IQ tests should be restricted, because it is economically costly. The authors don't explain how and to what extent these groups' immigration should be restricted.

So, what should we make of the claim that recent asylum seekers have not contributed as much as expected to the German economy, possibly because of lower cognitive ability than that of the general German population? We genuinely don't know if these claims are true: we don't know if it's true that asylum seekers haven't helped German economic growth, and we don't know if it's true that their cognitive capacities are lower than those of the general German population. The authors have presented some evidence, but, as is the case for almost all academic articles, the evidence they have presented is not beyond dispute.

Similarly, there is reasonable disagreement about how to regulate refugees' (and more generally, immigrants') access to a country. There are people who promote open borders, such as economist Bryan Caplan, and others, such as philosopher Michael Walzer, who argue that open borders could be detrimental and that immigration needs to be regulated. There can be disagreement about the impact of immigration on the receiving country as well as on the country of origin, but apart from matter-of-fact disagreements that in theory could be solved by empirical studies, there is more profound disagreement about how (or whether) to regulate immigration if it turns out that it does impose moderate to severe costs on the receiving populations. Christopher Wellman, in one of the commentaries to this paper, explains very well what the difficulties are for each approach, while Bradley Hillier-Smith, in another commentary, argues that the right to asylum should not be contingent on IQ or productivity. These are complex questions that are beyond the scope of the paper we have published. But we think this kind of debate is valuable and

useful, even though it strikes some sensitive chords. The questions it raises should be discussed openly and honestly. In this spirit, we decided to publish the paper together with three commentaries and we hope to receive more after publication. Rindermann, Klauk and Thompson will reply to these commentaries in the next issue.

One of the commentaries is by K. Paige Harden and E. Turkheimer, two respected psychologists who are familiar with the literature on IQ testing and group differences in IQ. Harden and Turkheimer are critical not only of the authors' methodology and analysis, but also of our editorial decision to publish the paper, which they argue should not have passed peer review. We would like to clarify that the decision to publish the paper was made by the three editors (not by the editorial board, which is not involved in editorial decisions) on the basis of the comments of four reviewers and two data analysts. It's possible that all these reviewers were mistaken and failed to detect the problems raised by Harden and Turkheimer, but as already explained, the paper passed a strict process of peer review (three of the four reviewers are also respected psychology professors), and we had no reason to reject the paper on the basis of the peer-review process. We could have rejected the paper only because of fear of criticism for publishing it, which obviously would be contrary to the mission of the journal.

In sum, we believe that disagreement is inevitable and desirable, and that by explaining why we disagree with each other, we can understand each other better, and perhaps even get closer to the truth. We believe that papers should meet a certain quality threshold for publication, and we trust our peer-review process. Of course, even a scrupulous peer-review process is not perfect, but this applies not only to controversial papers, or papers we disagree with, but to all academic papers.