

The reality of race

Ludovica Lorusso (Università degli Studi di Sassari)

Abstract

The epistemological relevance of the race variable in science is here discussed within the main metaphysical framework – biological realism – widely assumed in biomedical research in the explanation of different predispositions to complex diseases between racial groups. I will first examine what is “biological realism” adopted by biomedical research, and whether the use of race within this framework is justified from an epistemological point of view. I will then discuss the powerful *biological vs. social realism* dichotomy and argue that it represents a strong limitation for a correct use of race in biomedicine, in the light of the emerging “environment-focused” models in epidemiology that explain predispositions to complex diseases by means of a plenty of different kinds of environmental factors. Within these models, social realism of race represents a successful metaphysical framework in which a contingent, non-genetic, and health-affecting biological reality of race exists that is perfectly consistent with the view that human race is a social construction, since it is produced by our discriminating social practices and racist behaviours.