

INTRODUCTION

The Origin of Nazi Eugenics, and Its Importance

Why are so many people fascinated with genetics and distinctively eugenics? There seems to be in the current culture a pull toward the scientific, that is, a captivation with discovering new things about humanity in terms of genetics and our place within the gene-pool of traits that have been handed down from previous generations. Eugenics, although a seemingly old science from the early 20th century, still has an intrigue which a multitude of professionals have researched and yet there are those who know so little about its origins. The problem is not that these researchers have not reported their findings or that they have deemed the beginnings of eugenics as unimportant; rather the fundamental problem is that the origins of eugenics is somewhat naïve, in the sense that those who initiated it did so with good intentions. Meaning, that eugenicists through the 1900s were hoping that by their experiments and research they could be able to better the human race on a fairly large scale, if not naïve one may call this very ambitious instead. And so researchers tend to make conclusions about certain events during World War II which were the result of perhaps the study of eugenics but not necessarily its origins. The best way to understand the difference between what researchers tend to publish on about eugenics, opposed to the origins of eugenics is to describe the problem as a gap. This gap which exists is full of questions that ponder why a people would allow other persons to be judged on the basis of their family derivation or the lack of some physical or mental capacity or capability. By no means are these scholars incorrectly coming to conclusions, per se, however there simply remains a need for more understanding of eugenics and its place in the history of humanity, the best way to discover this is by examining where it first started and then to what ends did these early eugenicists seek to go.

Approaching Eugenics

An old German proverb goes like this, “*Den Wald vor lauter Bäumen nicht sehen,*” translated, “To not see the forest for the trees.”¹ Within this phrase is the idea that the ones who focus only on the small details seem to fail in understanding the larger implications of what they or others are doing. For early eugenicists the intention of their research was to self direct human evolution for the advancement of humanity and the propitiation of biological science. However, as history reflects on the scientists, philosophers, eugenic research, and moral ideologies of the 18th, and mostly 19th and 20th centuries an obvious progression and pattern emerges that densely resembles a thick forest of ideas which culminate in the heart of Nazi Germany. This is not say that the intention of early eugenicists were to undermine whole populations, or even for that matter single out particular kinds of people, whether that is religiously or culturally. Rather, the intention to better humanity through eugenics existed in part to combat gene degeneracy within communities and political states. Reinhold Niebuhr, a philosopher and theologian who lived through World War II once wrote, “All human sin seems so much worse in its consequences than in its intentions.” Regardless of what one believes religiously Niebuhr assists in our journey toward understanding the origins of Nazi eugenics practically, in that he expresses a simple means of viewing the Third Reich and the Racial Hygiene program in a philosophical way.² The

1" Simone Preuss, http://learning-german.suite101.com/article.cfm/30_most_popular_german_sayings

2 The *Racial Hygiene* project was initiated in Germany and adapted under the Nazi Third Reich. Although its intent changed under certain political structures, it is best known as the means by which Germany justified the identification of those less “fit” and later their destruction.

analogy is thus: intentions of early eugenicists were indeed good, yet history provides a clear picture of what the ultimate consequence was for those at the mercy of absolute power in Nazi Germany. When leaders are in a position of absolute power, as many were in their own regard under the Third Reich, then absolute corruption is possible all the more. This paper addresses the thesis that Nazi eugenics had its origins in social biology of the 19th century, social Darwinism, and German socialism of the 20th century. The progression and pattern of the origin of Nazi eugenics follows a timeline filled with good intentions by various scientists, philosophers, leaders, and others, but will good intentions result in fruitful or frightening fruits? Were there any changes along the way that lead to a shift in the eugenic movement? Do the origins or those who began the idea of eugenics matter? What were the origins of Nazi eugenics up through the reign of Adolf Hitler?

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

Eugenics, as understood today, is the selection of desired heritable traits that improve future generations. The term was coined in 1883 by a British scientist, Francis Galton, a man influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection and a strong advocate for particular races to prevail over others. This ideology leads to a more stark definition of eugenics, one influenced by the popular theory of Social Darwinism which is the "survival of the fittest" mentality that gained serious scientific study in the early 1900s. When World War I began many scientists and political authorities supported eugenics. As a science, eugenics failed to continue after World War II because of its use as a means to support the murder of entire races. However, in contemporary times eugenics survives in seemingly obscure and minute places but none-the-less thrives.

Early History

Eugenics was popularized in the late 19th century, yet aside from the title eugenics, efforts to select particular mates in order to secure superior offspring with desirable traits can be dated back to ancient times. [Plato](#)'s Republic (c. 378 BC) describes a society where selective breeding was implemented to improve human beings. Later, the Italian philosopher and poet Tommaso Campanelli wrote in City of the Sun (1623) of a utopian community where only noble elites were allowed to reproduce. Francis Galton, in Hereditary Genius (1869), anticipated that if only men and women of distinction and wealth were to wed and procreate eventually a race of gifted people would emerge.

Basic laws of heredity were discovered by, who some would call the father of modern genetics, Gregor Mendel. He did numerous experiments with pea plants and demonstrated that individual physical traits were the result of a combination of two units (genes) and could be passed down from generation to generation. Eugenacists, including Galton, used Mendel's fundamental information of heredity with scientific evidence to support an implementation of selective breeding to improve the human race.

Advancing eugenics was simultaneously increasing along with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution within society, often referred to as Social Darwinism. Darwin concluded his account of evolution by reasoning that the greatest step humanity could do would be to realize that one is not completely guided by instinct; but that humans, through selective reproduction, had the ability to control their future evolution. This concept is what defined and drove the science of eugenics and terms such as positive and negative eugenics, which are the promotion of "good stock" and the prohibition of "defective stock", respectively.

While still in the early 1900s, eugenics increasingly became a prominent scientific study

in which biologists and social scientists participated. The scientific community sought to gain an understanding as to which human characteristics of social importance were inherited. These professionals came from around the globe including Scandinavia, most of Europe, the American continents, Japan, China, and Russia. Particularly during the Progressive Era, the United States began developing their eugenics movement and was actively involved through 1940. Support for eugenic development came from leading scientific scholars such as zoologist Charles Davenport, plant geneticist Edward East, and Nobel Prize laureate Hermann Muller, who was also a geneticist. United States political leaders in support of eugenics, included President Theodore Roosevelt, Secretary of State Elihu Root, and Associate Justice of Supreme Court John Marshall Harlan. Internationally, several persons encouraged eugenic ambitions, such as British scientists J.B.S Haldane and Julian Huxley and along with Russian scientists Nikolay K. Koltsov and Yury A. Filipchenko.

Eugenics Institutions and Legislation

Galton, in his will, provided funds for a chair of eugenics at University College, London. One particular chairman, Karl Pearson, was a renowned mathematician who helped form the science of biometry. Pearson was a controversial figure who believed that the environment had very little to do with the development of either mental or emotional qualities. In fact, he felt that the high birth rates among the poor were a direct threat to civilization. These views fueled theories of racial and social superiority. Blame and later discredit of eugenics is often attributed, in part, to Pearson.

The spread to the United States sparked the opening of the Eugenics Record Office (ERO) in Long Island, New York. When ERO was opened in 1910, it was funded by a railroad tycoon, Edward Henry Harriman. Officially, the overseer of operations was Charles Davenport

and superintended by Harry Laughlin, a professor from Kirksville, Missouri. ERO's primary objective was to be the national storehouse and clearinghouse for eugenic information. They would compile indexes of traits in American families, train field-workers to gather data throughout the United States, investigate inheritance patterns of both human traits and diseases, advise on the eugenic fitness of future marriages, and perhaps most importantly compile all such information into series of publications. With the immensity of this work further funding was necessary and furthermore obtained from the Carnegie Institution of Washington, the Battle Creek Race Betterment Foundation, and the Human Betterment Foundation.

Prior to the ERO, eugenics work in the United States was ran by the American Breeder's Association, chaired by Stanford University president, David Starr Jordan. Early research across the globe was held by three international congresses in 1912, 1921, and 1932. In Britain the English Eugenics Society (founded by Galton in 1907 as the Eugenics Education Society) monitored eugenics education and the United States counterpart was supervised by the American Eugenics Society.

In the years following World War I, the United States gained status as a world power. The rise to supremacy brought along with it a fear that the American populous would soon become diluted by immigrants entering the country and thereby undermining the country's political and economic strength. With the United States as the upcoming maintainer of world peace by means of democracy and capitalism, as well as one of the leaders in eugenic studies, prominent political leaders sought to amend border policies in interest of preserving the United States' prosperous population. Beginning in 1920, congressional hearings were held in hopes to identify particular immigration problems. The country's "eugenics expert," Harry Laughlin (of ERO) produced statistics depicting that certain immigrants, like those from Italy, Greece, and Eastern Europe,

were significantly overrepresented in American prisons and institutions for the “feeble-minded.” Additional data suggested that these groups were principally responsible for contributing too many genetically and socially inferior people. Several descriptors followed that sought to define those identified as overrepresented, for instance, feeble-minded, insane, criminalistic, epileptic, inebriate, diseased, blind, deaf, deformed, dependent, chronic recipients of charity, paupers, and “ne’er-do-well.” Much of the racial overtones saturated British and American eugenic literature and thus spread through to the public.

Laughlin was sent in 1923, as an immigration agent to Europe to investigate the chief emigrant-exporting nations. His arrangement with the U.S. secretary of labor was to determine a feasible plan that would require every prospective immigrant to undergo an interview before approved to come to the United States. Ultimately, his testimony before Congress led to a new immigration law in 1924, which severely restricted the annual immigration of individual from countries previously claimed to have contributed excessively to the dilution of American “good stock.”

Laughlin appeared frequently with other forms for controlling eugenics and the reproductive stock of the United States. One such occurrence led him to approach state legislators with a model law to control the reproduction of institutionalized populations. By 1920, and only two years before his influential publication *Eugenical Sterilization in the United States* (1922), a staggering 3,200 individual across the country were reported to have been involuntarily sterilized. That number tripled by 1929, and by 1938 more than 30,000 people had claimed to have been sterilized. Laughlin’s law was adopted into more than half the states with California, Virginia, and Michigan leading the sterilization campaign. Support grew and in the 1927 case of *Buck vs. Bell*, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. upheld a Virginia

statute, claiming, “It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind.”

Support for Eugenics

During the 1930s, eugenics gained considerable popular support across the United States. Hygiene courses in public schools and eugenics courses in colleges spread eugenic-minded values to many. By studying the passage of ancestral traits, many were urged to adopt the progressive view that responsible individuals should pursue marriage ever mindful of eugenics principles. Booths were set up at county and state fairs promoting “fitter families” contests, and medals were awarded to eugenically sound families. Drawing again upon long-standing eugenic practices in agriculture, popular eugenic advertisements claimed it was about time that humans received the same attention in the breeding of better babies that had been given to livestock and crops for centuries.

Support Against Eugenics

Anti-eugenics sentiment began to appear after 1910 and intensified during the 1930s. Most commonly it was based on religious grounds. For example, the 1930 papal encyclical *Casti connubii* condemned reproductive sterilization, though it did not specifically prohibit positive eugenic attempts to amplify the inheritance of beneficial traits. Many Protestant writings sought to reconcile age-old Christian warnings about the heritable sins of the father to pro-eugenic ideals. Indeed, most of the religion-based popular writings of the period supported positive means of improving the physical and moral makeup of humanity.

In the early 1930s, [Nazi](#) Germany adopted American measures to identify and selectively

reduce the presence of those deemed to be “socially inferior” through involuntary sterilization. A rhetoric of positive eugenics in the building of a master race saturated *Rassenhygiene* (racial hygiene) movements. When Germany extended its practices far beyond sterilization in efforts to eliminate the Jewish and other non-Aryan populations, the United States became increasingly concerned over its own support of eugenics. Many scientists, physicians, and political leaders began to denounce the work of the ERO publicly. After considerable reflection, the Carnegie Institution formally closed the ERO at the end of 1939, the same year Adolf Hitler sanctioned his personal physician to kill people considered unsuited to live. That effort of euthanasia in Germany is commonly known as the T4 Program.

During the aftermath of [World War II](#), eugenics became stigmatized so much that many individuals who had once hailed it as a science now spoke disapprovingly of it as a failed pseudoscience. *Eugenics* was dropped from organization and publication names. In 1954, Britain’s *Annals of Eugenics* was renamed *Annals of Human Genetics*. And in 1972, the American Eugenics Society adopted the less-offensive name Society for the Study of Social Biology. Its publication, once popularly known as the *Eugenics Quarterly*, had already been renamed *Social Biology* in 1969.

U.S. Senate hearings in 1973, chaired by Edward Kennedy, revealed that thousands of U.S. citizens had been sterilized under federally supported programs. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare proposed guidelines encouraging each state to repeal their respective sterilization laws. Other countries, most notably China, continue to support eugenics-directed programs candidly in order to ensure the genetic makeup of their future.

“New Eugenics”

Despite the dropping of the term *eugenics*, eugenic ideas remain prevalent in many issues

surrounding human reproduction. Medical genetics, a post-World War II medical specialty, encompasses a wide range of health concerns, from genetic screening and counseling to fetal gene manipulation and the treatment of adults suffering from [hereditary disorders](#). Because certain diseases (e.g., [hemophilia](#) and [Tay-Sachs disease](#)) are now known to be genetically transmitted, many couples choose to undergo genetic screening, in which they learn if there is a chance that their offspring have been affected by some combination of their hereditary backgrounds. Couples at risk of passing on genetic defects may opt to remain childless, to adopt children, or procreate in hopes that their child will not get the defect or knowing that even if they do have a defect they will be taken care of.

Furthermore, it is now possible to diagnose certain genetic defects in the unborn. Many couples choose to terminate a pregnancy that involves a genetically disabled offspring, despite that the child at the time of termination is a living human. These developments have reinforced the eugenic aim of identifying and eliminating undesirable genetic material. Counterbalancing this trend, however, has been medical progress that enables those with many of the genetic diseases to live fairly normal lives. Direct manipulation of harmful genes is also being studied. If perfected, it could obviate eugenic arguments for restricting reproduction among those who carry harmful genes. Such conflicting innovations have complicated the controversy surrounding what many call the “new eugenics.” Moreover, suggestions for expanding eugenics programs, which range from the creation of sperm banks for the genetically superior to the potential [cloning](#) of human beings, have been met with vigorous resistance from the public, which often views such programs as unwarranted interference with nature, and an unnecessary opportunity for abuse.

Applications of the [Human Genome Project](#) are often referred to as “Brave New World” genetics or the “new eugenics”; however, the ethical, legal, and social implications of this

international project are monitored much more closely than were early 20th-century eugenics programs. Still, with or without the use of the term, many eugenics-related concerns are reemerging as a new group of individuals decide how to regulate the application of genetics science and technology. This gene-directed activity, in attempting to improve upon nature, may not be that distant from what Galton implied in 1909 when he described eugenics as the “study of agencies, under [social control](#), which may improve or impair” future generations.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany by Richard Weikart is a compelling work and well researched book that asks the reader to consider Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany (Third Reich) from an angle that often is overlooked or misunderstood. Weikart’s thesis is that Hitler constructed his view of ethics on the basis of Darwinian principles. Darwinist thinkers in Germany began to consider human life through the lens of Darwinian theories and from there sought to manipulate or control the genetic code of different people and races. As the socialist party grew and the Third Reich gained dominance as the German national government so did Darwinian ideology. Progressive leaders, like that of Hitler and Germany’s greatest minds, believed the study of eugenics would serve as a powerful means to identify genetic ideals and in doing so use them to the advantage of the Third Reich. Furthermore, Weikart lays out the foundations for ethics in Germany, emphasizing how moral relativism and evolutionary progress played a key role in perpetuating the development of the devaluing of human life and racial inequality. In his closing chapters the reader is able to see how much success the study of eugenics with the application of Darwinian theories has accomplished. Hitler and his rhetoric succeeded in convincing a populace that controlled reproduction, killing the “unfit”, and racial extermination were for the benefit of Germany and the world.

In his book, *Medicine Ethics and the Third Reich: Historical and Contemporary Issues*, John J. Michalczyk is joined by several colleagues to shed light on medicine and ethics under the Third Reich. Michalczyk considers the perception of doctors and medical professionals in Germany's Third Reich. He remarks how the once highly regarded Hippocratic Oath of physicians is undermined by a crucial hiatus created by the controlling regime of the Nazi party from 1933 to 1945. No longer was the medical profession about the health of an individual but rather on that of the State. Within this new uprising were physicians and nurses who followed the directive of the Third Reich in aiding and abetting the murder of millions of people, often innocent in their demeanor but guilty in their cultural association, lifestyle, or handicaps. The intent was to create a clean and healthy Germany and those who helped thought that what they were doing was right. Michalczyk and his fellows express their understanding of such a corrupted Germany by bringing to the forefront their expertise on what they think the world should have learned from all things considered.

The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism was written by Stefan Kühl. His book's thesis concerns American and German Eugenicists; he contends that the United States had a major influence on the formation of German policies. Kühl primarily focuses on the relationship between scientist in both the United States and Germany during the early Twentieth Century. In so doing he clearly makes the case that racism, sterilization, and extermination of handicapped persons was not widely accepted over night. Rather, it seemed to have evolved since the rise of Hitler and German National Socialism. The reader will be introduced to pre-WWII relations among scientist and how eventually even the eugenicists of America could not handle the procedures of the Nazi connection.

Gerwin Strobl has written an article called *The Bard of Eugenics: Shakespeare and Racial Activism in the Third Reich*. This unusual title has an unusual story in that Strobl had come across a speech by Nazi sympathizer, Hans F.K. Günther. At the time the speech was presented Hitler was about half way through his appointment as Chancellor and the ‘Euthanasia Programme’ was already gaining ground. The setting for Günther’s speech was at the annual meeting of the German Shakespeare Society. Günther, at the meeting, presented his paper entitled, “Maidens and Matrons in Shakespeare: A Practical Perspective,” which would serve as what Strobl calls a “bizarre exercise in literary criticism.”³ Strobl indicates four reasons that this work was influential: it highlighted a non-traditional form of progressing Nazi ideology; the paper was presented for both the individual and as organized propaganda, how Nazism was brought into every aspect of society, and lastly how progressive the escalation of Nazi racial policy grew during this time.

Andre Sofair and Lauris Kaldjian wrote an article entitled, *Eugenic Sterilization and a Qualified Nazi Analogy: The United States and Germany, 1930-1945*. The authors give very helpful information into the eugenic movements in both Germany and the United States. Half of the article describes how the Nazis greatly influenced physicians and created sterilization programs which eventually lead to the euthanizing people involuntarily. In the second part they dive into the United States and their eugenic program. The United States is described as rushing into the progressive era with high scientific expectations, and a need for relieving economic instability. Furthermore, sterilization laws, the American Eugenics Society, and the response of medical professionals are discussed.

³ Gerwin Strobl, *The Bard of Eugenics: Shakespeare and Racial Activism in the Third Reich*. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 34, No. 3, p. 336.

C. H. Güvercin and B. Arda have written an interesting article which follows the eugenic movement from the time of Plato to the present, it is properly titled, *Eugenics concept: from Plato to present*. They quickly move from a brief history of the eugenic concept into describing different types of eugenics, namely positive and negative. From there they go on an excursion through the country of Turkey. In this section they describe the marvelous development of a eugenic movement where although the handicapped and mentally ill were identified they were also protected under the law. This type of movement is rare in comparison to Germany. Lastly, they conclude with current updates on the eugenic movement still occurring around the world.

MAIN ARGUMENT

The Arrival of Eugenics

Overview

The origin of Nazi eugenics takes place in Germany, yet the idea of eugenics itself and much of the research was not conceived on German soil but began its legacy in Great Britain. Eugenics has a history that is ever seeking a means to expand and easily exhausted on a variety of levels in the hands of well-intentioned researchers. In its most primitive years eugenics and those who researched this science strove to succeed in creating harmonious societies free from or limited of degenerate people. Now, it must be understood how eugenics came to be without asserting a sort of deviancy between early eugenicists and those operating under the Third Reich. Later, eugenics will be discussed as it relates to the Nazi regime.

Eugenics is a highly selective scientific theory which tends to promote the ideal of improving the human race by getting rid of the “undesirables” and multiplying the “desirables,”

that is those without mental handicaps.⁴ These distinctions are rooted in social Darwinism of the late 19th century. One proprietor of this theory was Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin, who coined the term eugenics and essentially created the parameters for further research within this new field of science. But eugenics is much more than a term and a theory. Beginning with Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection in his *Origins of Species* written in 1859, is found the foundation of what eugenicists believed and used in order to establish and carry out their socially-scientific hypotheses. Darwin's account of evolution necessitated that species best adapted to their environment would ultimately win out over those less adapted. Variations among species, Darwin claimed, were inheritable and therefore those who survived would transmit desirable traits to the next generation.⁵

Early Timeline

To better understand social Darwinism and the beginning of the eugenics movement a basic timeline is essential for categorizing the brief statements above. The setting has its start in England the year of 1572, where compulsory poor law taxes are placed upon the shoulders of several communities in order to assist in paying for poor houses and other mental institutions. These taxes created a huge burden that many resented and as a result the British society would in time be amid a crisis best described as a social plague. As the proliferation of so called feeble-minded and degenerate people

⁴"Kevles (CIB), p. 457

⁵"Carlson, pp. 139-40

rose, concern for the welfare of ruling classes did too. One such concerned Englishman was Thomas Malthus. He, among others, sought a new philosophy that was only beginning to immerge in Europe. Malthus, in 1798, published a theory on the nature of poverty and how to control the socioeconomic crisis. His idea was to reject aid for the poor and manage a “finite food supply [that] would naturally inhibit a geometrically expanding human race.” These ideals were not, as Malthus would see it, immoral. Rather, he saw his socioeconomic plan as “population control by moral restraint.” He followed his principles to their end by expressing how charitable assistance, in his view, promoted generation-to-generation poverty, and while several rallied behind his desire to reject the helping of the poor, few supported his fight against an unjust social and economic structure.⁶

Sometime after Malthus in the 1850s, another English philosopher arose with similar concepts about society. Herbert Spencer, in his book *Social Statics*, expressed that man and society were not under the dominion of almighty God but cold science. In a pseudo continuation of Malthusian ideology author Edwin Black wrote that Spencer observed “man and society [as] evolving according to their inherited nature.” From this point Spencer would later conclude in his 1863, *Principles of Biology* that from evolution the “fittest” would go on to perfect society while the “unfit” would become more impoverished, diminished in education, and die off. He popularized the term, “survival of the fittest”, a nut shell phrase summarizing his thoughts about how certain humans would naturally become both better and perfect or worse and die off. Spencer himself

⁶Black, pp. 11-12

insisted, “The whole effort of nature is to get rid of such, and to make room for better...If they are not sufficiently complete to live, they die, and it is best they should die.” Within his strict societal dogma Spencer declared, “all imperfection must disappear.” The progression of social poverty created a continuing pattern of insensibility toward those in lowly estates. Author Elof Axel Carlson criticizes Spencer in that, “he missed the implication of weeding out of the unfit for species formation and saw it then as a way to maintain or perfect, rather than transform, the human species.”⁷ After addressing Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution and natural selection Spencer’s conclusions seem to fit a personal social agenda outside of what Darwin had in mind. Spencer is only one level above Malthus in that his concern for social poverty goes an element beyond his philosophical predecessor to the realm of outward criticism of the impoverished where earlier the remarks, although blunt, were seemingly reserved and suggestive but now are poignant and scientifically more creditable.⁸

In the continuum of social philosophy and hereditary science it is necessary to briefly address the person and legacy of Charles Darwin. *The Origin of Species* was written in 1859 and was a summary of years in observation of living things. His conclusion was that the survival process of most living things was natural selection. Darwin wrote about his theory expressing that it “is the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms; for in this case, there can be

⁷ Carlson, p. 124

⁸ Black, p. 12

no artificial increase of food, and no prudential restraint from marriage.”⁹ Essentially, animals other than humans are restricted to their natural makeup and cannot deviate from it, whereas if humans need more food we are capable of making more and in abundance; or if we do not desire marriage or a certain mating partner we are able to make that decision. However, in the natural world such decisions are not possible and in turn a more *true* idea of society can be observed, one that has its fulfillment in the strength of those it is made of and in the adherence to natural instinct. To this end Darwin’s legacy, as well as Malthus and Spencer’s, was bundled up into a new ideology never embraced by the man whose name bears the term: *social Darwinism*. Herbert Spencer first used the term and it may be debatable as to what intentions he had in mind by doing so. However, while the term ‘social Darwinism’ was retained it is possible that in all reality the definition better suits the name *social Spencerism*, being that he applied his social philosophy to Darwin’s observation of the natural world. The idea of social Darwinism is the notion that many humans, in their struggle to survive in a callous world, are not only less worthy but actually destined to fade away as a rite of progress. Preservation of the weak and needy was, by these standards, an unnatural act; instead the term suggests that there will only be survival of the fittest.¹⁰

In the years following Darwin’s achievements, Spencer as noted earlier published *Principles of Biology* and in it he suggests that heredity was under the control of

⁹Darwin, *Origin of Species*, Chap. 3

¹⁰Black, p. 12-13

“physiological units.”¹¹ Only a few years later in 1866, did a Czech monk Gregor Mendel inconspicuously publish his pea pod experiments. Mendel “constructed a predictable hereditary system dependent on inherited cellular ‘elements.’” Although Mendel’s experiments would not be noticed until a few decades later, the wheels of progress at this moment began to race toward eugenics as an actual field of science. To make this possible, gravitating toward the other was social planning, philosophy, and biology, each settling into the facet of a new ideology that sought to improve the human race through science and mathematics.¹²

What’s in a Name

The driving force behind this new philosophy began with the man who coined the term *eugenics*, Francis Galton. He was not known precisely as a scientist neither a philosopher nor a physician, yet in all three he dabbled. Galton weaved his scientific principles into social philosophy and although he was not a health expert his analyses of human physiology assisted greatly in the surgical and medical professions. It is by these characteristics that Galton is referred to as a trend setter, one who is a counter of things, an originator of traits, and influential in great and small matters.¹³

11" Spencer, Principles of Biology (New York; D. Appleton and Company, 1884) Vol. I, p. 183.

12" Black, p. 13

13" Ibid, p. 14

By the time Galton arrived at his theory and now termed *eugenic* science in 1883, Darwinism was becoming widely accepted as scientific fact and Spencer's *survival of the fittest* social Darwinism was being "used [as] the biological metaphor of the organism, in an inverse way, for [his] model of society."¹⁴ Galton seemingly took Spencer's philosophy and placed it in the realm of naturalistic science. Furthermore, after the rediscovery of Mendel's theory of hereditary traits in 1900, "that the biological makeup of organisms is determined by certain factors, later identified with genes," eugenics began to flourish. Daniel Kevles goes on to underscore that eugenic research was being published by a variety of professionals including physicians, scientists, and most notably biologists. These individuals were pursuing the new discipline of genetics with anxious vigor by establishing research centers, writing books, lecturing, and composing articles to educate the public. Soon, experts within the field of eugenics raised inquiries of the socially degenerate, insisting that "feeble-minded" people were responsible for numerous social problems and that these people threatened the social resources and stability of mankind.¹⁵ Eugenics quickly became an active field within scientific and social communities, bring with it political and economical ramifications. The name eugenics soon became a beacon of hope and for others an impending doom.

The Origin Shift: When Intent Becomes Reality

Overview

14" Carlson, p. 125

15" Kevles (CIB), p. 457

What was once a theory, mostly philosophical in nature, rapidly became the means of distinguishing particular classes within societies. Such classifications should not be confused with terms such as upper-class, middle-class or bourgeoisie, and lower class, but by whether or not certain peoples exemplified beneficial hereditary traits that contributed to society in a function which served to sustain, opposed to drain a society of necessary resources. The greatest examples which point to an obvious shift within eugenic research were the progression of the American eugenic movement and the distortion of Darwinian ideology in Germany. Only after these two pivotal movements did an aggressive progressive pattern emerge only to be found tangled in the web of Nazi Germany and under the control of a supreme dictator.

The American Connection

From the time Hitler came into power under the German National Socialist party, the Third Reich sought to collect more data on the so called, “inferior” people within German communities. As the German eugenicists struggled with their societal inconsistencies they looked to American eugenicists for the evidence that they needed, evidence that they hoped would help perpetuate the German people into prosperity of Biblical proportions.¹⁶

When considering the so called ‘American connection’ to, at the very least, influence of the German eugenic programs, an understanding must first be made clear. At no specific time did the German eugenic program dating before Hitler suddenly change

16" Kuhl, Introduction

because of an American influence, and thus when Hitler was in power bring him into a stupor for a bold new Germany via the scientific advancements of the United States. Rarely in history do such radical changes occur, rather what is being dealt with here is a transformation or metamorphosis from the old ways of conducting eugenic research in Germany to a more modern method. The American eugenicists influenced the practical approach that German scientists took, but the responsibility for German reactions to American methods is only that of those Germans. This is important, in that although Americans are responsible for their eugenic research and instillations in society, they deliberately separated their support of radical Nazi reforms. Yet, “No other country played such a prominent role in Nazi propaganda,” according to Stefan Kühl. This is significant in that the American eugenics movement was supportive of Nazi policies, until the war between the two nations intensified. By 1945, American eugenics had all but entirely abandoned their support of this scientific theory largely due to the horrific extremes which the Nazi’s brought their programs to.¹⁷

The connection between Germany and the United States is more intricately woven than what some may want to believe. However, the development of eugenics in Germany, although there are differences, resembled developments in the United States. Similarly to their American colleagues, German eugenicists would study family genealogies and problems of degeneration, making distinctions between those people considered superior and inferior.¹⁸ Moreover, Professor Enzo Traverso remarks,

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 37, 52

¹⁸ Friedlander, p. 9

We should [...] be aware of the links between the Nazi technico-scientific massacres and the eugenicist culture with racist connotations that was for decades widely disseminated by many doctors, psychiatrists, anthropologists, ethnologists, and biologists in important positions in the universities and scientific institutions of Europe and the United States.¹⁹

The provocative intensity of the links between German eugenicists and their American counterparts would overextend the intended brevity of this section. For this reason the most important factors between Nazi and American eugenics were the following: the implications of Nazi race policy, the reception of American degeneration studies, examples of sterilization in the United States, and support of sterilization in Germany. Briefly, one reason for this collaboration is due in part to the recognition by American scientists that Nazi Germany's sterilization laws were supposedly limited to or absent of mistakes and that the German law on the matter was entirely clear and justified. Many eugenicists idolized the freedom of the German movement and praised their efforts, and in the early years imparted applauding support.²⁰

Distortion of Darwinism in Germany

German eugenics continued to struggle with societal inconsistencies and tried to make the most of what evidence was available. In their effort to justify their position they

¹⁹ Traverso, p. 126

²⁰ Kühl, pp. 37, 39, 42-44, 50

in the process distorted Darwinism. Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution was fundamental to the ethos of German scientists who sought to advance eugenic research. By twisting the original intent of Darwin's research a factional shift occurred, which would in turn have a rippling effect on much of those influential to the progress of the Racial Hygiene movement. At this time social Darwinism was rampant and widespread, eliminating almost entirely previous social standards with moral relativism. Richard Weikart depicts that

later Darwinists hoped to salvage the kernel of religious ethics, while dispensing with those aspects they deemed superfluous religious trappings no longer necessary in a more enlightened age of science. More importantly, however, since they regarded ethics and morality as products of evolution, they considered all morality relative to the evolutionary stage of development and also relative to its ability to preserve the species. Thus they denied any fixed moral code.²¹

Darwinian morality is based off of Herbert Spencer's ambition to construct a "scientific morality" where God is dispensed and a fully naturalistic account of evolutionary ethics is provided. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish Darwin from German Darwinists who often understood or asserted that ethics can be relative to personal standards. Weikart underscores the significance of these claims when he writes that "by basing morality on biological instincts, Darwin's evolutionary explanation for ethics provide a rational, scientific account for the development of nonrational human impulses."²²

²¹" Weikart, p. 22

²²" Ibid, pp. 22-23

Nazi Germany: Eugenics, Eugenicists' and Political Power

Germany had two distinct historical breaks that emerged pertaining to its eugenic programs. In the first, there was the importance of pre-Nazi Germany eugenics before 1933 without the reign of Adolf Hitler, and the second is of course Nazi Germany eugenics with not only the reign of Hitler but the endorsement of the greater scientific community. Within these two historical breaks is a fusion of agreement that eugenics is for the ultimate good of the state but an entirely different understanding on how to approach eugenics. In the formative years of German eugenics, dating mostly from the early 1900s to the end of WWI the primary philosophy instituted was positive eugenics, whereas in the years following up until the end of WWII in 1945, the progressive philosophy was that of negative eugenics. John Cornwell summarizes both camps by noting that

the 'medical' and 'scientific' basis for the notion of eliminating the mentally ill was thus laid in the years following World War I, preparing Germany for the propaganda that would lament the cost of maintaining the 'ballast' of the mentally ill and those with congenital diseases.²³

By the end of the 19th century social Darwinism had been introduced into the German scientific community. At the turn of the century Alfred Ploetz, in 1904, founded the German Society for Racial Hygiene. His motivation was based upon the influences of Herbert Spencer, Marxism, and the American eugenics movement. A predecessor to

23" Cornwell, p. 90

Ploetz, was the pioneer of germ theory of infectious diseases, Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902). Virchow was highly accomplished and had an enormous influence on the field of medicine, in which he promoted the cell doctrine, opened up the field of pathology, and became politically active to urge governmental reform in public health issues. By in large, like his predecessor, Ploetz was relatively passive, believing that war, revolution, and welfare contributed to racial degeneration. Yet, he favored welfare for those past the age of reproduction, and therefore discouraged early and late marriages, while supporting preventive medicine as a social philosophy. He wanted social security, accident insurance, shorter working hours, profit sharing, and cooperatives to come into existence. However, Ploetz felt that the only way these reforms would occur and be successful is if they were accompanied by differential breeding “to offset the dysgenic effects that social welfare would cause.”²⁴

In 1915, psychiatry professor Alfred Hoche “described the end of atomistic individualism and the transformation of the nation into a higher organism, the *Volk*.” Hoche uncovered a key element to the progressive pattern that Germany was trailing toward. He properly predicted that Germany was slowly separating itself from an individualistic society toward a socialistic one. Later, Hitler would incorporate the idea of society as an organism into his worldview. The Third Reich under a unified, socialistic, purpose would “with its own health and identified human beings [act] as functional or dysfunctional parts of a larger whole.”²⁵

²⁴ Carlson, pp. 318-320

²⁵ Sofair and Kaldjian, p. 312

Assisting in this process of creating a socialist nation were the minds behind the race hygiene movement. The architects of Nazi race hygiene were regarded as scholars of excellent academic credentials. One of the greatest scholars to introduce evidential support of race hygiene was August Weismann, a great theoretical biologist of the 19th century.²⁶ Based on his theories of independent, immutable germ plasm, Henry Friedlander notes that “German scientists accepted the idea that heredity alone determined natural selection.”²⁷ With these conclusions in mind, the distinguished students of Weismann: Eugen Fischer, Fritz Lenz, and Wilhelm Schallmayer would seek to continue the ideals of their teacher as well as their own research.²⁸

Schallmayer’s work appealed particularly to the Nazi party in that he favored racial models of eugenics. In the early years of the Nazi party he was principally influential for their ideological development in eugenic research. His book *Inheritance and Selection in the Life of Nations* (1910) won the Krupp Prize for its social significance. For Schallmayer, marriage was an important issue in which he asserted that the role of women was to be a wife and a mother with her reputation judged in proportion to the number of children she raised. Additionally, early marriage, family values, and a

26" Carlson, p. 321

27" Friedlander, p. 9

28" Carlson, p. 321

eugenic basis for marriage was encouraged including compulsory sterilization of those unfit for marriage.²⁹

In 1921, the first textbook in human genetics was co-authored by Erwin Baur, Fischer, and Lenz. It was an extremely influential book which deeply influenced the expansion and application of race science. Furthermore, the publisher of the text, Lehmann, gave a copy to Adolf Hitler who at the time was imprisoned. Hitler read the work and used its ideas in *Mein Kampf*. Later, Nazi racial laws quoted the Baur-Fischer-Lenz textbook as their scientific basis.³⁰

Baur was possibly the most academic and least political among his co-authored colleagues. He edited an internationally respected series on the genetics of laboratory organisms, and worked on the genetics of snapdragons as well as cytoplasmic inheritance, which gained him international respect. By in large, Baur did not consider himself a Nazi, however his membership in Plotez's society, his acceptance of the race hygiene movement, and his silence on the racism and embraced after 1930 marred his reputation at the war's end.³¹

Fischer grew up in a conservative Catholic home and embraced those ideals early

29" Ibid, p. 322

30" Friedlander, p. 13

31" Carlson, p. 321-22

in his career. Yet, his interest in anthropology led him to embrace racial theory and race hygiene. His study of human genetics led him to publish widely in that field, and interestingly enough Fischer also conducted twin studies. When the Weimar Republic had its eugenic courts he served as an expert witness and later a jurist, these courts had their fruition in the Nazi eugenic program.³²

Lenz was as influential as he was unique. In its formative years the Nazi party could attribute the development of race hygiene philosophy in part to Lenz. His belief was that the state does not serve the individual but the race. The unique views that he had on race were more sophisticated than that of the Nazis'. Contrary to their belief Lenz held that there were no pure races but that there was an 'absolute value of race' as a force in society. The admiration for which he had of race hygiene greatly hinged in his understanding that eugenically based lifestyles would ultimately lead to socialism. In his academic life he served as the first professor of racial hygiene in Germany (1923) and founded the Archive for Racial and Social Biology. When the Nazi regime held power in Germany, Lenz became an ardent supporter of their basic racial policies and the development of a Nordic ideal. To him Hitler was the first politician who had taken racial hygiene as a serious element of state policy, and in 1931, he had fully committed to the party and "equated National Socialism with applied biology."³³

Although Ploetz had early on opposed Nazism before Hitler came to power, he

32" Ibid, p. 323

33" Ibid, p. 322-23

was won over to the regime via their eugenics program. It is for this reason that the Society for Race Hygiene not only survived but thrived under Nazi rule. Hitler's worldview predominately featured eugenics, euthanasia, and social Darwinist racism.³⁴ The progressive pattern of ideas began to culminate more fervently under the new Nazi socialist party. What began as an ambition to overcome societal inconsistencies evolved into a necessity for perfection, or an utopic nation.

Hitler took it upon himself to instill this utopia. The origins of Nazi eugenics are found in the years leading up to Hitler's arrival, for in his coming eugenics moves out of its common routine of research and dabblings in social experiments, and ultimately finds itself thrown into every aspect of human life. His vigor to accomplish a eugenically based Germany surpasses passive means of assisting naturalistic evolution and relies primarily on aggressive maneuvers which take eugenics beyond anything ever imagined. Hitler developed his social Darwinist ideology in the years just around World War I, they "predominantly featured racial conflict and racial extermination, and not only in relation to the Jews." His long-range agenda included the extermination of other races, although to be sure Jewish extermination was one of his highest priorities.³⁵ The ideology that Hitler held would captivate not only his mind, but "many other Germans of his time [...] would support him and cooperate with his attempts to create a social utopia."³⁶

34" Weikart, p. 70

35" Ibid, p.184

36" Ibid, p. 206

CONCLUSION

Why Eugenics is Essential to Nazism

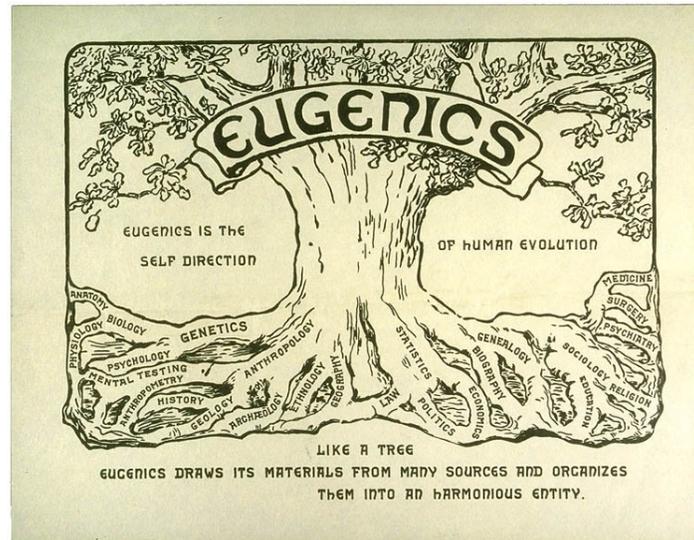
Perhaps the reason why genetics is so fascinating to so many people is the expanse and depth of its research, or the possibilities with the arrival of new discoveries. Whatever the case may be for the fascination now, during the reign of the Third Reich genetics and specifically eugenics was not only fascinating but essential to Nazism. Several German psychiatrists, anthropologists, and physicians held views about race and heredity that reflected those of the Nazi party. A leading postwar German geneticist summarized practical eugenics in Germany best:

The ideology of the Nazis can be explained simply. They claimed that the differences among human beings are based on biology. Their blood, that is to say their genes, turns Jews into Jews, Gypsies into Gypsies, antisocial individuals into antisocials, and mental patients into mental patients. All these, as well as others, are inferior, and thus the inferior cannot receive rights equal to the superior. It is possible that the inferior will produce more children than the superior, and therefore the inferior must be excluded, sterilized, extirpated, and eliminated, that is killed, otherwise we will be responsible for the destruction of civilization.³⁷

This embraces an ideology of supremacy over inferior people. Eugenics dramatically changed over the years, but not into something different. Rather, eugenics was allowed to establish a progressive pattern which brought its principles to their end. Meaning that from the beginning eugenics was established to accomplish one primary goal, better the

³⁷"Friedlander, p. 123

human race through assisted evolutionary processes.



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However, in the development of such a goal eugenicists and their followers neglected to see the whole forest of vibrant possibilities outside the singular details of one route to better the human race. The picture which most resonates with the entirety of the eugenics movement is a singular tree with many roots and branches. It seems to imply with the labeled roots that eugenics is a multi-faceted self direction of human evolution that when adhered to will produce a rich, strong, and beautiful entity, harmonious in its very nature. But history tells a different story, about men who desired perfection, gave their all to every detail, but lost compassion for those who by their own right had no say in their humanity and yet were placed into the hands of those who thought they had the right to say and act on humanity's behalf.