

# British Eugenics and Birth Control Before World War Two

by

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November, 2018

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Eugenics is the science of breeding well, or rather, the science of improving the inborn qualities of the population. This science was founded by Francis Galton in the late nineteenth century and continued by his acolytes through the British Eugenics Society. The British eugenics movement, embodied in the aforementioned Society, was primarily a movement of advocacy. Contrary to numerous historical interpretations, the British eugenics movement's *raison d'être* was the instillation of eugenic values in Britons for the health of all in society. The British eugenics movement was not fundamentally concerned with class, but race. It was also benign in comparison to many continental forms of eugenics. The *modus operandi* of the movement was the dissemination of propaganda and educational materials (literature, posters, handbooks, heredity charts, etc.) at local birth control clinics with whom the British eugenicists had allied themselves. Thus, birth control clinics became the vehicle by which the British eugenicists would attain their desideratum: pan-racial enhancement. For the British eugenicists, this desideratum would not change regardless of context, be it domestic or colonial. The exact methodology of the British eugenicists was indeed malleable per geographic context, but their goal of racial enhancement for the welfare of posterity was not.



British Eugenics and Birth Control Before World War Two

A Thesis

Presented To the Faculty of the Department of History

East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in History

by

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November , 2018

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBC	The Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress .....	97
EES	Eugenics Education Society .....	20
FMC	Fertility of Marriage Census.....	12
KSSRI	The Kenyan Society for the Study of Race Improvement .....	108
MCBC	Mothers' Clinics for Birth Control .....	92
NBCA	National Birth Control Association .....	102
NBRC	National Birth Rate Commission .....	12



## Introduction

The term *eugenics* has developed a bad reputation. An offshoot of the scientific disciplines of genetics and biology, the practice of eugenics has led to some devastating consequences.<sup>1</sup> The most obvious examples are the various genocides, forced sterilization programs, and the use of euthanasia over the past 125 years. However, eugenics can also be associated with more benign, even helpful, practices, such as the dissemination of both contraceptives and the information on how to use them, the construction of infant and maternal welfare centers, and/or the implementation of environmental reforms. There is an ongoing debate as to the proper appellations with which the eugenics movement as a global phenomenon should be attributed. Was it malicious, virtuous, or some hybrid of the two? The same question arises as to the relative progressive or conservative nature of the movement. This debate is certainly still active in regards to the Eugenics movement in Britain – the birthplace of the idea. For this reason, the topic of this project is: British Eugenics and Birth Control in Britain before World War II.

Although there have been many studies of the British eugenics movement, there does not seem to be enough literature discussing the rationale for the British Eugenics Society (periodically shorted to: the Society) operating through propaganda campaigns and birth control and mothers' clinics. This is not to say that scholars have ignored the relationship; they have not. However, in attempting to define the ethical and political tenor of the British eugenics movement, studies have overlooked nuisances to the argument and have not addressed the

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1. Eugenics can be described as the science and practice of breeding well. However, a more robust definition will be provided later in this project.

sensible partnership of the birth control and eugenics movements in necessary detail. This project will attempt to address these issues in order to fill in a gap in the current historiography.

This project will examine the manner in which the birth control movement and eugenics in Britain were aligned in the fight against population decline, deterioration, and pauperism in the early twentieth century. More specifically, this project will discuss the methodology, rhetoric, and rationale behind the partnership of the British Eugenics Society and birth control associations. In this manner, this project will show the connection between contraception and/or controlled constructive births and eugenic thought. In this instance, eugenic thought will refer to the notion that births should be either planned or prohibited in order to create the most productive, most fit, British citizens in hopes that they will make society, and the country, more productive and efficient.

Along with providing some basic knowledge of the theory, rationale, and history surrounding eugenics and birth control movements in Britain, this project will also ultimately answer questions surrounding the societal role of birth control and eugenics in Britain in the early twentieth century. This paper will answer questions such as: Why did eugenics appeal to Britain and modern society? Why did the British eugenics movement and the birth control movement enter into a partnership? What do both the rhetoric of eugenicists and the methodology of the Eugenics Society tell us about the aims of the movement; how is this different from other national contexts?

The period of study within this paper is from the latter years of the nineteenth century up until the start of World War Two. These years best represent a time in which both the British Eugenics Society and the overall birth control movement in Britain had the most financial and moral support from the public. This support would soon wane as news of the Nazis' eugenic

views and programs became known in the latter 1930s and onward. It should be noted that this project is not going to serve explicitly as a comprehensive discussion of the history, principles, and theory of eugenics. Instead, this project's purpose is to demonstrate that the eugenics movement in Britain can be described as supra-racist. It went beyond the more traditional definition of race – one being predicated upon cursory characteristics such as skin color and ethnicity – and conceptualized classes as different races. However, the political climate in Britain at the time was not conducive to illiberal practices, such as sterilization, being widely supported. Therefore, the methods of the British eugenicists were relegated to propaganda campaigns and the relatively benign operations through birth control and mothers' clinics.

This project will be divided into five subsequent chapters that are thematic and not chronological in their order of appearance. The chapter immediately following this introduction discusses both the historical background and historiography of the British eugenics movement. This chapter will explain the role ominous demographic trends played in helping the eugenics and birth control movements grow. Also, the overall trend of European population decline will be discussed. Next, the differential fertility within Britain at the time will be examined. In this context, the fertility of the upper classes was disconcertingly lower than the birthrate of the lower classes. This chapter will analyze both the rhetoric of, and demographic studies by, prominent eugenicists and British officials to demonstrate the perceived necessity of eugenics at the time. This chapter will also briefly describe the major historiographical debates in the literature pertaining to British eugenics and the corresponding scholarly works. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that due to the differential birthrate and the perception of racial and imperial decline, the time was ripe for the growth of a eugenics movement in Britain.

The second chapter in this project will discuss race and British Eugenics Society. This chapter will analyze sources from some of the most outspoken members and influential leadership of the Society, such as Francis Galton, Leonard Darwin, and C.P. Blacker, to demonstrate that the British eugenics movement was interested in creating a better society full of more competent people at all socioeconomic levels. British eugenicists were not interested in creating a race of supermen or extirpating racial or ethnic minorities. Although they certainly used racially-charged language, the overwhelming majority of British eugenicists were not staunch racists as we understand the term today. The creation of a better, meritocratic society was their overall aim.

The third chapter in this project will discuss class and the British Eugenics Society. Along with discussing the founding members of the Society, this chapter will also examine the social makeup of the Society's general membership. Next, the proponents and opponents of the Eugenics Society will be discussed. The ultimate aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the British eugenics movement, embodied in its Society, was a movement of intelligent, middle- and upper-class Britons in scientific, medical, and university occupations and settings. These Britons were primarily concerned with curbing the fertility of the lower classes in order to reverse the differential birthrate that was favoring the urban poor.

This chapter will also discuss the shared roots, goals, and membership of both the eugenics and birth control movements in an attempt to demonstrate the sensibility of their partnership. This chapter will show that the roots of these two movements originated in the meliorist movements of the nineteenth century that were concerned with both the alleviation of poverty and its deleterious effects on broader society, and the perceived loss of morality in society. This chapter will discuss movements and groups such as Malthusianism, neo-

Malthusianism, the Moral Education League, and the Charity Organization Society in order to demonstrate that they all shared a similar goal with the Eugenics Society: the amelioration of social “illnesses.” The primary, practical partnership was forged between the embodiment of the British Eugenics movement, British Eugenics Society, and the birth control movement, embodied in local clinics supported by eugenicists, feminists and Neo-Malthusians.

Education and propaganda are the topics of discussion in the fourth chapter. The British eugenics movement from its inception was mainly designed as an educational movement, not an investigative movement. British eugenicists wanted to instill eugenic morality in British society. The *modus operandi* of the British Eugenics Society was the use of propaganda campaigns and educational methods such as flyers, exhibits, handbooks, lectures, and pedigree charts designed to enlighten British citizens as to the necessity of the implementation of eugenic practices for the future welfare of the nation. This chapter will show that the representative materials produced by the Society are relatively benign in terms of their language and implications. They are not calls for genocide or mass euthanasia; they seem to be calls for prudent choices on the part of individuals.

An analysis of race enhancement initiatives by British eugenicists both in Britain and abroad lies within the fifth chapter. The British Eugenics Society cooperated with networks of birth control clinics in Britain and colonial settings to amplify and implement their eugenic agenda. This relationship was symbiotic: the eugenicists gained influence through the institutional infrastructure of birth control branches and clinics, while birth control clinics received financial support from the Eugenics Society. An analysis of Eugenics Society operations within Britain will be coupled with case studies of British eugenicists’ activities in India, South Africa, Hong Kong, and Kenya to demonstrated that, barring the occasional testing

of contraceptives like spermicides, clinics were primarily used as institutions through which eugenic ideals could be espoused. Despite the fact that different locales often led to different methodology, the end goal was always the same regardless of context. British eugenicists, regardless of location, sought to control fertility and improve the race for the welfare of current society and posterity.

This project will end with a brief conclusion that not only concisely recapitulates the argument of the project, but will also place this project in a contemporary context. When we think of birth control, what aims or whose aims are we serving in the end? Given what we know about the roots and aims of these movements, what should be our contemporary opinion on these matters? Also, given the rise of the science of epigenetics, what does this do to the nature vs. nurture argument so prevalent among eugenicists and social engineers alike? What seems to be the best implementation of birth control and eugenics?<sup>2</sup>

The project is necessary not only to fill in a gap in the current literature, but also to draw awareness to the fact that these debates about demographic trends, euthanasia, and sociobiological engineering are still prevalent today. According to the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University, countries such as Columbia, Japan, the Netherlands, and Belgium have legalized both voluntary active euthanasia and physician- assisted suicide. Countries such as Germany, Switzerland, South Africa, Canada, and some west coast states of America have legalized the latter practice. Also, due to the new CRISPR genome-editing technology, undesirable genes can be removed from the genome sequence and replaced with more favorable genes, thus making the platitudinous idea of “playing God” less hyperbolic. If

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2. Epigenetics is the study of the manner in which changes in gene expression triggered by biological and environmental factors can be heritable without changing the actual DNA sequence. (Egger G. et al. Epigenetics in human disease and prospects for epigenetic therapy. Nature 429, 457-463 (2004)).

one wishes to describe social engineering as a form of “playing God,” then eugenics was a form of this heretical game. However, when discussing these games of extreme prudence, one cannot paint with a broad brush. Details matter, and it is not beneficial to caricature or trivialize both British eugenics and social engineering if a true representation of these movements and mindsets is the ultimate goal.

This project will rely upon published works by Francis Galton and Leonard Darwin, as well as materials from the Eugenics Society archive located at the Wellcome Library in London. Individual historians such as Pauline Mazumdar were granted access to the private documents of the Society long before the documents were relocated to the Wellcome Library in 1989 and made public. Since 1989, only a few works have been published that deal specifically with British eugenics and birth control before World War Two, thus necessitating another study of the topics. Richard A. Soloway, Dan Stone, Lucy Bland, and Lesley A. Hall constitute some of the scholars who have written either monographs or short scholarly works in recent years.

The Wellcome Library should be commended for offering and maintaining a public collection of sources pertaining to the history of medicine, and especially eugenics. Although the collections at the Wellcome Library are primarily meant to be resources for the study of medical history, this does not mean that I consider this project to be one pertaining to the history of medicine. This project is not a comprehensive study of the history of medicine, demography, urbanization, eugenics, and or birth control. It is the study of both the manner in which science can be used as both a proscriptive and descriptive tool by those with an agenda and or ideology to push, and the manner in which the concept of the individual by the state and general society determines both the tenor of the agenda, and how far it is allowed to progress. I owe a great deal of gratitude to the scholars of this subject for their informative works. I also owe a great deal of

gratitude to those professors who have offered guidance and constructive criticism for this project.



## Chapter 1

### Atrophy, Pessimism, and Imperial Decline

At the turn of the twentieth century, deterioration and decline became the subjects of great debate and concern in Europe. During the last third of the nineteenth century, fertility in Europe began to decline, and marital fertility dropped ten percent in approximately half of the states within Western Europe. As the problem of low fertility became particularly acute, countries such as France, Italy, and Germany created fertility inducements to combat the issue.<sup>3</sup> Britain was not an exception to this demographic trend, and could trace the roots of the trend back to the 1870s. Fertility in Britain dropped twenty percent between 1871 and 1901, only to be followed by a period extending to the 1930s in which the fertility declined by forty percent. Fortunately for Britain, this drop in fertility was slightly offset by a drop in the mortality rate of fertile women between 1841 and 1931.<sup>4</sup> However, British observers of this trend could only be but so sanguine as it became clear that “[b]y the time of Queen Victoria’s death in 1901 it was . . . becoming apparent that her subjects were reproducing themselves at markedly lower rates than in earlier generations.”<sup>5</sup> The numbers were striking, only about two to four percent of the grandchildren of Queen Victoria’s contemporaries were having as many children as the sovereign. This number was reduced from nine to ten percent in comparison to their grandparents. Small families were becoming the norm. Take for example the shift in fertility

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3. Pauline M. H. Mazumdar. *Eugenics, Human Genetics, and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, its Sources and its Critics in Britain*. London: Routledge, 1992. 45-46.

4. *Ibid*, 46.

5. Richard A. Soloway. *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. 4.

from the 1870s, the most fertile decade on record. The number of marriages producing only one or two children (12.5 percent) was surpassed by the number of marriages producing nine or ten offspring (13.5 percent). Yet a generation later, small families were far more prevalent. The number of marriages that produced one or two children now sat at one third of all marriages. At the other end of the spectrum, Britain saw a decline in families of nine and ten children, who now constituted less than 4 percent of the total. This trend would only continue during the next decade and through the period of the Great War. Only 1.5 percent would produce nine or ten children, while forty-five to fifty percent of marriages would produce one or two children. Further exacerbating this trend was the number of childless marriages, which doubled from eight percent in the 1870s, to sixteen percent during and after the Great War.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of fertility decline was especially frightening to the British Empire, who had grown accustomed to the amount of global influence she possessed. The problem facing Britain was the creeping realization that times were changing, and that British society was shifting from an entity with global predominance to possibly utter collapse. Historian Richard A. Soloway aptly describes the zeitgeist of British society as quickly turning from one of optimism to pessimism through the revelation of deterioration.<sup>7</sup> And how could one not imagine such a shift in British dispositions? In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, ascending industrial and commercial powerhouses such as Germany and the United States challenged Britain's economic preeminence and questioned her ability to preserve global markets, let alone expand. The dynamism of the era, exemplified by both the intensification of imperial rivalries and the industrial and agricultural depression of those decades, made Britons pessimistic about the

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6. Richard A. Soloway. *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982. 8.

7. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 3.

“durability of their nation’s accomplishments.”<sup>8</sup> Soloway is not the only historian to describe the dispositions of Britons at the time to be pessimistic. Dorothy Porter also asserts that “[f]ears of imperial competition from the rapidly expanding industrial economies of Germany and the United States created a late 19<sup>th</sup>-century cultural pessimism about the potential for social and biological degeneration.”<sup>9</sup> This pessimism was only further amplified by the realization of the differential fertility rate within Britain.

### **Differential Fertility**

As if the drop in fertility was not enough, the decline proved to be more severe in the higher socioeconomic classes than in the lower classes – a fact the Soloway describes as “alarming” to the British. This fact was especially alarming for the pre-World War I generation, who “were otherwise unconcerned about the diminishing rate of increase in a country they believed to be already overcrowded.” Indeed, the troubling statistic was not the overall decline in fertility, but the “inverse correlation between fertility and socioeconomic status.”<sup>10</sup>

It should be noted that differential fertility decline was not a novel realization at the turn of the twentieth century. Thomas Malthus and others had already opined about the observable differential fertility trend before the declining birthrate of the late Victorian era became an issue. “The progenitive capacity of the poor” was a particular concern for Malthus, a concern that even

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8. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 1.

9. Dorothy Porter. “Eugenics and the Sterilization Debate in Sweden and Britain Before World War II.” *Scandinavian Journal Of History* 24, no. 2 (June 1999): 147.

10. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 10.

his critics begrudgingly accepted was valid. It did seem that poverty promoted propagation.<sup>11</sup> After the publication of Malthus' *Essay on Population*, poverty was given a biological characteristic. The crux of Malthus' argument lay in the idea that there was an inherent limit on the growth of population that was determined by available food supplies. When this limit was reached, a "misery check" of disease and malnutrition would decrease the population to a sustainable number. If men would voluntarily marry at a later age to reduce the fertility of their families, this prudent act would help stave off the "misery check" that would inevitably affect the poorer masses of the population before moving to the upper classes. In Malthus' estimation, the fecundity of the poor was a threat to all in society, and it would be wise to voluntarily control fertility, especially amongst the poor.<sup>12</sup> However, even Malthus was not original in expressing concerns of the prolific nature of the poor. Soloway assures that "[t]he assumption that the lower orders were more prolific than their social betters had been postulated since antiquity."<sup>13</sup>

Long-standing assumptions and fears surrounding the prolific nature of the poor were only increased by data from investigations by the National Birth Rate Commission (NBRC) in 1916, and data from the 1911 *Fertility of Marriage Census* (FMC). Data from the FMC demonstrated that the fertility rate among wealthier couples who had married in the 1870s and 1880s had declined almost as much as two-thirds more than the birthrate in contemporary working class marriages.<sup>14</sup> When the findings of the investigative sessions of the NBRC that were undertaken in 1913 and 1914 were finally released after being delayed by the Great War, few were shocked. The investigators denounced the national, biological, and physiological

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11. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 18.

12. Mazumdar, 36.

13. Soloway, *Birth Control*, 26.

14. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 11.

explanations for the preceding decades of fertility decline. They proclaimed that “artificial limitation” of conception was the culprit as opposed to a drop in biological fecundity.<sup>15</sup>

Soloway is correct when saying that “[t]he *Fertility of Marriage Census* confirmed what most observers of the demographic scene already knew and, in many cases, feared.”<sup>16</sup> This fear, was even pronounced by the founder of eugenics, Francis Galton, some twenty years before the census. “Most assuredly, a surprising number of the ablest men appear to have left no descendants.”<sup>17</sup> Although most of Galton’s book *Hereditary Genius an Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* was concerned with the heritability of eminence and the infertile nature of the “ablest men” – terms that alone refer to no specific class – he was ultimately discussing the upper classes of British society. This much is evident from his assertion that “reputation is a pretty accurate test of high ability.”<sup>18</sup> Even though the investigations into, and fears surrounding, overall fertility decline in Britain at this time were prominent, those conducting and or sponsoring the investigations were much more concerned with the differential fertility decline. Although ostensibly exploring the drop in fertility, those involved with the FMC and the NBRC were ultimately more concerned about class differentials. Although the overall decline of fertility may have initiated the interest in demography, the birthrate differential between socioeconomic groups became the primary focus. For the average Briton, the “population question” was reduced

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15. Soloway, *Birth Control*, 24.

16. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 12.

17. Francis Galton. *Hereditary Genius an Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences*. 2nd ed., London: MacMillan and Co., 1892. 320.

18. *Ibid*, 2.

to a perceived truism: while the wealthier classes were feverishly curbing their fertility, the poor were reproducing with “reckless abandon.”<sup>19</sup>

### **The Boer War and Race Deterioration**

Data from the NBRC investigations and the FMC aroused not only concerns about the future quantity of Britons, but also the future quality of Britons. The embarrassing nature of the Boer War in particular was a major catalyst for the further agitation of fears and concerns regarding deterioration. Hitherto pervasive talk of degeneration was only inflamed by the “South African debacle.” During the war, a disproportionate number of the military recruits who failed to meet even the minimal physical requirements for the armed forces were from British industrial towns. Struggling with an ostensibly far inferior enemy, the British surmised that “urbanization was taking place at the expense of racial vigor.”<sup>20</sup> Similar concerns as to the perceived biologically deleterious effects of urbanization were espoused by Galton in 1909. “In short, the towns sterilize rural vigor.”<sup>21</sup>

The British should have easily defeated the outnumbered Boer troops, but did not. The British only managed to enter into a costly war that demonstrated their military weakness to the world. This pyrrhic victory only furthered many observers’ assumptions that race deterioration lay behind the embarrassing display. In 1899 the early eugenicist, Liberal imperialist, and journalist, Arnold White, questioned the “racial efficiency” of the British. Did they still possess the proper stock necessary to defend their “jingoistic boast to teach the Boers a lesson?” White

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19. Soloway, *Birth Control*, 24.

20. *Ibid*, 23.

21. Francis Galton. *Essays In Eugenics*. London: The Eugenics Education Society, 1909.  
27.

emphasized the forty percent rejection rate of those military recruits from industrial towns. He would raise the percentage to sixty just two years later with the support of various other “alarmist estimates” about the “dwindling size of the pool of fit men” in the industrial towns.<sup>22</sup> These alarming figures were supported by Major General Sir John Fredrick Maurice, who only added to the zeitgeist of pessimism brewing in Edwardian Britain. Assertions from figures such as White and Maurice recapitulated the seemingly obvious sentiment that the British race was on the decline - a sentiment of racial deterioration that was much more prevalent amongst the middle-and upper-classes.<sup>23</sup> This assertion is also echoed by historian Geoffrey Russell Searle, who concisely ties the Boer War panic to the announcement of Galton’s plan for race betterment.

Concerns surrounding the fact that many British soldiers were deemed physically unfit to fight in the Boer War (and even the soldiers that did fight had a difficult time defeating the heavily outnumbered Boer troops) and how this related to Britain’s national strength would only be intensified by the staggering butcher’s bill for The Great War years later. At the turn of the century in Britain, Galton believed sufficient progress had been made in eugenics to promote the scientific field without fear of “exciting universal ridicule.” He had his finger on the pulse of the nation, and correctly detected that a considerable sector of British society would respond sympathetically to his eugenic agenda. Concerns about national efficiency and deterioration exacerbated by the Boer War panic “created a political atmosphere highly congenial to eugenics.”<sup>24</sup>

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22. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 41.

23. *Ibid*, 41 and 46.

24. Geoffrey Russell Searle. *Eugenics and Politics in Britain: 1900-1914*. Leyden: Noordhoff International, 1976. 9.

Although the notion that Britons were physically deteriorating was not new to the twentieth century, the Boer War was a major cause for concern. It should be noted that the origins of the notion of a physically-declining British population go back to at least the 1880s. The notion arose from an anxiety that Britain may have made a mistake in becoming a predominantly urban, industrial society.<sup>25</sup> However old the notion of a physically-declining British population may be, the Boer War was one of the reasons for the early success of the eugenics movement in particular. As exquisitely stated by Searle, “[t]here are several explanations for the popularity of eugenics in Edwardian Britain. Its initial growth was undoubtedly assisted by Galton’s shrewdness in choosing October 1901 as the date for launching his project of race improvement, for this was a time when the Boer War preoccupation with ‘National Efficiency’ and the panic about possibly physical deterioration were coming to a climax.”<sup>26</sup> Growing concern over the perceived physical deterioration of the British populace was due to investigators’ and officials’ ability to identify social concerns and inform the general public about them. “The illusion that human distress was *increasing*,” states Searle, “was largely created by the greater sophistication of social investigators, who by their graphic descriptions of urban squalor and destitution, and still more, by their presentation of social problems in precise quantitative terms, made these problems seem infinitely graver than had previously been supposed.”<sup>27</sup> The use of this statistical analysis by special investigators just further proved the impact that the Boer War had on the early interest in eugenics. One need only refer back to the

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25. Searle, 20.

26. Ibid, 20.

27. Ibid, 21.



statistical evidence positing ‘national degeneration’ form of the reports of the Inspector-General of Recruiting and Arnold White.<sup>28</sup>

Although social investigators, eugenicists, and journalists used statistics to try to convey the message that Britain’s population was physically deteriorating, this does not mean that all of the statistical analysis proved this notion to be true. More complete statistical records, more facilities for the mentally handicapped, and better methods of identification of those in need of social assistance made it seem as though the notion of deterioration was all too real. However, this does not mean that all signs pointed to the British nation circling the drain. The Registrar-General’s Reports actually showed a decline in mortality, which weakened the argument that Britons were becoming more physically unfit. However, these reports did not sway eugenicists. In fact, the information within these reports actually seemed to play right into their hands. For eugenicists, the decline in infant mortality represented a growing number of unfit babies that were being “artificially kept alive by the miracles of modern medicine.” And the falling tuberculosis death rate just meant that medicine was keeping yet more possibly unfit Britons alive.<sup>29</sup>

These issues explain Britain’s turn to eugenics for a viable form of alleviation. Eugenics appealed to many middle- and upper-class Britons during this period because it played upon their anxieties. Economic anxieties stemmed from challenges to Britain’s economic supremacy exuded by the United States, Japan, and Germany. Domestic social anxieties came from the women’s suffrage movement, labor unrest, and the revival of socialist movements. Foreign social anxieties came from colonial resistance in Egypt, India, and Ireland. Lastly, anxieties

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28. Searle, 22.

29. Ibid, 22.

about degeneration and national efficiency were flamed by the outcome of the Boer War and especially the realization of the differential birth rate. Many middle- and upper-class Britons looked to city slums and some sanitation and public health efforts as allowing “undesirables” to survive.<sup>30</sup> Thus, eugenics germinated at the turn of the century, and its sustenance was British upper-class pessimism, fears of atrophy, and looming imperial decline.

### **Historiography**

The major historiographical debate regarding British eugenics centers around the motives, goals, and tenor of the eugenics movement in Britain. Often this argument tends to expediently boil down to the question: Were the British eugenicists mainly classist or racist? Some of the historians who have written on this topic include Richard A. Soloway, Dan Stone, Pauline Mazumdar, Dorothy Porter, and Donald Mackenzie. A second, lesser debate centers on the reasoning for the failure of the eugenics movement in Britain. An uncomprehensive list of historians who have written on this subject include Dan Stone, Bradley W. Hart, and Richard Carr. This debate is not nearly as pertinent to this project in relation to the former debate pertaining to the motives, goals and tenor of the eugenics movement in Britain. For this reason, only the more pertinent historiographical debate will be discussed in this project.

Unlike a traditional monograph with a narrative, fairly rigid structure, Richard A. Soloway aptly describes his work titled *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930* as “a series of self-contained, topical essays within a general, chronological

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30. Lucy Bland and Lesley A. Hall. “Eugenics in Britain: The View from the Metropole.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 213.

structure.”<sup>31</sup> Soloway claims that the notion that birth control was promoted primarily to increase emotional fulfilment and sexual enjoyment amongst the British populace is simplistic. He expresses no doubt that considerations regarding health, economics, sexual liberation, marriage, the value of children, etc., inevitably determined the adoption of birth control by individuals. However, Soloway argues that the birth control movement was primarily concerned with reducing the fertility of the poorer classes – a goal shared by the Eugenics Society, which aligned with broader campaigns to inculcate the lower classes with “solid virtues” such as self-restraint, foresight, and prudence in order to improve their welfare.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of its name, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930* is concerned less with demography and more with dynamic social thought. The study of demography Soloway discusses in further detail, yet still not explicitly, in a latter work titled *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain*. In this work, Soloway attempts to expose the rarely-discussed relationship between the pervasive ideas of pessimism and degeneration in the late Victorian and Edwardian years, and the population statistics of the same period.<sup>33</sup> This work “considers an important aspect of the relationship in examining how differing scientific (and pseudoscientific) eugenicist theories of biological inheritance became popularized and enmeshed in the prolonged, often contentious national debate stirred up by the relentless fall in fertility from the 1870s to World War II.”<sup>34</sup> Soloway’s *Demography and Degeneration* is a study in the history of ideas. He examines how

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31. Soloway, *Birth Control*, xi.

32. Ibid, xvi-xvii.

33. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, xvii.

34. Ibid, xviii.

consecutive generations of educated Britons in the middle and upper classes who were “culturally inclined to think in socially conscious, value-laden, hereditarian terms” understood and responded to “compelling quantitative changes” caused by the swift decline in the fertility of Britons.<sup>35</sup> In both of Soloway’s works referenced in this project, he describes eugenics as a social movement consisting of upper-class Britons attempting to remedy the problems both afflicting, and brought about by, the urban poor. This description of eugenics is not, however, unique to Soloway.

In *Eugenics, Human Genetics, and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, its Sources and its Critics in Britain*, historian Pauline Mazumdar echoes Soloway’s description of eugenics by stating that “[t]he formation of the Eugenics Education Society followed closely the traditional pattern of social activism among the upper middle class.”<sup>36</sup> However, unlike Soloway’s works, Mazumdar’s study is concerned more specifically with the eugenics movement and its Society. Mazumdar argues that the British eugenicists “worked within a well-defined and quite recognizable problematic.” For Mazumdar, social class played a vital role in the problematic exemplified not only by the “narrow social group” who joined the Eugenics Education Society (EES) in Britain, but also by the Society’s particular program of advocacy and investigation.<sup>37</sup>

Mazumdar asserts that British eugenicists, for all intents and purposes being represented by the EES, were concerned with poverty and the lower classes. She considers their *raison d’être*

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35. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, xx-xxi.

36. Mazumdar, 28.

37. Mazumdar, 1; According to Mazumdar, a *problematic* is a branch of concepts that organizes a particular science by allowing certain questions to be suppressed in favor of other questions thus determining the problems which will be perceived as significant at the expense of other problems.

to have been the advocacy of “legislative remedies” for what the British eugenicists perceived to be the ultimate cause of pauperism. Mazumdar asserts that for about the first sixty years of the EES, the pauperism problem was at the heart of the Society’s program. Ergo, Mazumdar sees the alleviation of pauperism to be the desideratum of the EES.<sup>38</sup> In her book, especially her first chapter, Mazumdar demonstrates class-centeredness as being “the point of view typical of British eugenics.”<sup>39</sup> However, she is not alone in making this assertion. Continuing with the theme of the subordinate place of race to class in British eugenics, Donald MacKenzie argues that the eugenicists in Britain “were concerned with improving the social status of the professional middle class.”<sup>40</sup> This led to the British eugenics movement to understandably be perceived by some of its more vehement critics as a form of class-warfare. No wonder then that in the 1930s, “radical scientists” perceived the British eugenics movement as a “paradigm case of the anti-working class use of science.”<sup>41</sup>

This is the point of contention over which the debate surrounding the motives, goals and tenor of the eugenics movement in Britain manifests itself. Again, the essential question is: Were the British eugenicists mainly classist or racist? Authors such as Dan Stone and Bradley W. Hart argue in more recent scholarly works that race was more important to some if not most British eugenicists. They also argue that many in the British eugenics movement were fascist sympathizers and or had fascistic ideas and agendas. In “Watching the ‘Eugenic Experiment’ Unfold: The Mixed Views of British Eugenicists Toward Nazi Germany in the Early 1930s,”

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38. Mazumdar, 2.

39. Ibid, 73.

40. Donald MacKenzie. “Eugenics in Britain.” *Social Studies of Science* 6, no. 3/4 (1976): 499-532. 521.

41. Ibid, 520.

Hart argues that “there was a significant, though not numerically sizeable, faction in the British eugenics movement, though mostly outside the Eugenics Society itself, in the early 1930s that viewed Nazi Germany as an admirable state for its implementation of eugenic principles.”<sup>42</sup> In Hart’s opinion, the activities and views of British eugenicists who were confined mainly to the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations and had sympathy and or admiration for Nazi eugenic policies have been ignored in favor of “comparatively elitist” sources such as the Eugenics Society archive. Nazi-denouncing, liberalizing sources, such as general secretary of the Eugenics Society C.P. Backer’s personal papers, constitute examples of such sources.<sup>43</sup> Hart asserts that most scholars “have agreed that there were very few ideological and material connections between British eugenics enthusiasts and the far right. Yet the Eugenics Society contained literally hundreds of subscribing members in the 1930s and many of these harbored different views from the organizations leaders.”<sup>44</sup> Hart describes these eugenic dissidents as being divided into two camps. One camp embraced fascism and complementary eugenic ideals, while the other camp was cautiously optimistic that positive propaganda and news about the 1933 German Sterilization Law might influence the British public and Parliament to support a domestic voluntary sterilization bill.<sup>45</sup>

Dan Stone discusses this similar topic in *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain*. This monograph is more concerned with

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42. Bradley Hart. “Watching the ‘Eugenic Experiment’ Unfold: The Mixed Views of British Eugenicists Toward Nazi Germany in the Early 1930s.” *Journal Of The History Of Biology* 45, no. 1 (February 2012): 33-63. *Historical Abstracts*. 33.

43. Ibid, 35.

44. Ibid, 35.

45. Ibid, 36.

discussing the “extremes of Englishness” – a term Stone uses to indicate “the existence of an indigenous tradition of modern illiberalism” in order to argue against the “Whiggish” explanation of the failure of fascism in Britain, which is predicated on the assertion that parliamentary institutions in Britain were too well-developed and strong to “fall prey to such an ephemeral movement” that was a “foreign invention, alien to British ways.”<sup>46</sup> Stone is not trying the argue that fascism was in any manner a successful movement in Britain. That would be absurd. Stone merely argues that “British fascism failed not because it was an imitative movement, but because mainstream conservatism did not need to co-opt its ideas in order to remain in power.”<sup>47</sup>

Stone’s argument about the indigenous tradition of illiberalism in Britain dovetails into an argument about eugenics when Nietzsche enters the discussion. Stone proposes that historians “reassess the intellectual provenance of proto-fascist ideas in Britain, suggesting that they may be found to quite a large degree in the Nietzsche and eugenics movements, movements that represented the *extremes of Englishness*.”<sup>48</sup> Both Nietzsche’s conception of the *Ueberschensch* (beyond-man), and his idea that if human progress was the goal, then the random process of natural selection through survival of the fittest could not be the *modus operandi*, meshed well with the Galtonian Eugenics idea that humans can partially guide their own evolution through willpower.<sup>49</sup> Stone asserts that “British eugenics cannot so simply be separated from an ostensibly ‘harder’ continental school, since race-thinking, so often overlooked by historians,

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46. Dan Stone. *Breeding Superman: Nietzsche, Race and Eugenics in Edwardian and Interwar Britain*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2002. 1 and 5.

47. *Ibid*, 2.

48. *Ibid*, 2.

49. *Ibid*, 74.

was integral to the worldview of the British eugenicists.”<sup>50</sup> It is Stone’s contention that despite the fact that “class concerns” primarily drove the ideas and enquiries of the British eugenicists, “no less important was a concern with race.”<sup>51</sup>

The arguments about the racist or classist motivations of the British eugenics movement are not based on concepts of mutual exclusivity. Quite the contrary, historians have been trying to figure out the right ratio of classism to racism. In reality, both motives seem to be present in both the primary and secondary sources – a notion to which historians are in agreement. In *Breeding Superman*, Stone says that the citations he uses to bolster his argument have not been implemented “to suggest that race was the sole concern of the British eugenicists, for it was not. The aim is to correct a widely held view that race was of little or no concern to British eugenicists.”<sup>52</sup> If race has been overlooked as a primary concern for British eugenicists, it is more than likely due to the fact that Britain at the time was fairly homogenous in terms of race, albeit a cursory understanding of race. However, through careful study, it seems that class was transmuted to race.

In *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930*, Richard A. Soloway also demonstrates, even if unknowingly, the British eugenicists’ transmutation of class to race. The mounting statistical evidence about the declining birthrate precipitated precise descriptions and analyses of differential fertility leading to biological generalizations and the rapid inseparability of the population question from the question of class. Most Britons continued to perceive the issue of fertility decline in terms of “race suicide.” To maintain the empire,

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50. Stone, 95.

51. Ibid, 95.

52. Ibid, 110.



human material was needed. For particularly class-conscious Britons, the birthrate differential only inflamed this fear.<sup>53</sup> Similar notions can be found in Soloway's latter work, *Demography and Degeneration*, and in Dorothy Porter's "Eugenics and the Sterilization Debate in Sweden and Britain Before World War II." Soloway asserts that during the interwar years, anxieties about differential birthrate and race degeneration "altered considerably in the interwar years."<sup>54</sup> Porter furthers this notion when claiming that although race was not as important as class to the British eugenicists, "[t]he eugenic conceptualization of class within Britain, however, 'racialized' social and economic relations within British society."<sup>55</sup>

The crux of the issue is whether the British eugenics movement can be accurately described as a seemingly more liberal, classist movement or a more fascist, racist movement. This project will argue that either notion is simplistic. Even if historians are willing to grant that both racism and classism were motivating factors to British eugenicists, the idea of a type of ratio of classism to racism is missing the point. Eugenics from its conception aimed to refine society through the enhancement of mankind. The British eugenics movement seems to have been racist only in that it was supra-racist; race embodied everything from skin color and ethnicity to socioeconomic class, intelligence, and manner of conduct. The British eugenics movement, embodied by the Eugenics Society, was a hybrid movement that was liberal, while being racist. The movement cannot be accurately described as radical in relation to eugenic movements in other predominantly protestant countries such as Germany and Sweden. The political climate in Britain would not have allowed such activity. For these reasons, the British

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53. Soloway, *Birth Control*, 48.

54. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 226.

55. Porter, 146.

eugenics movement chose a sensible ally in the Birth Control movement to operate through voluntary, relatively harmless measures while still attempting to attain their eugenic goals. The next chapter will examine the birth of the Eugenics Education Society.

## Chapter 2

### British Eugenics and Race

The idea of creating a better society through racial enhancement was a natural response to the notion of racial decline and deterioration that was pervasive within British eugenics. “If we,” Galton proclaimed, “could raise the average standard of our race only one grade, what vast changes would be produced!”<sup>56</sup> Eugenics made the idea of human self-evolution seem possible. It should be noted that this evolution pertained to all of mankind, so in the instance of the British eugenics movement, racial enhancement was actually pan-racial enhancement. Galton claimed that “the human race has a large control over its future forms of activity.”<sup>57</sup> Galton’s mentioning of the human race as opposed to just one race is evidence of the pan-racial evolution for which the British eugenicists were striving. Later on in Galton’s writings, this notion is fortified by his statement that “[t]he entire human race, or any one of its varieties, may indefinitely increase its numbers by a system of early marriages, or it may wholly annihilate itself by the observance of celibacy; it may also introduce new human forms by means of the intermarriage of varieties and of change in the conditions of life.”<sup>58</sup> It should be noted that referencing Galton’s statements is crucial to understanding the mindset of many British eugenicists who followed their master’s teachings as if they were disciples.<sup>59</sup> Clearly, for Galton and later British eugenicists, eugenic

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56. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 331.

57. *Ibid*, 360.

58. *Ibid*, 360.

59. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 146.

policies were to act as a steroid for all of mankind. All humans needed was the will to enact said policies.

There was a great deal of consistency in much of the British eugenic rhetoric. There is no better example of this consistency of thought than a pair of quotes by two of the most prominent British eugenicists (Francis Galton and Leonard Darwin).<sup>60</sup> The quotes are functionally identical despite the fact that forty years separated the two. Galton described both humans and cattle as being tethered closely to “pegs” by “elastic cords.” Cattle could only venture so far from their post to graze until the elastic cord reigned them back to their hereditary post (their naturally prescribed position in life). The elasticity of the chord represented the effect willpower had on expanding one’s opportunities in life. For Galton and Darwin, humans also had the ability to “modify” their own nature through adherence to eugenic practices. Thus, humans could move their pegs whilst the cattle were preordained to their station in life. If one were to omit the part of Galton’s quote about cattle, and both simply replace the term “peg” with “anchor,” and replace the phrase “elastic cord” for “elastic cable,” then one would have a close approximation of Darwin’s assertions on the same subject.<sup>61</sup>

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60. Leonard Darwin was a son of Charles Darwin, and both chairman and, later on, honorary president of the British Eugenics Society.

61. Francis Galton’s original quote from page 360 of *Hereditary Genius* states that: “Their [mankind] state may be compared to that of cattle in an open pasture, each tethered closely to a peg by an elastic cord. These can graze in any direction, for short distances, with little effort, because the cord stretches easily at first; but the further they range, the more powerfully does its elastic force pull backwards against them . . . Now, the freedom of humankind, considered as a whole, is far greater than this; for it can gradually modify its own nature, or, to keep to the previous metaphor, it can cause the pegs themselves to be continually shifted. It can advance them from point to point, towards new and better pastures, over wide areas, whose bounds are as yet unknown. Nature teems with latent life, which man has large powers of evoking under the forms and to the extent which he desires.” On pages 19-20 of Leonard Darwin’s *What is Eugenics?*, Darwin approximates Galton’s earlier assertion by saying:

Due to their constant use of the term race, it would be simple for contemporary audiences to categorize British eugenicists as racist. A cursory study of the writings of prominent eugenicists conveniently supports this superficial notion. For example, Galton's statement that "the average intellectual standard of the negro race is some two grades below our own," proficiently fits the bill of racist rhetoric.<sup>62</sup> He later expressed this sentiment with an even more inflammatory statement:

the number among the negroes of those whom we should call half-witted men is very large. Every book alluding to negro servants in America is full of instances. I was myself much impressed by this fact during my travels in Africa. The mistakes the negroes made in their own matters were so childish, stupid, and simpleton-like, as frequently to make me ashamed of my own species . . . I have no information as to actual idiocy among the negroes – I mean of course, of that class of idiocy which is not due to disease.<sup>63</sup>

Having a nostalgia and reverence for the past, Galton asserted that the Greeks were the ablest race in all of history by the fact that their small population created "master-pieces in the principal departments of intellectual activity" that had yet to have been equaled or surpassed.<sup>64</sup>

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"Our heredity can best be compared to a fixed anchor, to which we are tied by a cable. But the cable which ties us to this fixed point is elastic. By further efforts, or by being placed in better surroundings, our lot can always be improved somewhat. In all circumstances the cable tying us to our hereditary anchor can be stretched a bit more by pulling harder. This is so, although it would be practically impossible to go on lengthening it for ever . . . If an improvement in the breed of the race comes to be made, this will be as if those who come after us will find their anchors of heredity cast further in advance. Such an improvement in natural qualities would mean that our successors would have a better start in life. They would be able to do as well as we have done with less exertion. With efforts equal to those which we have made, their lives would be more profitable than ours. The cables attached to their fixed anchors would not drag them back to the same extent. With no more trouble than we have taken, they would be superior to us in mind and body. That these results in the future can actually be obtained by reforms adopted to-day is the hope held out to us by eugenics. Is not this an inspiring hope?"

62. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 327.

63. *Ibid*, 328.

64. *Ibid*, 329.

Galton created a type of hierarchy in which the Greek sub-race of Attica was at the top, and various indigenous peoples of Australia and Africa were at the bottom. He even said that “the average ability of the Athenian race is, on the lowest possible estimate, very nearly two grades higher than our own – that is, about as much as our race is above that of the African Negro.”<sup>65</sup>

From these quotes, it would be easy to perceive that Galton was an ardent racist, not only because of his caustic rhetoric, but because he seemed to place blacks permanently on a level below that of whites in a human hierarchy of intelligence or ability. However, this latter notion is incorrect. Galton said that “the negro race is by no means wholly deficient in men capable of becoming good factors, thriving merchants, and otherwise considerably raised above the average of whites.”<sup>66</sup> In Galton’s estimation, human achievement and worth were not necessarily based on race. People of different races could out-compete one another; there was ample room for vertical movement within the hierarchy. Also, race was not based on purely phenotypic indicators such as skin pigmentation, as evidenced not only by the distinction between Britons and ancient Athenians, but by the claim that “[t]he average standard of the Lowland Scotch and the English North-country men is decidedly a fraction of a grade superior to that of the ordinary English, because the number of the former who attain to eminence is far greater than the proportionate number of their race would have led us to expect.”<sup>67</sup> The bifurcation of the Lowland Scotch/English North-country men and the English into two separate races signifies the

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65. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 331.

66. *Ibid*, 327.

67. *Ibid*, 328.

complex construct of race in British eugenics. For many British eugenicists, even the English race was “defined unusually as separate from that of the other British races.”<sup>68</sup>

Although Galton’s *Hereditary Genius*, the seminal work for British eugenics, can correctly be characterized as a work concerned with measuring the heritability of the advantageous traits of eminent men, the work was also concerned with race. Galton presumed that the question of race had not been sufficiently present in discussions pertaining to legislation. He wanted to “justly appraise” the influence of race on society. This inquiry seemed to manifest itself from genuine scientific curiosity, for Galton claimed that the goal should be to determine “neither more nor less” than the “real value” of race.<sup>69</sup> He believed that ideologically-possessed individuals would have attempted to either severely undervalue or overvalue the impact of race. Galton further elucidated his position when he stated that

[t]he importance to be attached to race is a question that deserves a far larger measure of exact investigation than it receives. We are exceedingly ignorant of the respective ranges of the natural and acquired faculties in different races, and there is too great a tendency among writers to dogmatize wildly about them, some grossly magnifying, others as greatly minimising their several provinces.<sup>70</sup>

Although on the surface, Galton’s attempted appraisal of the influence of race can easily be misconstrued as malicious in intent, this is far from the truth. British eugenicists cannot be so easily classified as racists since the meaning of the term “racist” has been altered since the Second World War to correspond more to prejudicial and or murderous acts. Both Galton and Darwin alike saw eugenics as a method of improving British society and even mankind. Eugenics, to them, was not a way to extirpate ethnic minorities. The British eugenics movement

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68. Stone, 42.

69. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, xxiv-xxv.

70. Ibid, xxiv-xxv.

advocated more liberal eugenics policies aimed to work within and benefit a meritocratic society. To elucidate this idea, exploration into both their goals and motives, and exploration into their methods for achieving said goals and motives, will need to be undertaken.

### **Duty: Patriotism, Prudence, and Morality**

Not only was race enhancement deemed possible by British eugenicists, it is clear that British eugenicists perceived eugenics to be a duty as well. This is evident in passages from *Hereditary Genius* that preceded the Eugenics Society by over a decade. *Hereditary Genius* was written to demonstrate that the “natural abilities” of man were heritable. Ipso facto, through numerous consecutive generations in which “judicious marriages” were undertaken, a “highly-gifted race of men” could be produced much as higher breeds of horses and dogs could be produced. In an era of perceived pessimism and decline in Britain, Galton believed that Britain should alter or remove the social agencies that were “working towards the degradation of human nature” and replace them with the agencies that were improving human nature. Prudence in regards to controlling reproduction through social agencies was the duty to which Galton was referring, and he was not shy in sounding this edict.<sup>71</sup> “I conclude,” said Galton, “that each generation has enormous power over the natural gifts of those that follow, and maintain that it is a duty we owe to humanity to investigate the range of that power, and to exercise it in a way that, without being unwise towards ourselves, shall be most advantageous to future inhabitants of the earth.”<sup>72</sup>

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71. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 1.

72. *Ibid*, 1.



Galton and other eugenicists were concerned with creating a better future. In this way, eugenics became the prudent *modus operandi* for paternalistically-minded individuals to create said future. Leonard Darwin stated

if selection can now be applied to the human race, in a somewhat similar manner, it will have wonderful effects on future generations. A belief in evolution opens out before our eyes possibilities of almost unlimited improvement in the lot of mankind in the distant future. We are also thus led to see that those who care for the future welfare of their country should make it one of their main aims to attend to the breed of their race. And eugenics tells us in what ways we can do this.<sup>73</sup>

Eugenics was not only concerned with creating a better future through improving the characteristics of posterity, eugenics was also intended to usurp the authority of nature for the purposes of decreasing cruelty. Though residing in an unbelievably tragic world, Galton believed that mankind was still accountable for its success and failure. Given the existential crisis of being, and the agency which mankind possessed, “interference with the pitiless course of Nature, whenever it seems possible to attain the goal towards which it moves, by gentler and kinder ways” was clearly justified in Galton’s estimation.<sup>74</sup> Given his Darwinist view of human progress, in which natural selection was a cruel process, Galton stated that “with especial reference to improving the racial qualities of mankind . . . the truest piety seems to me to reside in taking action, and not in submissive acquiescence to the routine of Nature.”<sup>75</sup>

Eugenicists expressed a type of paternalistic instinct by attempting to make decisions for Britons who they deemed incapable of doing so for themselves; eugenics aimed at curbing not only innate cruelty in the future, but also aimed at decreasing human-generated folly in the

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73. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 9; In the use of the term “selection,” Leonard Darwin is referring to the process of “evolution by natural selection.”

74. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 77.

75. *Ibid*, 77.

future. Darwin said as much when he claimed that since British eugenicists supposedly knew that, to a sizeable extent, the favorable and unfavorable qualities of parents would reappear in their progeny, the characteristics of their posterity could be foretold.<sup>76</sup> For Darwin, the possession of this knowledge begged the question: “[i]s it not, therefore, worse than folly to allow parents with bad natural qualities to have more children than those who are better endowed?”<sup>77</sup> In response to this musing, Darwin replied: “[e]ugenics seeks to lessen this folly in the future.”<sup>78</sup>

Eugenics was not only perceived as a lofty duty for the betterment of the human race, but as a utilitarian duty to be carried out to cure pauperism and crime – two themes that, according to historian Pauline Mazumdar, constituted “the core of eugenic thinking in Britain.”<sup>79</sup> Although the exact placement of pauperism and crime in British eugenicists’ hierarchy of concern varied amongst individual eugenicists, it is evident that reducing pauperism and crime were seen as a duty that could be fulfilled by eugenics. “Many who are familiar with the habits of these people,” Galton claimed, “do not hesitate to say that it would be an economy and a great benefit to the country if all habitual criminals were resolutely segregated under merciful surveillance and peremptorily denied opportunities for producing offspring. It would abolish a source of suffering and misery to a future generation, and would cause no unwarrantable hardship in this.”<sup>80</sup> This same sentiment was echoed by Darwin when he said that “if the families of the poor were to be

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76. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 19.

77. *Ibid*, 19.

78. *Ibid*, 19.

79. Mazumdar, 10.

80. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 20.

smaller, other good results would follow. Much misery would thus be saved. Taxation would be lessened because there would be less pauperism.”<sup>81</sup> Darwin also believed that having larger upper-class families would lead to a more even distribution of wealth. This more even distribution of wealth would thus diminish political animosity and discontent; improve the industrial situation; and improve the standard of living across the board.<sup>82</sup>

All of these aforementioned appeals and assertions made by eugenicists were done on moral grounds. As Darwin claimed, “[s]uccess in the field of eugenics will mainly depend on the moral aspirations and the sense of patriotism of the mass of the people being aroused in the right directions.”<sup>83</sup> Striving for happiness and the betterment of future society was seen as the moral good, and the British eugenicists were obsessed with controlling the future for their moral good. “It is by the adoption of eugenic reforms to-day,” claimed Darwin, “that the reputation and happiness of our nation in the future can most certainly be promoted.”<sup>84</sup> This adoption of eugenic reforms was certainly perceived as a duty to the British nation, and this duty was trumpeted by Galton and later by Darwin as the moral sacrifice that must be made to procure a better future. “Eugenics,” Galton asserted, “deal with what is more valuable than money or lands, namely the heritage of a high character, capable brains, fine physique, and vigour; in short, with all that is most desirable for a family to possess as a birthright. It aims at the evolution and preservation of high races of men, and it as well deserves to be strictly enforced as a religious duty.”<sup>85</sup>

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81. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 15.

82. *Ibid*, 15.

83. *Ibid*, 83.

84. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 24.

85. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 49.

Approximately forty years later, Darwin recapitulated this sense of duty, sacrifice, and British patriotism throughout his writings. Darwin desired that, through the adoption of a more patriotic mindset, Britons would overcome ignorance, passion, prejudice, and “selfishness,” as these were enemies to progress and human welfare. Darwin claimed that eugenicists’ “first aim must be to arouse moral sentiments, including true patriotism, to the highest possible pitch,” in the hopes that “members of bad stock [would be] ready to make that great and noble sacrifice which would deprive them of some or all of the joys of family life.”<sup>86</sup> In essence, these Britons would have less, or no, children for the betterment of society. A sacrifice was not only levied on the members of “bad stock,” but also on members of the “well-to-do” class of society who would feel a patriotic duty to “sacrifice personal comfort, so as to enable them to supply their share of recruits to the coming generation; recruits who will then be needed to fight the good fight for peace and progress.”<sup>87</sup> In this instance, Darwin called for eugenically desirable couples to have more children at the expense of their monetary and physical comfort.

It is a peculiar thing to appeal to patriotism as a moral sentiment whilst pushing science, a method originally designed to be amoral. However, this did not prevent British eugenicists such as Darwin from appealing to eugenics as a moral good. Darwin claimed that “[i]f science points clearly to certain steps which could now be taken in order to benefit our nation in the future, do not let us fail to move in that direction out of a selfish regard for our own comfort.”<sup>88</sup> Clearly not being of an egoistic bend, British eugenicists found it immoral to retain one’s own comfort at the expense of the welfare of posterity. As Darwin said it, “[e]ugenics calls upon us to include all

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86. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 88.

87. *Ibid*, 88.

88. *Ibid*, 24.

future generations amongst our neighbors; that is amongst those for whom we ought to be prepared to sacrifice our own immediate interests.”<sup>89</sup> Darwin himself even went as far as to tacitly equate the risks of combatting racial deterioration with the risks of then contemporary warfare. In reference to the First World War, Darwin claimed that “all our [Britain’s] best citizens were ready to send their sons forth to face death for their country’s sake. Duty and patriotism are now calling to them just as loudly, if they could only hear it, to supply the men and women needed to maintain our nation in the future in the paths of peace and industry.”<sup>90</sup> That Britons must envision their role in the struggle for race betterment as akin to soldiers on the fields of Flanders seems hyperbolic. And one must conclude that hyperbole was used purposefully used by eugenicists to better argue their case for the necessity of pan-racial progress, which it seems Darwin believed would help deliver peace to the world.

Never straying far from race, Darwin claimed that “[t]he path of duty is the road to racial progress.”<sup>91</sup> This racial progress necessitated that the “better stocks” had larger families. This was to be prescribed as a duty for eugenically-desirable Britons, and that was, in the words of Darwin, to “be incorporated in our moral code and advocated with religious zeal.”<sup>92</sup> Writings by eugenicists are rife with religious rhetoric, so much so as that a discussion on this topic is beyond the scope of this project, however, it should be quickly noted that the British eugenicists had odd argumentative tactics. They would argue on moral and ethical grounds when attempting to incite Britons’ ideas of patriotism, duty, and religious dispositions, while also attempting to appeal to

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89. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 24.

90. *Ibid*, 75-76.

91. *Ibid*, 75-76.

92. *Ibid*, 78.

Briton's sense of rationality. This can be further observed in frequent comments aligning animal breeding with human breeding.

### **Stockyard Mentality**

Eugenic arguments frequently straddled the line between sympathy or passion and reason. Whilst attempting to persuade Britons that both reducing pauperism and enhancing the race were a moral good for which was worth zealously striving, eugenics was also an appeal to seemingly amoral rationality. "There is nothing," Galton claimed, "either in the history of domestic animals or in that of evolution to make us doubt that a race of sane men may be formed who shall be as much superior mentally and morally to the modern European, as the modern European is to the lowest of the Negro races."<sup>93</sup> Eugenics was promulgated as an utilitarian measure. This philosophical tenet can be seen throughout Galton's *Hereditary Genius*, in which he claimed that the practice of eugenics could better society by "gradually raising the present miserably low standard of the human race to one in which the Utopias in the dreamland of philanthropists may become practical possibilities."<sup>94</sup>

Not only was eugenics promulgated as an utilitarian operation, but also a pragmatic operation. British eugenicists believed that because science offered a method to build a better future through "guiding the evolution" of Britons, it should be done. This notion is elucidated by Galton's statement that "the improvement of the natural gifts of future generations of the human race is largely, though indirectly, under our control. We may not be able to originate, but we can

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93. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, x.

94. *Ibid*, xxvi-xxvii.

guide.”<sup>95</sup> For British eugenicists, the spontaneous processes of evolution that vacillated between desirable and undesirable outcomes for humanity should be monitored and checked. If the outcomes became too negative, intervention was needed. If the outcomes became positive, then the British eugenicists would give “free play” to this process.<sup>96</sup> Not long after this statement, Galton made another pragmatic argument when he claimed that “as a new race can be obtained in animals and plants, and can be raised to so great a degree of purity that it will maintain itself, with moderate care in preventing the more faulty members of the flock from breeding, so a race of gifted men might be obtained, under exactly similar conditions.”<sup>97</sup>

Arguments in favor of human breeding were not anomalous to eugenic rhetoric; both Darwin and Galton pondered the method on several occasions. Darwin asserted that “[i]n human affairs the need for attending to the immediate wants of our fellow citizens has constantly been made an excuse for altogether neglecting the consideration of the breed of future generations.”<sup>98</sup> Contrary to these supposedly imprudent acts on behalf of humans in their own affairs, were the acts of farmers who were ultimately concerned with the health and amenability of their animals. For Darwin, Britons needed to consider fitness of posterity when making decisions.<sup>99</sup> Again, the eugenicists saw folly in a refusal to learn from farmers and breeders. The stockyard brand of science was seen as potentially useful, and eugenics would determine its usefulness. This is evidenced best by Darwin’s line of questioning early on in *What is Eugenics?*

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95. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, xxvi-xxvii.

96. *Ibid*, xxvi-xxvii.

97. *Ibid*, 58.

98. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 22.

99. *Ibid*, 22.

But should not we ask ourselves why we should not try to improve mankind by somewhat the same methods as those which have worked such wonders with domestic animals? Is it not folly altogether to neglect the experience gained by breeders when we are thinking of the needs and the shortcomings of our own nation? These are the questions which eugenics aims at answering.<sup>100</sup>

The frequent discussions of breeding humans like stockyard animals could easily be used as a basis for the maligning of British eugenicists. There was no doubt a cold logic to their way of thinking. As historian Pauline Mazumdar suggests, “[e]ugenics was a movement that attracted people who felt themselves to be serious and responsible, concerned about the civic duties of science and its application to human problems.”<sup>101</sup> Science had been chipping away at Christian morality and its truth claims since the Scientific Revolution, why should it have stopped at eugenics? What was irrational about treating people as another breed of animal after Charles Darwin persuasively claimed that humans evolved from apes? If one could breed humans like animals for the betterment of society, it would be only rational to do so. The British eugenicists quickly came to this conclusion. As Darwin proclaimed, “[w]e are of common descent with the lower animals, and with us, as with them, wonders could be effected by breeding.”<sup>102</sup> The aim then of British eugenics seemed inevitable. “What we want to know about mankind,” said Darwin, “is whether it is likely that the human race would be benefited in the future by care being taken in regard to breeding; that is, in the same way that domestic animals have certainly been improved in the past. This is the question to be asked and answered.”<sup>103</sup>

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100. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 4.

101. Mazumdar, 58.

102. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 5.

103. *Ibid*, 5.



The amount to which emotion or reason should take precedent over the other in any decision was just as debatable then as it is now. However, it is safe to say the British eugenicists argued that eugenics was rational and therefore must have perceived themselves as such; rationality was understandably used as a positive value claim. Unfortunately, when taken to its logical conclusions, rationality can become a nightmare as acutely evidenced by the Holocaust. It would be disingenuous to discuss Nazi eugenics and British eugenics as if the movements were synonymous, however it would be just as deceitful to assert that there was no connection at all between the two movements. The attempted technocratic management of demography through race-inspired eugenic methodologies by British eugenicists was, according to historian Dan Stone, “not a complete break from Nazism.”<sup>104</sup> The conflation of British eugenics with Nazi-style race hygiene programs is at least partially derived from both British eugenicists’ incessant, abrasive talk of race, and their ideas of human breeding for racial progress – tenets that seemed similar to Nietzsche’s conception of the proper construction of society.

For British eugenicists, the connection between Nietzsche and their particular brand of science was obvious.<sup>105</sup> Nietzsche was generally seen by eugenicists abroad as the philosopher of Darwinian evolution in man in regards to his conception of the *Übermensch* who was meant to be the precursor of a new, master race of humans.<sup>106</sup> Ipso facto, many early translations of Nietzsche and several books on his philosophy were stored in the library of the Eugenics Society in London.<sup>107</sup> The Nietzschean view that there was a need for an aristocratic caste duty-bound to

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104. Stone, 9.

105. Nietzsche was a nineteenth century German philosopher.

106. *Übermensch* refers to the “beyond-man,” or “superman.”

107. Mazumdar, 104.

create the superman who would lead the world and determine value itself was widely accepted by eugenicists. This much was evidenced by prominent eugenicists such as Dr. Havelock Ellis, A.R. Orage, and William Inge, being in agreement on this notion.<sup>108</sup> As has been evidenced by previous influential statements by Galton and Darwin, there was no shortage of lofty ideas of race betterment. The logical conclusion of race enhancement would be the production of a breed of supermen that aligned with the Nietzschean conception of the *Übermensch*. That British eugenics theories of race enhancement supposedly meshed well with Nietzsche's writings helps give credence to the idea that British eugenicists were racists in the same manner as the Germans and the Nazis. This is especially true when noting that some eugenicists avoided aligning themselves with Nietzschean doctrine when it was perceived that both Treitschke and Nietzsche were intellectually responsible for German militarism in 1914.<sup>109</sup> Even more eerie were the self-evident similarities between Hitler's conception of Aryans and Nietzsche's conception of an aristocratic race.

Although there were some eugenicists who believed they shared Nietzsche's vision, Leonard Darwin took great pains to distance British eugenics from that of a science determined to create a superman.<sup>110</sup> For Darwin and his eugenic acolytes, reducing the amount of feeble-

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108. Dr. Havelock Ellis was a sexologist and vice-president of the Eugenics Society. A.R. Orage was the editor of the *New Age*, a British literary magazine. William Inge, often referred to as "Dean Inge," was the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral.

109. Stone, 88; Heinrich Treitschke was a German nationalist political writer and member of the Reichstag at the time of the German Empire.

110. Although there certainly are a variety of interpretations of Nietzsche's works, Nietzsche clearly was no proponent of nationalism, militarism, and/or biologically improving mankind. His *Übermenschen*, the possessors of a *mästare-moral* (master morality), were above those in society who needed a *slav-moral* (slave morality) developed from Christianity or a similar *weltanschauung* (world view) to operate in life. These *Übermenschen* were not beholden to any previous or contemporary morality or value system; the *Übermenschen* were to determine

minded, criminal, insane, diseased, deformed, blind, deaf, and other undesirable Britons did not coincide with attempting to create a class of supermen; the two goals were mutually exclusive. Darwin acknowledged that, idealistically, “[i]f a few perfect individuals were to appear on earth, and if their perfection were to be acknowledged by all, this would be very good. These supermen would rule over us to our great contentment.”<sup>111</sup> However, he specifically addressed the impracticality of this goal. Darwin believed that eugenic breeding would be unable to rid the supermen of the “desire to dominate or lead other men” because this was a “deeply-seated quality,” the extirpation of which would be “not altogether beneficial.” It seems Darwin believed that although eugenics could guide evolution to create physically and cognitively superior individuals, eugenics would not be able to alter psychological predispositions. The aversion to creating supermen came from a sense of liberalism that was dubious of creating something that would easily have the capacity to lord over the rest of the populace.<sup>112</sup> Darwin feared that “any group of supermen appearing in our midst would probably bully or harass their fellow citizens, until the mob rose up and drove them from power or exterminated them. The creation of supermen is to be condemned because it would lead to either tyranny or rebellion.”<sup>113</sup>

It would be easy to portray the British eugenicists’ aversion to potentially tyrannical supermen as one of naked self-interest. However, this assumption is incorrect. British eugenicists

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values for themselves. Unlike eugenicists who wanted to both construct society and create a better fate for posterity, Nietzsche preached *amor fati* (love your fate). Regardless of whether the British eugenicists had a correct reading of Nietzsche is irrelevant for this discussion, many of them clearly took the concept of creating a *Übermensch*, a superman, and extrapolated this concept to form a goal of pan-racial enhancement.

111. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 25-26.

112. *Ibid*, 25-26.

113. *Ibid*, 25-26.

also did not venture to create humans of an opposite ability. Darwin claimed that “neither should our aim be to create various inferior castes of human beings, such as would be especially adapted to do the dirty work of the world without complaint.”<sup>114</sup> This proclamation was a manifestation of Darwin’s, and his eugenic acolytes’, aversion to slavery or any approximation of the practice. As Darwin stated, “[s]lavery is now condemned because it is always demoralizing to the slave owner as well as being generally cruel to the slave. The endeavor to create inferior and docile human breeds is to be condemned on like grounds.”<sup>115</sup> So if eugenics was not to be employed to create a class of supermen or a class of slaves, what did the British eugenicists want to accomplish through the implementation of eugenic policies? Darwin succinctly answered this question when he stated that “[o]ur object should be, therefore, to improve the breed of the whole nation. And in this endeavor we should not attempt to lay down a single standard of excellence, with the object of preventing or discouraging parenthood in all who fall below that standard.”<sup>116</sup>

Just as quickly as Darwin dismissed the notion of British eugenics’ aim as that of being the creation of supermen, he also decried the implementation of “useful,” yet authoritarian, stockyard methods of social construction. In a pithy repudiation of stockyard methodology, Darwin asserted that “[t]he farmer may kill off his inferior stock; whilst no one advocates putting both the unwanted kitten and the inferior baby into the tub in the backyard. To argue against such proceedings is a waste of time.”<sup>117</sup> Arguments from antiquity were dismissed as the British eugenicists made sure that they were not advocating once common, illiberal, and “uncivilized,”

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114. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 25-26.

115. *Ibid*, 25-26.

116. *Ibid*, 25-26.

117. *Ibid*, 23.

practices such as compulsory marriage, the subjection of women, or infanticide. As Darwin stated, “[a] highly developed moral sense and great freedom of choice are two of the most precious attributes of man, and the necessity for preserving them rules out these stockyard methods.”<sup>118</sup>

British eugenics was not meant to be an atavistic movement, but a progressive movement, one that learned from brutal practices yet did not adopt them. Since the findings of Charles Darwin, man was included in the realm of animals. And since the study of domestic animals seemed to display the idea that like produced like, this is, good stocks produced good stocks and vice versa, it would be folly not to heed this apparent natural truth. The lessons of the stockyard led Darwin to believe that “in order to improve the breed of our race, we should now take such steps as would result in all who show any natural superiority producing a great number of descendants than at present, whilst making all who are definitely inferior pass on their natural inferiority to as few as possible.”<sup>119</sup> The aim of British eugenics then, was to combine a stockyard mindsets with a more liberal methodology.

### **Meritocracy**

If the British eugenicists were concerned with race, they were concerned not with the oppression or eradication of certain races, but of the enhancement of all races as a method of attaining a better future. “Though no agreement could be reached as to absolute morality,” Galton said, “the essentials of Eugenics may be easily defined. All creatures would agree that it was better to be healthy than sick, vigorous than weak, well fitted than ill-fitted for their part in

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118. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 22-23.

119. *Ibid*, 22-23.

life. In short that it was better to be good rather than bad specimens of their kind, whatever that kind might be. So with men.”<sup>120</sup> The aforementioned words: “whatever that kind might be” clearly shows that the British eugenicists were not on a mission to extirpate certain classes of society. Everyone was seen to have an important role in society. The British eugenicists just wanted to make sure that the roles were being fulfilled as proficiently as possible.

The British eugenicists did not seek some Marxist-style social leveling of society, and did not seek to create a homogenous race of Britons. As Galton stated it, “[s]ociety would be very dull if every man resembled the highly estimable Marcus Aurelius or Adam Bede. The aim of Eugenics is to represent each class or sect by its best specimens; that done, to leave them to work out their common civilisation in their own way.”<sup>121</sup> In this light, British eugenics could be described as more liberal than some historians have claimed. There is even a hint of meritocracy in eugenic rhetoric as evidenced by Galton’s assertion that “[t]he most illustrious and so-called ‘well-bred’ families of the human race, are utter mongrels as regards their natural gifts of intellect and disposition.”<sup>122</sup> Galton also claimed that “[a]bility must be based on a triple footing . . . In order that a man should inherit ability in the concrete, he must inherit three qualities that are separate and independent of one another: he must inherit capacity, zeal, and vigour; for unless these three, or, at the very least, two of them are combined, he cannot hope to make a figure in the world.”<sup>123</sup> This of course would only be true in a meritocratic society in which

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120. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 36-37.

121. *Ibid*, 36-37.

122. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 57.

123. *Ibid*, 75.

capacity, zeal, and vigour would determine success, not a privileged status, nepotism, or some other illiberal scheme.

If there was any uncertainty as to the accuracy of the claim that eugenics pushed for meritocracy, Galton resolved this problem with his statement: “I look upon the peerage as a disastrous institution, owing to its destructive effects on our valuable races.”<sup>124</sup> Galton even took the time to lay out an ideal society as one being opposed to subsistence through inheritance; castes; and xenophobia, ergo being in favor of meritocracy and competition. Galton believed that

[t]he best form of civilization in respect to the improvement of the race, would be one in which society was not costly; where incomes were chiefly derived from professional sources, and not much through inheritance; where every lad had a chance of showing his abilities and, if highly gifted, was enabled to achieve a first-class education and entrance into professional life . . . and lastly, where the better sort of emigrants and refugees from other lands were invited and welcomed, and their descendants naturalized.<sup>125</sup>

Although from the outset British eugenicists were in favor of meritocracy, they did still explain the variances between certain socioeconomic classes as arising from differences in heritable culture and intellect. While placing intrinsic value on certain classes, eugenics was still conceived as a way to establish a society that would allow vertical movement. British eugenics was not used as a science to completely mark entire classes as being literally hopeless, worthless, and dispensable. Galton believed that even in the lowest social class where most people were useless; destroyed, rather than created, wealth; and were “perhaps incapable of improvement;”; there were still valuable individuals.<sup>126</sup> Galton claimed that “individuals of every sort [were] to be found in the mass. Those who are able to wash the mud may find some gems in it.”<sup>127</sup>

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124. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 132.

125. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 348.

126. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 19-20.

British eugenicists were in favor of creating a society in which men with good qualities would be allowed to compete for jobs and rank within society. These men would thus be enabled to leave as many descendants as possible for the betterment of society. Positive qualities such as sobriety, industry, honesty, perseverance, intelligence, strength, good-fellowship, and good health were believed by eugenicists to outweigh negative qualities such as weakness, foolishness, drunkenness, carelessness, dishonesty, sickliness, and ill-temperedness.<sup>128</sup> None of these good qualities mentioned by Darwin necessarily had anything to do with one's class or innate social status. However, as has been stated earlier, there was no doubt among British eugenicists that these good qualities were more abundant in people of the upper classes. As historian Richard A. Soloway asserts, "[t]hat the 'thoughtless and reckless' tended to be disproportionately distributed among the laboring poor was regrettable but a reality eugenicists felt had to be confronted."<sup>129</sup> This perceived truism surely added to their confidence in the virtue and favorability of a more meritocratic society.

### **Conclusion**

So what exactly did the British eugenicists want? What was their *raison d'être*? It was most certainly race enhancement. This race enhancement was meant to be pan-racial in an attempt to create a better society in the future, one based on merit. If the eugenicists were consumed with race, it was because race constituted everything from phenotype, to nationality, to class. Therefore, class and nationality were transmuted to race. On the whole, British eugenics

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127. Ibid, 19-20.

128. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 65-66.

129. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 36.



from the onset was not xenophobic or maliciously racist, as evidenced by Galton's declaration that

[i]t is very remarkable how large a portion of the eminent men of all countries bear foreign names, and are the children of political refugees, - men well qualified to introduce a valuable strain of blood. We cannot fail to reflect on the glorious destiny of a country that should maintain, during many generations, the policy of attracting eminently desirable refugees, but no others, and of encouraging their settlement and naturalization of their children.<sup>130</sup>

The British eugenics movement was thus interested in creating a better society full of more competent people at all socioeconomic levels. This society would not stand in the way of the procreation of any able men, but encourage it, as evidenced by Galton's statement that "the more able the man, the more numerous ought his able kinsmen to be."<sup>131</sup> British eugenics was not interested in creating a stockyard society, or birthing a race of supermen. British eugenics was attempting to create a better society tout court. However, this does not mean that there were no members of the Eugenics Society and or the broader eugenics movements who were ardent racists with malicious motives. There certainly were members of the Eugenics Society that were primarily concerned with race in its simpler conception, and favored fascistic policies like infanticide and sterilization. These Britons saw eugenics as a scientific authority which could support their "will-to-power."<sup>132</sup> However, these eugenicists constituted a drastic minority of British eugenicists; their ideas had little impact on legislation in Britain; and their views were not

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130. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 346.

131. *Ibid*, 140.

132. A main tenet of Nietzsche's philosophy, the ill-defined, ergo debatable, tenet of "will-to-power" is similar to the idea of ambition – the prime mover of human actions in Nietzsche's estimation.

popular. Therefore, it would be disingenuous to proclaim that these more illiberal eugenicists represented the British Eugenics movement.<sup>133</sup>

Regardless of the political leanings of the eugenicists, they shared the same paranoia produced by the accompanying mindset of their similar societal statuses. The idea that society was on the decline was the manifestation of middle-class anxieties about the future of the nation, and in this sense, British Eugenics can understandably be described as classist, or class-central in mindset. The establishment of the perceived classist and elitist Eugenics Education Society and its partnership with birth control will be the topic of discussion in the next chapter.

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133. Stone, 95.

## Chapter 3

### Class and British Eugenics

The standard historical narrative of the British eugenics movement is that it was a primarily middle-class movement concerned with reversing the differential fertility trend and reducing pauperism. In fact, Darwin stated that the aim of eugenics was “to lessen the fertility of all inferior stocks, whilst increasing the fertility of all the superior.”<sup>134</sup> This was just a recapitulation of Galton’s earlier assertion that “the wisest policy is that which results in retarding the average age of marriage among the weak, and in hastening it among the vigorous classes; whereas, most unhappily for us, the influence of numerous social agencies has been strongly and banefully exerted in the precisely opposite direction.”<sup>135</sup> When comments such as “the residuum that forms the bulk of general society of small provincial places, is commonly very pure in its mediocrity,”<sup>136</sup> and “[t]he brains of the nation lie in the higher of our classes,”<sup>137</sup> were made by Galton himself, it is difficult to not characterize his eugenics movement as anything other than classist.

The classist mindset of the British eugenicists was actually a symptom of the intellectual roots of the eugenics movement which grew from Victorian social reform movements. The eugenics movement in Britain was closely related to the Moral Education League and other older groups that all aimed at managing the lower classes and controlling pauperism. Eugenics then,

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134. Darwin, “Message to the International Congress of Eugenics, New York,” 8.

135. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 339.

136. *Ibid*, 31.

137. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 11.

was just an off-shoot of a wider middle-class social movement to deal with both the lower classes and poverty that can be dated far back into the nineteenth century.<sup>138</sup> Groups such as the Moral Education League, the Charity Organization Society, and the British eugenics movement, embodied in their own society, all attempted to solve the problem of urban poverty. The urban bourgeoisie also wanted not only to understand the plight of the lower classes, but also wanted to explain how the gap between the two groups justifiably arose in accordance with natural laws.<sup>139</sup> These bourgeois social reform groups possessed their own unique plans for molding the working-class into a more ambitious, healthy, moral, and orderly class akin to their own.<sup>140</sup> For the British eugenicists, this molding of society would occur through race enhancement.

It should be noted from the previous chapter that class was transmuted into race by the British eugenicists. When Galton proclaimed “let us do what we can to encourage the multiplication of the races best fitted to invent and conform to a high and generous civilization, and not, out of a mistaken instinct of giving support to the weak, prevent the incoming of strong and hearty individuals,” he was actually referring to both race and class.<sup>141</sup> However, if one does not taken into account that the classes were biologized by the British eugenicists, their terminology is misleading. The British eugenics movement was centered around class.<sup>142</sup> However, this was only because they considered class to have a biological aspect.

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138. Mazumdar, 10.

139. Ibid, 15.

140. Ibid, 15.

141. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 343.

142. Mazumdar, 73.

Galton saw the practice of eugenics as the means by which Britons could “raise the average quality of our [the British] nation to that of its better moiety at the present day.”<sup>143</sup> The gain from the implementation of eugenic practices would be an elevation in the “general tone” of political, social, and domestic life. Coinciding with this elevation in the tone of society would be the gain of more prudent individuals. Eugenics was meant to enhance society by ridding the populace of unsatisfactory qualities such as frivolousness, excitability, and foolishness. Galton hoped that the “gallery” to which “demagogues” played would evolve to be more sensible than it was at the present time. This more sensible, future gallery would consist of a greater proportion of highly able men that would help Britain fulfil its “vast imperial duties.” All of this was for the betterment of posterity, who would be the benefactors of large contributions from the “useful” classes in British society.<sup>144</sup>

British eugenics was concerned with increasing the number of useful people whom they believed belonged mainly to the middle and upper classes. The fact that the British eugenicists just so happened to mainly belong to the middle class is thus unsurprising. The socioeconomic status of eugenicists on the whole, did not help them from being labeled as classist. Britons in the middle and upper classes joining a movement that seemed to primarily benefit them at the expense of the lower classes, would only further the notion that eugenics was a malicious, elitist movement. This notion of elitism and classism became increasingly predominant once the Eugenics Education Society was established.

### **The Pedigree of the Eugenics Society**

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143. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 37-38.

144. *Ibid*, 37-38.

British eugenicists were particularly interested in the social problems of pauperism and poverty. The eugenicists aim was to try to apply the laws of inheritance to these groups.<sup>145</sup> The aims and interests of the British eugenicists were predicated on the worries dictated by their statuses and pedigrees. The majority of the leading members of the Eugenics Education Society were well-educated, middle-class professionals. Members of the scientific and medical community, as well as university professors constituted a significant portion of the members of the EES. However, leadership positions within the EES were not strictly dominated by those with middle-class professions. Those with creative, welfare, and intellectual professions also made up a portion of the leading members of the EES.<sup>146</sup> As to the general membership of the EES, it is widely accepted by historians that the British eugenicists “spoke on behalf of the educated middle class; their position is as obvious to us as it was to the movement’s founders.”<sup>147</sup> The bulk of the British eugenics movement consisted of “university people,” the majority of whom were social or biological scientists. The remainder of the movement consisted of both physical and medical scientists, (the latter of whom achieved better representation on the Society’s Council) and those with occupations in the humanities.<sup>148</sup>

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145. Mazumdar, 7.

146. Donald MacKenzie. “Eugenics in Britain.” *Social Studies of Science* 6, no. 3/4 (1976): 504.

147. Mazumdar, 8.

148. Ibid, 8.

Many women, especially feminists, also joined the Society. In fact, nearly half of the Society's Council consisted of women.<sup>149</sup> It should be noted that eugenics was not seen by some British women as a blunt instrument of an oppressive society or government, it was seen as entitling. Women were a primary concern for British eugenicists, who often bifurcated the sexual category into two camps represented by: "the selfish, birth-restricting, middle-class woman" juxtaposed to the "feckless over-fertile working-class woman." Though caustic and stereotypical in its language, the British eugenics movement converted many women for their crusade. This was due to the empowering position into which the movement thrust women. In this new position, women were given the duty, and also the power to, "regenerate the race," whether the race was that of the British or the human race.<sup>150</sup> Empowered by their new, uniquely-female, mission to determine posterity, these women proved to be a major source of support for the EES.

To be fair, the involvement of women in eugenics was not something unique to Britain. As historian Alexandra Minna Stern points out that "[f]rom the late nineteenth century, women across the world were drawn to or targeted by eugenics because of their status as mothers of the family, nation, and future."<sup>151</sup> At first glance, one would presume that feminists would find the assertions of eugenicists untenable. While feminists were beginning to argue for voluntary motherhood, British eugenicists were arguing that the social role of women was predicated upon their reproductive function, and that this function was far too important for the health of the race

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149. Lucy Bland and Lesley A. Hall. "Eugenics in Britain: The View from the Metropole." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010., 214-215.

150. Bland and Hall, 215.

151. Alexandra Minna Stern. "Gender and Sexuality: A Global Tour and Compass." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 176.

to be left to the whims of women.<sup>152</sup> However, because eugenicists were in the business of promoting the use of contraceptives, it could have an empowering effect on women as they were given the chance to control their own reproduction. Thus, birth control became the bonding point between the two groups. British eugenicists argued alongside feminists and Malthusians that poor women needed birth control in order to space or limit pregnancies for the benefit of posterity. Contemporaneously, feminists adopted the eugenic argument that stressed the beneficial role of birth control in the practice of prudent parenthood.<sup>153</sup> Although it was at times an odd pairing, because they did share some common ground on the necessity for the use of contraceptives in certain circumstances, eugenicists and feminists became “strange bedfellows.”<sup>154</sup>

As evidenced by the support eugenics received from the intellectual sectors of the middle and upper classes, including many women, Eugenics was not widely denounced. On the contrary, it was accepted and backed by many respectable, politically and medically influential people due to the progressive ethos in which eugenic was instantiated. Eugenics was discussed as a viable practice that could help the competitiveness of nations by ridding them of “weaklings, fools, and moral deficient.” The betterment of human beings was not seen as closely linked to racial purity projects, and was therefore advocated for by many people.<sup>155</sup> Eugenics was a

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152. Susanne Klausen and Alison Bashford. “Fertility Control: Eugenics, Neo-Malthusianism, and Feminism.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 109.

153. Ibid, 111.

154. Klausen and Bashford, 111.

155. Alison Bashford. “Internationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and Eugenics.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 163.



“mainstream movement” in Britain, especially among the geneticists and biologists. It would have been difficult to find a textbook on heredity written between 1910 and 1930 that did not advocate eugenics, and it would have been even rarer to find written opposition to eugenics from biologists or geneticists until at least the mid-1920s.<sup>156</sup>

It seems quite clear that “[t]o be against eugenics in the 1920s was to be perceived as being against modernity, progress, and science. The ideas were inaccurate and insensitive-but they were modern science as it was constituted in that decade.”<sup>157</sup> The initial love affair of many academics and medical men with the ideas of eugenics did, in part, come from the desire for many scientifically minded individuals to avoid being perceived as not progressive enough or even regressive by their contemporaries. However, it still seems that the primary reason for the investment into eugenics by these professionals arose from fears surrounding the health of the nation - a sentiment ubiquitous to the literature on British eugenics. This movement was undoubtedly comprised mainly of “medical men” and scientists such as biologists and geneticists that was concerned with the national efficiency of Britain due to the perceived national degeneration of the British populace. Eugenics was the obvious, inevitable application of academic genetic knowledge into the social sphere. According to historian Geoffrey Russell Searle, eugenics was to “stand to genetics in rather the same relationship that engineering does to mathematics.”<sup>158</sup> British eugenicists were thus trying to achieve greater national efficiency through the practical, progressive application of science to demographic planning.<sup>159</sup>

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156. Jonathan Marks. “Historiography of Eugenics.” *The American Journal of Human Genetics*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1993. 650.

157. Ibid, 651.

158. Geoffrey Russell Searle. *Eugenics and Politics in Britain: 1900-1914*. Leyden: Noordhoff International, 1976. 8.

### **Birth Control as the Linchpin for an Alliance**

The eugenics movement in Britain could not only trace its roots back to the meliorist movements of the nineteenth century, but also back to Malthus himself. In his *Essay on Population* of 1798, Malthus biologized poverty, and with that, propagated a view that continued into the twentieth century and laid the groundwork for the mindset of hereditarianism.<sup>160</sup> Neo-Malthusianism, a “restrictionist” philosophy espoused by the Malthusian League, advocated for couples to implement contraceptive techniques for their own benefit in an era of economic uncertainty.<sup>161</sup> The Neo-Malthusians thus perceived the population problem to be one that was essentially quantitative in nature, and believed the solution to this problem was to be found in the “negative policy” of curbing the fertility of the poor.<sup>162</sup>

The Neo-Malthusians were a major proponent of birth control, and since both the British eugenicists and the Neo-Malthusians shared a similar goal, that of decreasing pauperism it should be of no surprise that the movements developed parallel to one another in the late Victorian and Edwardian years.<sup>163</sup> Members of both groups perceived the fall in the birthrate to

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159. Marks, 8.

160. Mazumdar, 37; Malthus assigned a different level of fecundity to the poor, thus placing them in a different biological category than that of the higher classes.

161. Soloway, *Birth Control*, 49.

162. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 87.

163. *Ibid*, 86; For British eugenicists, race enhancement would reduce pauperism by increasing Britons’ productivity, competitiveness, and prudence. For Neo-Malthusians, via a simplistic calculus, reduced fertility would decrease the amount of potential paupers.

have resulted from a “conscious change in the domestic strategy of married couples.”<sup>164</sup> What for some Britons, the eugenically-desirable, was once left up to natural mating practices (lust or inclination) was consciously being determined. Thus for the sake of posterity, Britons needed to be educated about the folly of the reproductive patterns resulting from pre-meditated procreation. Although arguing from different perspectives, both the Eugenicists and the Neo-Malthusians claimed that “the race” was not inevitably doomed to suffer from either a biological vice or a “Malthusian dilemma” so long as “rational selection” usurped both natural procreative tendencies among the undesirables and the miserly fertility of the desirables. Rational selection would be the corner stone of the eugenicists’ “race culture.”<sup>165</sup> However, just because the Neo-Malthusians and the eugenicists both believed that changing the fertility of select classes was the solution to the population problem, this does not mean that both groups had the same targets.

The Neo-Malthusians and the eugenicists differed most in their policy. Unlike the Neo-Malthusians, the problem of quality was on the minds of eugenicists who advocated for “positive policies” to encourage higher fertility in the middle and upper classes of Britain.<sup>166</sup> In essence, the Neo-Malthusians advocated for the expanded implementation of birth control so couples could reduce fertility, with the idea being that hopefully poor couples would take part in this fertility reduction. The British eugenicists aimed at raising the fertility of the higher classes and were thus dubious of the Neo-Malthusian’s seemingly naïve strategy. As aptly stated by Geoffrey Russell Searle, “[u]nlike most restrictive plans . . . family limitation was almost entirely dependent upon the voluntary compliance of the sort of people who were least inclined to be

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164. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 86.

165. *Ibid*, 86.

166. *Ibid*, 87.

educable and responsible.”<sup>167</sup> The British eugenicists were concerned that if birth control were to be heavily adopted by society, it would only be the thoughtful and prudent members of society, i.e. those Britons they perceived to make up the majority of the middle and upper classes, who would implement contraception and thus further reduce their fertility in comparison to the poor.

The skepticism of the British eugenicists was not just directed at the Neo-Malthusian solution to the population problem, but at the Malthusian solution to the population problem as well. The eugenicists saw the same basic problem in the Malthusian solution as they did in the Neo-Malthusian solution: the reliance on individual responsibility. Galton himself was skeptical that the preaching’s of Malthus would lead to anything but a qualitative disaster. Historian Pauline Mazumdar is correct in stating that “Malthus stood for a prudent delay in marriage and self-control in procreation, but, says Galton, only the prudent and self-controlled would follow this pattern. The less disciplined elements would then outbreed them, and the very persons who had the needed high natural abilities would leave the fewest progeny.”<sup>168</sup> This assertion is clearly evidenced in Galton’s *Hereditary Genius*. He believed that Malthus’ solution was “a most pernicious rule of conduct in its bearing upon race. Its effect would be such as to cause the race of the prudent to fall, after a few centuries, into an almost incredible inferiority of numbers to that of the imprudent, and it is therefore calculated to bring utter ruin upon the breed of any country where the doctrine prevailed.”<sup>169</sup> Galton did not believe for a second that Malthus’ doctrine would be equally adopted among all classes. In Galton’s estimation, prudence was a factor in differentiating classes, and by that logic, it would be silly to expect the imprudent class

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167. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 95.

168. Mazumdar, 39.

169. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 343.

to act prudently. In fact, Galton even proclaimed that Malthus' doctrine would prove to be immoral or monstrous in the long-run. Galton protested "against the abler races being encouraged to withdraw in this way from the struggle for existence. It may seem monstrous that the weak should be crowded out by the strong, but it is still more monstrous that the races best fitted to play their part on the stage of life, should be crowded out by the incompetent, the ailing, and the desponding."<sup>170</sup> Thus for the new science of eugenics, prudence was a *sine qua non* of morality.

Although the Neo-Malthusians and the eugenicists had different methodologies, they shared both an intellectual and class origin and their goal was approximately the same. Therefore, it was only rational for the two groups to try to cooperate in the realization that they could not avoid one another. Although reluctant to admit it, the British eugenicists and the Neo-Malthusians had much in common. Despite the attempts of many reputable Eugenics Society members to avoid connection with the "disreputable" Malthusian League, the British eugenics movement was not a monolith. Therefore, there was overlap in the membership of the Eugenics Society and the Malthusian League; one could be a eugenicist and a Neo-Malthusian without too much mental gymnastics. As the Neo-Malthusians sought an alliance with the British eugenicists in order to gain respectability and credibility, some British eugenicists joined the Malthusian League because they genuinely thought that the two groups' methods and causes were not conflictual, but actually complementary.<sup>171</sup> In this light, although the Neo-Malthusians were somewhat theoretical opponents to the British Eugenics movement, they were functional proponents of the movement. Much like with the feminists, the goal of controlling fertility

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170. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 343.

171. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 87.

became the linchpin connecting the British eugenics movement to another expedient ally: the Neo-Malthusians.

### **The Opponents of Eugenics**

Along with its proponents, eugenics also had its fair share of opponents. The opposition to British eugenics was not just present, but extremely effective in many circumstances. Some of the opposition to the British eugenics movement came from aristocrats, businessmen, and working-class Britons (the mouthpiece of whom was the labor movement). Along with these aforementioned opponents, jurists, politicians, recalcitrant individuals, skeptical scientists, and organized religious groups incessantly “hobbled” eugenics.<sup>172</sup> These various groups of people, despite their shared goal of squelching the British eugenics movement, each had their own motivations for their oppositional position or mere indifference.

Among those opposed or simply indifferent to the EES, hereditary aristocrats and businessmen were surely present. The lack of support British eugenics received from businessmen and aristocrats makes the social reaction to British eugenics all the more peculiar since the EES also received opposition from many working-class Britons. In fact, not only did the working-class not support eugenics and the EES, but neither did all members of the middle-class. The British eugenics movement then, did not receive unanimous support from any socioeconomic class in Britain, including hereditary aristocrats, which one would presume to be proponents of a movement often described as elitist. This indifference or open hostility to the British eugenics movement from groups located up and down the socioeconomic hierarchy lay in

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172. Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford. “Introduction: Eugenics and the Modern World.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 18-19.

the fact that the British eugenicists did not recruit evenly from every class. Neither did they recruit evenly from every occupation within a specific class. It is quite clear from the examination of the data collected pertaining to the occupations of those who were members of the EES that eugenicists did not even come from all sections of the middle class. As previously mentioned, most members of the EES worked either in scientific fields, medical fields, or at universities.<sup>173</sup> The British eugenics movement received little support from aristocrats, businessmen, and working-class Britons. The EES could only pretend to speak for groups of people from which they received so little recruits. Ipso facto, there was no reason for many aristocrats, businessmen, and working-class Britons to support a eugenics movement that they had no interest in, and that did not represent them.

There was a qualitative difference in the unsupportive actions aristocrats, businessmen, and working-class Britons aimed towards the British eugenics movement. Unlike aristocrats and businessmen, who were generally just unsupportive of the British eugenics movement, the labor movement was openly hostile towards the British eugenics movement whom they perceived as “anti-working class.”<sup>174</sup> There was definitely an elitist vibe to the eugenics movement. This came from the caliber (social, political, and economic) of many of the movement’s supporters. Aside from that, the data also appear to point out the fact that those more inclined to study and or practice science or medicine and or teach at a high level supported eugenics and the EES, because of their interest and belief in science and its practical applications. Those who were either disinterested in science or saw eugenics as a destructive, immoral practice, were not as inclined to support eugenics and the EES. Although the EES was considered elitists and anti-

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173. MacKenzie, 505.

174. Bland and Hall, 222.

working class by many critics, this does not mean that the EES escaped opposition on the other end of the political spectrum. While the Labor Party and other Britons on the left perceived the eugenicists as economic elites using eugenic jargon as a way to “naturalize their dominance of the working classes,” conservatives and liberals castigated the eugenicists for attempting to violate individual rights and expand state powers.<sup>175</sup>

It is quite ironic that although the British eugenics movement garnered much of its support from academic, scientific and medical professionals, opposition also came from within these same professional spheres.<sup>176</sup> Many of the strongest critics of eugenics were scientists themselves, especially geneticists.<sup>177</sup> This is to say, that the British eugenics movement did not even manage to garner full support from even those groups that were the supportive foundation of the movement. As historian Nils Roll-Hansen correctly points out, “[c]riticism of racism from the new science of genetics developed gradually during the 1910s and 1920s, and was radically sharpened in response to Nazi ideology and population policies in the 1930s.”<sup>178</sup> Granted, geneticists did not have to rely purely on racism in the Nazi context to find fault in the eugenics movements. Some British geneticists disagreed with the fundamental assertions of the British eugenics movement. After the rediscovery of Mendel’s work with the fruit fly *Drosophila*, the Mendelian-chromosome theory of heredity and the role of crossing-over and recombination was established. Thus genetics as a discipline began to flourish partially at the expense of eugenics.

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175. Chris Renwick. “Eugenics, Population Research, and Social Mobility Studies in Early and Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain.” *Historical Journal* 59, no. 3 (September 2016): 845-867. 6.

176. Porter, 157.

177. Levine and Bashford, 19.

178. Nils Roll-Hansen. “Eugenics and the Science of Genetics.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 87.



Some geneticists rejected the politically biased or outmoded pseudoscience upon which they deemed the Eugenics Society to be based. Other “Far Left” geneticists found the preconceptions of the Eugenics Society antipathetic to their political stance. This led to “a distinct lack of dialogue between” between the Eugenics Society and select oppositional geneticists.<sup>179</sup>

The primary qualm the British geneticists had with the British eugenicists was the latter’s downplay of environmental factors as being substantially influential to human development. However, this does not mean that the British eugenicists vehemently denied the idea of influences outside of heredity; they were more than willing to accept that heredity was not the sole factor in human development.<sup>180</sup> Galton stated, “I acknowledge freely the great power of education and social influences in developing the active powers of the mind, just as I acknowledge the effect of use in developing the muscles of a blacksmith’s arm.”<sup>181</sup> However, Galton did not subscribe to the notion of complete human malleability through “application and moral effort.” He also objected to the “pretensions of natural equality,” this is to say, genetic equality.<sup>182</sup> In Galton’s estimation, the blacksmith could labor as he desired, but would eventually find that there were feats beyond his physical capacity that another, naturally stronger, man could do.<sup>183</sup> Parroting this same sentiment, Darwin claimed that “[s]ince no two germs are alike, no two human beings are alike either.”<sup>184</sup> Darwin refused to deny the existence of

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179. Bland and Hall, 222.

180. Mazumdar, 146.

181. Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, 12.

182. *Ibid*, 12.

183. *Ibid*, 12.

184. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 10-11.

hereditary differences originating from the initial differences in germs. However, like Galton, he recognized the role which environment played on human development. “The surroundings to which men are exposed,” Darwin claimed, “may leave an indelible mark on them, and may thus make them differ permanently from one another. Probably no two human beings would ever remain exactly alike, even if the germs from which they all sprang were identical.”<sup>185</sup> Thus, both hereditary differences (nature) and acquired differences (nurture or environment) were acknowledged by Darwin and Galton.

The clash between the British geneticists and the British eugenicists centered not on the mere acknowledgement of nature and nurture in human development, but on the right amount of influence to ascribe to nature and nurture in regards to human development. British Eugenicists tended to favor nature over nurture, whereas the geneticists did the opposite. To British eugenicists, an approximation of the Lockean theory of *tabula rasa* did not hold up to experience, perception, and or common sense. This repudiation of *tabula rasa* was further fueled by the implications of Charles Darwin’s work. This can be seen in Galton’s statement that “[t]he natural character and faculties of human beings differ at least as widely as those of the domesticated animals, such as dogs and horses, with whom we are familiar.”<sup>186</sup> If humans were animals, then it would be irrational to assume that obvious interspecies and intraspecies differences regarding both physical and temperamental qualities would not also apply to mankind. Scientists, as the British eugenicists perceived themselves, should not deny evidence or act irrationally.

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185. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 10-11.

186. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 2-3.

In the context of the British eugenics movement, the repudiation of *tabula rasa* should not be seen as an attempt by elitists to further validate the gap between them and the lower classes, it should be seen as a reversion back to a religious idea of voluntarily shouldering one's cross or burden as evidenced by Galton's reference to a parable related in the book of St. Mathew. The parable stated that although some people receive few talents while others receive many talents, each individual is "responsible for the profitable use" of the talents with which he or she has been entrusted.<sup>187</sup> Bordering on existentialism, it seems the British eugenicists saw life as innately unfair. The qualitative differences in both people's capabilities (mental and physical), and success in life could not be fully laid at the feet of society or environment. At a certain point, people just had to cope with their lot in life. However, race enhancement could better the lives of posterity to a certain extent. They thought it better to address the root cause of inequality (biology) than to waste time lambasting the structure of society.

For the British eugenicists, their position was one of common sense – a position easily verified *ad oculus*. The position of course, was that nature determined human ability and development more than nurture. As Darwin claimed, "[m]en are certainly not born alike as far as their bodies are concerned. Men also differ amongst themselves at birth as regards their minds, or rather as to what their minds will become."<sup>188</sup> For Darwin and his colleagues, this assertion was self-evident upon simple recollections of classmates. "Let anyone look back at his school-days," Darwin asserted, "and he will readily admit that some of his school-fellows could beat him not only in strength of body, but in strength of mind also. And it is evident to us now that the superiority of the minds of *some* [my emphasis] of our young companions had little if anything

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187. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 2-3.

188. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 16.

to do with any superiority in their surroundings.”<sup>189</sup> It should be noted, for all their assertions as to the superordinate place of nature in human development, they never dismissed nurture outright. This is evidenced clearly in the use of the term “some” in the above quote. For the British eugenicists, memory conjured examples of both factors (nature and nurture). Common sense had to allow for both factors.<sup>190</sup>

Simply put, British eugenicists assumed that environment was of negligible importance; they emphasized heredity at the expense of the environment. The official position was that the environment might have “some effect,” but that nature was the problem for British eugenicists, not nurture.<sup>191</sup> Influential, outspoken critics of the British eugenics movement such as Lancelot Hogben wanted further evidence for the eugenicists’ claims regarding the primacy of genes and inheritance in human development.<sup>192</sup> Hogben himself even criticized eugenics for not being an ethically neutral science.<sup>193</sup> It is easy to see what Hogben was referring to when comments such as “innate stupidity cannot be stamped out by the schoolmaster” were made by prominent eugenicists.<sup>194</sup> However, the geneticists did not want to dissolve the Eugenics Society, but change the methodology and *a priori* assumptions of the establishment.

The most influential and powerful opponent of the British eugenics movement was also the most obvious opponent: religion, and more precisely, Catholicism. Although people did not

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189. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 16.

190. Ibid, 16.

191. Mazumdar, 107.

192. Hogben was a biologist, socialist, and Chair of Social Biology at the University of London.

193. Mazumdar, 154-155.

194. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 54.

have to be religious to oppose negative eugenics practices in particular, it did help. “More generally, eugenic thinking seems to have been more readily practiced as state policy in Protestant countries. This is certainly true for the European sterilization laws of the 1920s and 1930s.”<sup>195</sup> Catholicism had a major role to play in the development of this trend. “Indeed, for Catholics, any form of life, no matter how ‘defective’ or ‘flawed,’ is worthy of preservation, while Protestants have traditionally been more comfortable with ideas of human perfectibility.”<sup>196</sup> This was surely the case after the 1930 Papal Encyclical *Casti Connubii* condemned eugenics and asserted that “family is more sacred than the state.”<sup>197</sup> When the discussion of contraception and sterilization was brought about by British eugenicists, Catholic opposition became even stronger as they condemned birth control and eugenics as being “crimes against God and nature.”<sup>198</sup>

To be fair, Catholics were more opposed to negative eugenic practices such as sterilization, abortion, and all forms of contraceptives pushed by eugenicists than to eugenics as such, “as long as there was no unacceptable interference with natural biological processes through abortion, sterilization, prohibition of marriage, or contraceptive techniques.”<sup>199</sup> There were many majority Catholic countries such as France, Spain, Italy, Latin America, and even

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195. Véronique Mottier. “Eugenics and the State: Policy-Making in Comparative Perspective.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 143.

196. Ibid, 143.

197. Ibid, 143.

198. Graham J. Baker. “Christianity and Eugenics: The Place of Religion in the British Eugenics Education Society and the American Eugenics Society, c.1907–1940.” *Social History Of Medicine* 27, no. 2 (May 2014): 290; Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 265.

199. Roll-Hansen, 81.

Canada (Quebec) in which eugenics was practiced and state supported, but it tended to be positive eugenic practices (environmentalism, *puériculture*, etc.).<sup>200</sup> As Véronique Mottier puts it, “[r]eligion alone was therefore significant but not decisive as a factor determining variations in eugenic practices both within and between states, its impact being moderated by the local constellations of political power.”<sup>201</sup>

Religious opposition alone may not have been able to squelch the British eugenicists’ crusade for more efficient progeny, however, once allied with other political groups, Catholics became a formidable opponent. For instance, within Protestant-dominated Britain, the vocal, minority Catholic opposition to the domestic eugenics movement achieved some success in hindering the passing of eugenic legislation. This was accomplished via a Catholic-Labor Party alliance, notably successful during the interwar period for their blocking of the British Eugenics Society’s attempt to legalize voluntary sterilization.<sup>202</sup> Unfortunately for British eugenicists, who could not even dominantly recruit from a single socioeconomic class, their opponents proved to be tough and influential, especially when united against a common enemy.

### **Success and Change Driven by EES Membership**

The early success of the EES can partially be attributed the makeup of the membership of the Society. It has already been stated that the majority of the leading members of the EES were well-educated, middle-class professionals. These members were instrumental in boosting the

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200. Klausen and Bashford, 105; *Puériculture* can be defined as the practice of child-rearing and child health-care with special attention being paid to the health of both pregnant women and unborn children.

201. Mottier, 143.

202. Klausen and Bashford, 105.

reputation of the EES due to their “social prestige” and “intellectual caliber” despite their numbers; quantity was compensated by quality. Men of “weight, gravity and established reputation,” were a necessary bulwark against the hostility and “giggling embarrassment” the British eugenics movement provoked in certain socioeconomic arenas. Included among these members were practically the entire biological establishment; much of the medical establishment; and many distinguished geneticists.<sup>203</sup>

Although the British Eugenics movement was almost certainly a failure by their own standards, with the help of influential members, the EES did have some early success. As historian Geoffrey Russell Searle points out, the EES “had been asked to give evidence, not only to the Home Office Inebriates Inquiry, but also before the Royal Commission on Divorce, and it had played a significant part in getting the government to set up a Royal Commission of Enquiry into Syphilis and to give legislative effect to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded.”<sup>204</sup> Not only was the early success of the EES demonstrated in its ability to recommend and affect legislation, the EES was also successful through educational methods. For example, in 1913 the EES held an Education Conference that was booked fully in advance. Those attending the conference were comprised of over four hundred headmasters, head-mistresses, and teachers. The EES was also successful at displaying their eugenic point of view at medical and public health gatherings. For instance, before 1914, there were hundreds of eugenic-based lectures and addresses given that were sponsored by the EES. Even after 1908, eugenic information was disseminated through non-corresponding

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203. Searle, 11-12.

204. Ibid, 11.

educational texts such as the *Sociological Review* by eugenicist contributors.<sup>205</sup> The educational methodology of eugenicists and pro-abortionists will be discussed in greater detail later on in this project. What is crucial for this chapter is the acknowledgement that the caliber of EES membership contributed heavily to its early success.

Although the Eugenics Education Society did experience some early success, especially prior to the Great War, it should be noted that the EES, which was founded in 1907, changed its name in 1926. It dropped the word ‘education’ out of its name and simply became the Eugenics Society. The Society saw this name change as necessary since it struggled during the interwar period with finding an identity. The identity of the Society was being questioned by both lay groups and scientific elites, and the Society was trying to appeal to both factions due to their necessary contributions in meetings and activities.<sup>206</sup>

Pauline M.H. Mazumdar has stated that the name change from the Eugenics Education Society to the Eugenics Society was done in order to signify that the group considered original research and was not merely an advocacy group.<sup>207</sup> An extremely influential member of the Eugenics Society, Dr. Marie C. Stopes, offers a glimpse into the reaction to, and perceived necessity of, the name change. Dr. Stopes helped popularize eugenics and birth control ideas in her writings on marriage and birth control. Although often characterized as a “rabid eugenicist,” her feminist views refined her more stark eugenic notions.<sup>208</sup> Upon hearing about the planned transition of the EES to the Eugenics Society, Stopes wrote a letter to the secretary of the EES,

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205. Searle, 11-12.

206. Renwick, 5.

207. Mazumdar, 144.

208. Bland and Hall, 217.



Mrs. Cora Hodson, dated November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1926, in which she stated her anxiety about the transition due to her fearing the loss of her life membership in the EES upon the change – a life membership she hoped would be allowed to continue with the Eugenics Society.<sup>209</sup> More important than Stope’s worries over membership, however, was her reaction to the name change. “I think the additional word ‘Education’ is a nuisance,” proclaimed Stopes. “I trust, however, if you are starting out afresh as the Eugenics Society, you will have a sifting of your Council and the addition of some live blood.”<sup>210</sup> Stopes was clearly in favor of the name change from the EES to the Eugenics Society if it did not jeopardize her membership. Dr. Stopes was just one of many scientifically-minded Britons eager to continue membership in the Eugenics Society, and who approved of the Society’s attempts to become more involved in original research as opposed to just mere advocacy. Thus, she serves as an example of many members who encouraged the EES to change both its name and its function.

### **Conclusion**

The Eugenics Society was perceived as an elitist, classist organization so much so that the general secretary of the Society C.P. Blacker found it difficult to formulate a population policy for the Society due to the amount of criticism the Society took for both having class prejudice and distrusting the role of nurture in race culture.<sup>211</sup> This classist organization could trace its roots back to both the nineteenth century middle-class meliroid movements and Malthusianism, all of which perceived pauperism to be the severest threat to British society. By

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209. Marie C. Stopes. “Letter to Mrs. Hodson.” Correspondence, etc. between M Stopes and the Eugenics Society. From the Eugenics Society Archive. 1921. 19.

210. Stopes, “Letter to Mrs. Hodson.” 19.

211. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 195-196.

being perceived as elitist, and or classist, due mostly to the self-concerned rhetoric of its middle and upper class membership, the British eugenics movement got flak from critics across the political spectrum that perceived the Eugenics Society to be in opposition to everything from the working-class to God. Even quarrels within the Eugenics Society prompted a name change. However, the Eugenics Society did not wither under the criticism during this period, it gained an inevitable ally in the birth control movement.

It should then seem unsurprising that the British eugenics movement cooperated with the birth control movement in light that both birth control was inevitably being rapidly adopted by Britons, and that the British Eugenics Society was connected with feminists and Neo-Malthusians via membership and socio-intellectual origin. Contraception was, as historian Richard Soloway puts it, “the means to an end that married couples increasingly desired to achieve. It not only provided a degree of economic security, but, as contemporary analysts recognized, it permitted people individual freedom, opportunity, and greater control over the quality of domestic life they desired.”<sup>212</sup> Thus, for all the maligning of birth control as a selfish, ignoble practice by its critics, this criticism did not stop the rapid adoption of contraception. It seems that the adoption of birth control as a methodology for the British eugenicists seemed pragmatic. If contraception was going to be implemented by Britons anyway, it seems only rational that the British eugenicists tried to bend its implementation in the direction preferable to their cause. Much to the chagrin of some of the Eugenics Society’s reputable members, if an alliance with the Malthusian League and other birth control proponents needed to be made, so be it. In a Machiavellian style, pragmatism trumped intellectual consistency and optics. The risks were: 1) the potential staining of the reputation of the mainly middle-class Eugenics Society

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212. Soloway, *Birth Control*, 68.

along with many of its highly influential, respected members; and 2) the adoption of birth control practices by eugenically-desirable Britons. The reward was racial enhancement and increased national efficiency for posterity. The daring Eugenics Society decided that Britons needed to be educated as to both the necessity of eugenics, and the usefulness of birth control as a eugenic tool, tout court. Hence, the next chapter in this project will discuss the primary methodology of the Eugenics Society: education.

## Chapter 4

### Education and Propaganda

It is not surprising that the act of teaching was the primary function of the Eugenics Education Society. This was in line with Darwin and Galton's assertions about the primary role of eugenics. The British eugenics movement's most important aim was that of planting comprehensive "high ideals" in the minds of British youth with especial concern to marriage. To both avoid unhappy marriages in posterity, and maintain the future quality of the race, parents were encouraged to "set a good example" by dissociating themselves with persons who had "blots on their characters" in exchange for acquainting themselves with "worthy" citizens. It was believed that these discriminatory acts on behalf of the parents would provoke their children to naturally seek "worthy" companions out of emulation.<sup>213</sup>

These aforementioned high ideals were transmitted via education and propaganda campaigns by the Eugenics Society. These methods were the British eugenicists' attempts at positive eugenics, that is, "the methods of increasing fertility of all the better stocks."<sup>214</sup> Darwin claimed that, "there is now a crying need for a bold forward movement. The very first step should be to make certain indisputable truths so widely known that they shall come to affect the everyday life of the whole nation."<sup>215</sup> The truths to which Darwin was referring pertained to hereditary probability, and racial duty. He claimed that families with "natural abilities" should have three or more children (above the replacement level) to ensure that a large proportion of

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213. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 85.

214. Darwin, "Message to the International Congress of Eugenics, New York.", 5.

215. *Ibid*, 5.

their hereditary traits were passed on to future generations. He also asserted that those families with natural abilities who did not have at least three children were “deserters in the fight for racial progress” due to their dereliction of duty to Britain.<sup>216</sup>

Upon reading statements from Galton, Darwin, and other eugenicists, it should be of no surprise to anyone that the Eugenics Education Society attempted to educate the British public through a variety of media: from exhibitions to published works and lectures. In fact, birth control proponents and the Eugenics Society both distributed propaganda throughout Britain. Edward Larson argues that, “[i]f, as Leonard Darwin supposed, knowledge of eugenics was not widely disseminated by 1912, it was not for lack of trying. British eugenicists had been attempting to communicate their gospel to the general public for years.”<sup>217</sup>

Some of the eugenic and birth control propaganda worked at higher levels of abstraction, discussing overarching themes pertaining to the rationale for constructive birth control practices and the necessities of eugenics for the welfare of the nation. However, some propaganda campaigns were aimed specifically at certain aspects of birth control or eugenic methodology. One example of this specifically aimed propaganda can be observed in a memorandum written by Sir Humphry Rolleston in 1924. At the time, Rolleston was the president of the Eugenics Society and he wrote a memorandum outlining the recommendations of the General Purpose Committee regarding the allocation of grants from the Eugenics Society’s funds. Rolleston stated that if all went according to plan, the Eugenics Society would spend £950 on propaganda promoting sterilization. This, according to Rolleston was more than double the amount of money

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216. Darwin, “Message to the International Congress of Eugenics, New York.” 5-6.

217. Edward J. Larson. “The Rhetoric of Eugenics: Expert Authority and the Mental Deficiency Bill.” *British Journal For The History Of Science* 24, no. 1 (March 1991): 48.

the Eugenics Society was spending annually on propaganda at the time.<sup>218</sup> The fact that the Eugenics Society was willing to allocate such a large sum of money for propaganda shows two things: that propaganda was important for the success of birth control clinics and the Eugenics Society, and that the Eugenics Society knew this to be true and made efforts to fund eugenics propaganda.

### **Graphic Propaganda**

The best example of the implementation of propaganda by the Eugenics Society can be observed in photographs of the exhibits the society constructed, hoping to educate the public about eugenic ideas such as human inheritance. These educational exhibits frequently deployed British eugenicists' favorite *modus operandi*: pedigree charts. The use of pedigree charts by British eugenicists was practical, because it perfectly demonstrated their position. As Mazumdar points out, "theory taught in Britain was an even balance of Mendelism and biometry, and the practice was that of the pedigree study."<sup>219</sup>

The utility of pedigree charts was in part due to their flexibility and superficiality. The demonstration that "something was clearly hereditary" was all that was necessary. There was no need to imply whether the inheritance was of the bio-metric style (blended inheritance) or that of a Mendelian unit-character. In fact, the charts could demonstrate both theories, as well as

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218. Sir Humphry Rolleston. "Memorandum on Grants Recommended by the General Purposes Committee." From the Eugenics Society Archive. 1924. 12.

219. Mazumdar, 58; Gregor Mendel proposed that traits in individual offspring were always controlled by single genes i.e. each offspring exhibited the trait of one parent only – this trait being the dominant trait as opposed the unexhibited recessive trait. However, in certain circumstances the traits were identical and thus both expressed. The offspring in the former situation being heterozygous for the trait, and the latter offspring being homozygous for the trait. Either way, there was clearly an inherited 'unit-character'; Biometry was the statistical analyses of biological data.

environmental influences. It was crucial for the British Eugenists to demonstrate that “like produced like.” Beyond this, there was often no accompanying analysis of the pedigree in regards to specific theories of transmission.<sup>220</sup> The pedigrees fulfilled their role as classist propaganda for the British eugenists: defining a “network of relationships” that classified certain defects as inherent to specific classes and demonstrating how those were transmitted through heredity. The pedigrees were thus “a demonstration *ad oculus* of the *fact* of heredity.”<sup>221</sup>

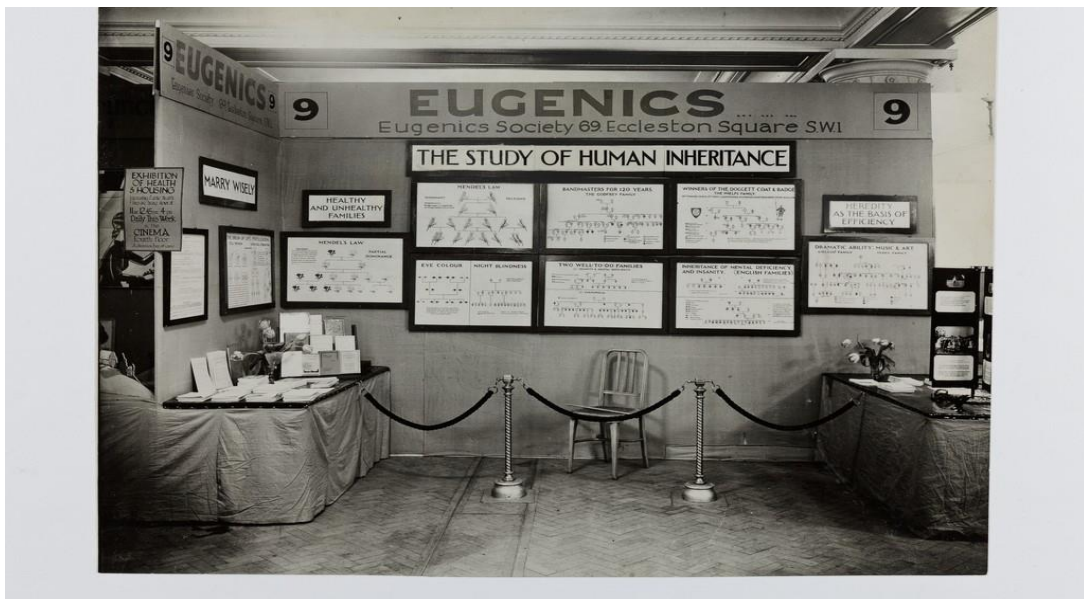


Figure 1. From “Photographs and Plans of Eugenics Society Exhibits.” Eugenics Society Archive. 2.

We can see in figure 1 – one of many such photos in the society archive – that the Eugenics Society valued public exposure of their ideas. The creation of these exhibits demonstrates that the Eugenics Society invested time and resources to inform Britons about the theory and rationale behind eugenics. Of particular interest is the central focus on the “Study of Human Inheritance.” Hereditarian eugenic theory is based on the notion that humans mainly inherit their traits from their parents and ancestors through DNA. Such a perspective explains

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220. Mazumdar, 58.

221. Ibid, 87.

why the Eugenics Society was so keen to use pedigree charts within their exhibits: to demonstrate to the public how genes and traits are inherited or passed on to offspring from parents.

These exhibits represent a type of educational propaganda with mixed motives. On the one hand, the obvious purpose of the propaganda was to demonstrate the actual process of human inheritance. On the other hand, the constant theme of these displays was the importance of making prudent choices in mating. This explains why the Eugenics Society placed the information displayed in the exhibits under such headings as: “Marry Wisely,” “Healthy and Unhealthy Families,” and “Heredity as the Basis of Efficiency.” Although often used as a cautionary tale of unwise mating, the charts often also explained the heritability of valuable or neutral traits.

The exhibit in figure 1 featured charts illustrating the inheritance of eye color and night blindness, as well as the inheritance of “dramatic ability [in] music and art.” Next to these were placed the pedigrees of two “well-to-do” families, juxtaposed with those of the mental deficient and insane. The pedigree chart dealing with eye color seems to be the outlier in this exhibit. There does not seem to have been any value placed on a particular eye color by the British eugenicists. All the other pedigree charts displayed traits that were either self-evidently valuable or invaluable. The ensemble’s clear implication was that, because the principles of human inheritance have been determined, people should control the inheritance of their genes. Desirable genes such as those possessed by “well-to-do” families should be allowed to, or made to, spread throughout the broader populace. Undesirable genes, however, such as the ones that ostensibly lead to mental deficiency and insanity, should be stopped from being inherited for the good of the race.



It is easy to imagine an average British citizen being persuaded by the wonderfully simplistic, yet effective *ad oculus* arguments put forth by the pedigree charts of the Eugenics Society. Prudence in mating was the logical conclusion espoused by the exhibits and exact message the Eugenics Society was striving to communicate. Historians Levine and Bashford have aptly described eugenics experts as “Janus-faced,” in that both past and present generations constantly captured their gaze. This fixation upon history and future was symbolized by the eugenicists’ reliance on genealogies in their research and publications (propaganda). Pedigree charts or family trees of both “talented” and “defective” families explained the origin and potential destination of beneficial and flawed attributes. British eugenicists’ “core business” lay in scientific and social work on heredity and genealogy (dominant and recessive genes).<sup>222</sup>

The propaganda within these exhibits helped the Eugenics Society mold the social perception of their cause. Each pedigree chart operated as a case study for the eugenicists to reference when preaching the necessity of eugenically prudent life choices. This fit hand-in-glove with Galton’s and Darwin’s assertions that “the spread of noble ideas is the surest way of promoting racial progress. Wise marriages based on affection will thus be promoted, and foolish ones rendered less probable.”<sup>223</sup>

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222. Levine and Bashford, 9-10.

223. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 88.



Figure 2. “Eugenics Society Poster.” Eugenics Society Archive. 1930. 1.

Though the exhibits were intended to be educational in nature, some eugenic and pro-abortion graphic propaganda was neither educational in nature nor even disguised as such. A poster for the Eugenics Society dating to the 1930s (figure 2) proclaimed that eugenics would “release the strangle-hold of hereditary disease and unfitness” on the nation. The poster depicts a hand representing eugenics pruning the vines of disease and unfitness suffocating the tree of the nation. The poster clearly depicts eugenics as the guarantor of the nation’s health. Lack of subtlety most likely did not diminish the power of the imagery, but rather enhanced it. This colorful poster was clearly designed to grab Britons’ attention and compel them to view eugenics as the answer to the woes of hereditary illnesses and social problems.

### **Educational Literature and Courses**

Although the Eugenics Society’s graphic displays were some of the most extravagant and overt uses of propaganda by eugenicists, this does not mean that they were the only examples. The Society also produced formal educational materials. A classic example was the *Handbook Accompanying School Charts* by C.P. Blacker, general secretary of the Eugenics Society. The

handbook contained six charts illustrating the following topics: the process of fertilization and cell division, Mendel's First Law, results of Mendel's Law in rats, a pedigree chart of stationary night-blindness, polydactylism, and the pedigree of a certain Phelps family "which contains many celebrated oarsmen."<sup>224</sup> The handbook was created to "be used in schools to demonstrate pictorially that heredity plays a part in our lives which we should take into account in the choice of a mate. 'Marry wisely' is the lesson to which they [the six charts] point."<sup>225</sup>

Along with detailed descriptions of the biological and genetic processes demonstrated in the aforementioned six charts, the handbook also contained eugenic advice or lessons to be learned from some of the charts as well as suggestions for further reading on the topics. For instance, the first chart

illustrates the process of fertilization and cell-division. It presupposes an elementary knowledge of how children are born. A short pamphlet entitled 'Mating and the Birth of Children' . . . produced by the Eugenics Society and written for children of twelve and over, may be found useful in this connection; so may a pamphlet written for parents entitled 'Sex Education of Children' . . . The lesson to be learned from these figures [contained within the chart] is that the individuality of the chromosomes, wherein are contained the hereditary factors, is carefully preserved from generation to generation. We are the products of our parents and they of our grandparents; our chromosomes are derived from our parents' chromosomes, and ours will, in turn, be handed on to our children.<sup>226</sup>

This passage is meaningful for two reasons. First, it clearly shows that there were other educational materials produced by the Eugenics Society aimed at children, young adults, and parents alike. Second, this excerpt implies that young adults and parents should be mindful of with whom they mated, because their genes, good and bad, will be passed along to their progeny.

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224. C.P. Blacker. *Handbook Accompanying School Charts*. From the Eugenics Society Archive. 1930. 3-12; Polydactylism is a congenital physical anomaly often resulting in malformations on limbs such as webbed feet, excessive digits, cleft pallet, etc.

225. *Ibid*, 3.

226. Blacker, *Handbook Accompanying School Charts*, 3-4.

To avoid an undesirable child, people were encouraged to mate with someone who would give their offspring the best chance of having the highest quality genes.

The passage above pertained only to the first chart. However, although the others charts did not all have accompanying eugenic advice, the handbook was far from frugal with these lessons. Take, for example, the chart illustrating Mendel's First Law (i.e. the Law of Segregation).<sup>227</sup> Here Blacker inserted the following eugenic lesson:

If the character [allele or trait] which is thus carried is harmful and if, also, it is rare it will appear more commonly among the offspring of cousin marriages than among those of random matings. (They would appear still more commonly among the offspring of brother and sister matings if these took place in human beings). Hence cousin marriages are to be avoided if hereditary abnormalities exist in that part of the ancestry which the two cousins share in common.<sup>228</sup>

Blacker thus cautioned Britons to avoid mating with family members, especially such close family members as first cousins and siblings. This warning was certainly not unique to Blacker. Galton and Darwin were both "deeply concerned" about their culture's practice of consanguineous marriage. In fact, Darwin married his first cousin, and thus himself was in a consanguineous marriage that brought "benefits of familial purity, but problems as well."<sup>229</sup> The concerns that Britons not mate with members of their own family had, and has, a definite eugenic aim: keeping those Britons with recessive alleles for harmful traits from mating with other carriers of the same alleles made sure that those traits did not become dominant in offspring and result in disease. This was aimed to make the overall population of Britain healthier and more fit.

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227. Mendel's First Law dealt with alleles in genes and how they combined with alleles from a mate to form genes in the progeny. The *recessive alleles*, ones that were not predominantly expressed in the phenotype (physical look) of an individual, can still be carried in a gene and passed on to future generations through procreation. These alleles determined anything from eye color, height, or a predisposition for a disease.

228. Blacker, *Handbook Accompanying School Charts*, 6.

229. Levine and Bashford, 10.

Blacker inserted the chart pertaining to the Phelps family pedigree to further illustrate the importance and benefits of selective mating. His accompanying explanation was thus:

The Phelps family have been on the Thames since the thirteenth century, and have been boatmen, watermen, lightermen, boat-builders and professional scullers. For generations they married the daughters of watermen and sailors, and unconsciously they followed the tendency of like to marry like, thus passing on the magnificent physique that is their great inheritance. In this century the Phelps family has produced six winners of the race for the Dogget Coat and Badge and, in the latter part of the last century, three. The family has also produced two professional sculling champions of England and one of the world.<sup>230</sup>

The lesson Blacker was trying to convey here was that Britons should marry and mate with individuals who also had good quality traits and genes because this would give their offspring the best chance of inheriting good traits and genes. In other words, eugenically-desirable Britons should not mate with genetically inferior Britons, as this would muddy the gene pool. Did Blacker believe that if Britons were more selective in their mating, Britain would produce drastically higher numbers of world-class athletes in the future? He did purposely use the Phelps family as an example to suggest that eugenically selective mating *could* result in physically gifted children in certain cases. But this was really beside the point. His program may have produced world-class athletes, but it certainly would produce generally fitter children. He did however purposely use the Phelps family as an example to suggest that eugenically selective mating *could* result in physically gifted children in certain cases.

At the end of his *Handbook* Blacker provided information that he purposely did not come by way of charts. This information described the inheritance of feeble-mindedness and was not reproduced in chart form “because it was felt that it might unduly alarm children who had, as

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230. Blacker, *Handbook Accompanying School Charts*, 13.

relatives, persons who are mentally defective.”<sup>231</sup> It may seem strange that Blacker would be so careful not to offend or upset the children with such information even while he essentially tells the children with whom they should mate. However, it must be remembered that eugenics was not accepted and supported by a good portion of non-academically and non-scientifically educated Britons. To garner their support, even if it were only moral support, the Eugenics Society needed to tread lightly and be as inoffensive as possible. Regardless, Blacker nevertheless believed the information about the pedigree of feeble-mindedness was pertinent and important enough to include in the handbook. He claimed that “[i]f, however, teachers should feel that a useful lesson should be learned from it, they could, if they wished, copy out the pedigree on a blackboard.”<sup>20</sup>

Of course Blacker believed an important lesson was demonstrated by the pedigree of the inheritance of feeble-mindedness. He was trying to be cautious for the benefit of the Eugenics Society, but he gave teachers the option of implementing the information within the pedigree in a class lesson. Though he left the decision up to the teachers, he still could not resist spelling out the lesson for them.

It would be impossible to exaggerate the tragic possibilities which this family history may hold for the future. The children now in institutions may return to their home on reaching the age of 16. They will doubtless have benefited by the special education and training which they will have received; but it is very doubtful if they will ever make satisfactory citizens, and it is far from improbable, that, in their turn, they will produce deficient children. The mother is sufficiently ‘witted’ to know what is wrong with her children. She says that their defects come from the ‘bad blood’ in her husband’s family.<sup>232</sup>

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231. Blacker, *Handbook Accompanying School Charts*, 14.

232. *Ibid*, 16.

The implication here is that such a scenario could have been avoided if one of two things had occurred: either the couple practiced birth control, or the mother was more cautious in selecting her mate.

While the Society placed a great deal of hope in educating future generations, it did not neglect the education of adults. In January 1913 at Imperial College, London, a course on the “groundwork of eugenics” was offered. Along with the course, a public lecture series was begun featuring an equal number of biometric and Mendelian presenters.<sup>233</sup> The topics covered were the same ones espoused in the Eugenics Society exhibits and educational literature, while topics such as Lamarckianism and environmentalism, which would not become prominent in eugenic literature until the 1930s, were left for other interest groups and experts to address.<sup>234</sup> In addition to the courses offered by the Eugenics Society, their “Monthly Meetings” also presented occasions to discuss Mendelism and biometry. Teaching particular theories of inheritance, however, was not the central aim of these lectures. Instead, they were meant to promote hereditarianism – the idea that human nature and character traits are significantly determined by heredity – as the core principle of eugenic thinking. Applying the principles of heredity to understanding and managing the social problem group (the poor) was the desired result. These aims are evident in both the work of the teachers and lecturers as well as the syllabi of the courses. Even-handedness between Mendelism and biometry was the pedagogical method chosen by the society as a careful means to educate Britons about the two theories of inheritance

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233. Mazumdar, 61.

234. Ibid, 67; French biologist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck hypothesized soft inheritance i.e. the heritability of acquired characteristics. This is the idea to which Lamarckianism refers.

that the Society deemed to be compatible with its cause.<sup>235</sup> Whether in the form of biometry or Mendelism or both, hereditarianism was the *ad oculus* truth on which British eugenics was built.

### **Societal Pressure**

Along with public displays, articles were a staple of eugenic propaganda used by the Society. Written for general circulation magazines and elite journals, the articles targeted the Society's core audience – the upper middle class – and usually contained both sociological and scientific arguments.<sup>236</sup> However, ultimately, the appeal was to common sense. Perhaps the best examples of these eugenic articles were written by Ellen Fris Pinsent, co-founder of the National Association for the Care of the Feeble-Minded and member of the Eugenics Education Society. A prominent education reformer from Birmingham, Pinsent was described by historian Edward J. Larson as a “gifted propagandist.” She appealed to the “traditional morality” and common sense of Britons. Her articles were full of melancholy case studies pertaining to genealogical deterioration. A growing family tree of worsening ailments was used to encapsulate said deterioration. These family trees illustrated the spread of disease, prostitution, crime, immorality, drunkenness, and mental defectiveness originating from a single feeble-minded ancestor.<sup>237</sup> Pinsent even declared that “it is surely a matter of common sense . . . to restrict the production of degenerates by the continuous control of the mentally defective.”<sup>238</sup>

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235. Mazumdar, 68.

236. Larson, 49.

237. Ibid, 49.

238. Ibid, 51.



The educational and propaganda materials created, displayed, and disseminated by the Eugenics Society all aimed at convincing Britons of the necessity of eugenics in the hope of inspiring social pressure in favor of implementing eugenic measures. British eugenicists like Galton believed that social pressure was their most valuable tool. As he put it, “[t]he enlightenment of individuals is a necessary preamble to practical Eugenics, but social opinion is the tyrant by whose praise or blame the principles of Eugenics may be expected hereafter to influence individual conduct.”<sup>239</sup> Elsewhere, Galton made it clear that persuading the right people to marry one another through social pressure was the British eugenicists’ foremost goal. “It is no absurd idea that outside influences should hasten the age of marrying and make it customary for the best to marry the best . . . In a community deeply impressed with the desire of encouraging marriages between persons of equally high ability, the social pressure directed to produce the desired end would be so great as to ensure a notable amount of success.”<sup>240</sup>

For British eugenicists, the only way to make sure that Britons were wise in choosing their mates without becoming too authoritarian, was to educate Britons enough to make abiding by eugenic principles a prevailing social norm. Galton claimed that “whenever public opinion is strongly roused it will lead to action, however contradictory it may be to previous custom and sentiment. Considering that public opinion is guided by the sense of what serves the interests of society as a whole, it is reasonable to expect that it will be strongly exerted in favour of Eugenics when a sufficiency of evidence shall have been collected to make the truths on which it rests plain to all.”<sup>241</sup> Even if these eugenic truths got in the way of love, they were still preferred

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239. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 95.

240. *Ibid*, 28-29.

241. *Ibid*, 98-99.

over a perceived imprudent, passionate choice. Galton proclaimed that “plain facts” repudiated the view that it was foolish to attempt to direct the course of passionate love. Social influences of all kinds could overrule imprudent affection. Therefore, “unsuitable marriages” from the Eugenic point of view, like consanguineous marriages, should be discouraged.<sup>242</sup>

British eugenicists attempted to educate Britons as to the importance of hereditary and how it should inform the choice of marriage. The fact that some of the material produced by the Society was not just targeted at adults, but at children as well, shows that eugenicists wanted to plant Galton’s and Darwin’s high ideals in the minds of youth before they were even at marital age. Galton believed that “[i]f a girl is taught to look upon a class of men as tabooed, whether owing to rank, creed, connections, or other causes, she does not regard them as possible husbands and turns her thoughts elsewhere.”<sup>243</sup> In this manner, the British eugenicists attempted to alter the ethics of society to have an affinity towards eugenics. Galton considered society to be “a highly complex organism, with a consciousness of its own, caring only for itself, establishing regulations and customs for its collective advantage, and creating a code of opinions to subserve that end.” He believed that society had tremendous power over the individual “in regard to any obvious particular on which it emphatically insists,” and endeavored to establish eugenics as one of the particulars.<sup>244</sup>

The British eugenics movement from its inception was mainly designed as a movement to instill eugenic morality in British society through education and propaganda. Although reducing the fertility amongst “the undesirables” would “raise the average” just as much as that

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242. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 41-42.

243. *Ibid*, 67.

244. *Ibid*, 94.

of increasing the fertility of “those who will become the lights of the nation,” encouraging high fertility among those Britons of the “best stock” subordinated “repressing the productivity of the worst.” This was the more liberal approach of positive eugenics, characterized by public pressure of a quasi-religious tenor and subsidies implemented to restructure societal norms and ultimately improve the race.<sup>245</sup> The social imperative to live by eugenic ethics among Britons was the desideratum of the Eugenics Society. This imperative was to be established through education and propaganda. Only then would a better future for Britain be assured. As Darwin claimed, “[t]he aim of eugenics is to prove that the breed of our own citizens is a matter of vital importance when considering the future welfare of our country.”<sup>246</sup>

Eugenic propaganda took the form of posters, articles, exhibits, and pamphlets aimed at implanting eugenic ideals in the minds of Britons, under the assumption that Britons would then police their own procreative habits according to eugenic principles. Whether through Mendelism or biometry, pedigree charts or lectures, British eugenicists appealed to the commonsense of Britons with incessant *ad oculus* arguments. The apparent truism that like produced like was good enough for an organization preoccupied with education, not investigation. Hereditarianism was its credo, not the a priori assumptions of Lamarckians and environmentalists. Although already active in society, British eugenicists eventually had to take part in the birth control movement to increase their influence. The next chapter will analyze the manner in which British eugenicists cooperated with birth control groups and operated through clinics with the ultimate goal of race enhancement.

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245. Galton, *Essays In Eugenics*, 24-25.

246. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 1.

## Chapter 5

### Race Enhancement and Birth Control

In the years before World War II, Mothers' Clinics for Birth Control (MCBC) became a primary tool for birth control and eugenics advocates in Britain. These clinics were supported by eugenicists, neo-Malthusians, and feminist, all groups who had a vested interest in gaining the ability to control reproduction.<sup>247</sup> Some of the best examples of these types of clinics are the Mothers' clinics established in several locations throughout Britain, these clinics serve as a great example of attempted race enhancement through birth control. The MCBC started by Humphrey Verdon Roe and his wife Dr. Marie C. Stopes were started safeguard the well-being of the mother and the race. The health of mothers and posterity was to be achieved through the dissemination of contraceptives and information pertaining to their rationale and proper use of. "Let knowledge grow from more to more, But more of reverence in us dwell," was the mantra of the MCBC.<sup>248</sup> The emphasis on knowledge indicates that the clinics were not established just to provide birth control to mothers. They were also meant to educate British women as to the proper, responsible use of birth control. By reverence, the clinic founders were referring to not only respect toward the individual mother and child, but also toward to the race as a whole. Those involved with the clinic believed that the race should "be represented on this earth by the most perfect and God-like individuals that it is in our power to call forth in His image!"<sup>249</sup> Birth control measures taken at these clinics were believed to be "epoch-making" for the race. These

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247. Klausen and Bashford, 103.

248. "History of the Clinic." Correspondence, etc. between M Stopes and the Eugenics Society. From the Eugenics Society Archive. 1921. 3.

249. Ibid, 3.

clinics were intended to not only provide birth control, but also “beauty.” This is to say, at the clinics, mothers were not only identified as simply the creators of babies, but as the “creators of splendid babies.” Therefore, motherhood was seen as the best avenue through which to advance the race.<sup>250</sup> This shared notion of mothers as the key to advancing the race clearly points to birth control being used not only as a method to help women plan for, or deal with, a difficult period of their lives, but also as a means to advance the race, a venture which is clearly eugenic in nature.

To suggest that eugenicists were birth control enthusiasts would be an understatement. Eugenicists’ were heavily involved in establishing birth-control clinics through which to distribute information among the poor Britons in both working-class urban districts and agricultural-based rural centers. The condom, sponge, cap, diaphragm, intra-uterine device, and spermicides were all contraceptive technologies distributed at these clinics.<sup>251</sup> This advocacy grew in the early years of the twentieth century as eugenicists increasingly aligned themselves with broader birth control movement. Eugenicists feared being “left behind” in the birth control “revolution” if they did not take an increasingly larger role in it. Eugenicists were actually the first to establish birth control clinics in some contexts, and of course, to advocate for more intrusive, controversial methods such as abortion and sterilization.<sup>252</sup>

The MCBC not only intended to provide mothers with the opportunity for a “voluntary and joyous motherhood.”<sup>253</sup> In certain instances, they also intended to prevent motherhood.

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250. “History of the Clinic,” 3-4.

251. Klausen and Bashford, 102.

252. Ibid, 99.

253. “History of the Clinic,” 3-4.

“Birth control knowledge will not be given in the crude repressive form it is advocated in some quarters, but as the keystone in the arch of progress toward racial health and happiness.”<sup>254</sup> This statement shows that, again, many birth control clinics had eugenic ambitions. Motherhood was meant to advance the race tout court. Only Britons of good stock should be persuaded to reproduce, others should be dissuaded. If mothers or families could be educated on the virtues of eugenics while being trained on the proper methods of birth control (birth-spacing, contraception, etc.), then proponents of birth control and eugenicists could metaphorically kill two birds with one stone.

Birth control education was of particular concern to Dr. Stopes. She determined that although information about birth control had been available in Britain for years, it was only really available to the well-to-do and educated portions of British society. Stopes believed that the ignorant and impoverished were the most in need information about birth control, but also the most ignorant of where such information was available. Thus Stopes made it her mission to provide birth control information wherever she could.<sup>255</sup>

The official history of the first MCBC is couched in surprisingly propagandistic language.

The poor woman who is driven into her motherhood blindly, involuntarily and rebelliously is not she who best serves our race. Slave-mothers have produced in the past, and are producing to-day, myriads of weak, inefficient, diseased and miserable lives. With one puny infant hanging on her half-starved breast the mother carelessly and recklessly, or pitifully and ignorantly, or bitterly and rebelliously has conceived another bear upon her womb's depleted strength. And of the infants such as she produced, myriads have died before their lips could frame the word 'Mother,' taking their tiny coffins back to mother earth the human

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254. “History of the Clinic,” 3-4.

255. “How the Clinic Came into Being.” Correspondence, etc. between M Stopes and the Eugenics Society. From the Eugenics Society Archive. 1921. 9-10.

strength for want of which their brothers and sisters went through life enfeebled.<sup>256</sup>

Note that while this comment suggests that women being “driven blindly” into motherhood did not “serve” the race, avoids callously describing these poor women as useless. Instead, the author used sympathetic imagery to make the message stick in the mind of the reader. The use of phrases such as “poor woman,” “slave-mothers,” “puny infant,” “half-starved,” and “tiny coffins” demonstrates that those in charge of the clinics were attempting to appeal to the emotions of those who might question the rationale or ethics of birth control.

Such appeals are reminiscent of the pathos arguments used by the eugenicists discussed in chapter two. Indeed, appeals to the pathos of Britons are scattered throughout the clinics history. The text constantly refers to and plays upon the notion of happiness. The clinics claimed that the use of birth control could create happier marriages and decrease “misereries.” Those who learned to use birth control measures correctly “have been spared the loss and human agonies of the mother’s heart torn by the sufferings of incessant pregnancies, and the heart-rending pathos of puny and dying babies.”<sup>257</sup> Elsewhere, the text suggests that birth control will alleviate the suffering of unwanted children: “Have you ever looked deep into the heart of an unwanted child? It reflects all its mother’s misery with an even tenderer, more helpless and incurable pathos.”<sup>258</sup>

The emotionally-laden language used by the MCBC was coupled with appeals to a variety of authorities in order to sway less emotional opponents of birth control. These authorities would ostensibly provide a more logical argument for birth control when arguments *ad misericordiam* would not work. Such appeals to authority echo the logos arguments of the

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253. “History of the Clinic,” 4.

257. Ibid, 6.

258. Ibid, 6.

eugenicists discussed in chapter two. Two such authority figures, the Bishop of Birmingham and Dean Inge, believed it was only logical to use birth control to decrease the amount of babies that would be a total loss to the state and create misery all around:

The Bishop of Birmingham and Dean Inge have pointed out how serious it is for our race that it is now the better and thriftier couples, those likely to make good parents and train their children to be good citizens, who have to restrict their families, while those below the level of self-respect, often even of decency, reproduce themselves innumerable. Thus, in recent years, there has been a proportionate increase in our population of the miserable with an ever decreasing percentage of those who originate in good homes.

Once stem the onrush of those who enter life in such quick succession that they snatch the bread and milk from each other's mouths and do nothing but defeat each other's chances of life, or, if they live, lead weakened, doomed or diseased lives -- once stem the onrush of those who are a total loss to the State, an anguish and drain to their mothers and a misery to themselves, and then we shall find in each home only the joyous creators of children born in love and loved before their birth. Then only and at last will the sting of life be vanquished and victory over misery be achieved by humanity.<sup>259</sup>

The message was quite clear, authority figures agreed that "better and thriftier" couples needed to reproduce at a higher rate than those "below the level of self-respect" who were currently more fertile. The implication here was that a reverse of this phenomenon should take place with the aid of birth control practices in order for Britain to receive more children from good families who will become good citizens, and less of those deemed "miserable" and "a total loss to the state." This use of birth control would thus amplify the proportion of "joyous creators of children" who were "born in love and loved before their birth." This excerpt further demonstrates the link between eugenics and the birth control movement in Britain during this time, and the implementation of clinics for educational purposes. If the MCBCs were merely present to offer contraceptives, then those in charge of the clinics would not clearly state that after the number of "good" children from "good" families far outweighed the number of

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259. "History of the Clinic," 5.



“miserable” families and children, “[t]hen only and at last will the sting of life be vanquished and victory over misery be achieved by humanity.”<sup>260</sup> The fact that birth control clinics were used for educational purposes is only further strengthened by another statement made by the Mothers’ Clinic for Birth Control. “Right in their midst, open to all those who most sorely need it, the ‘Mothers’ Clinic’ will bring to the unhappy not only knowledge of the power to quell nature’s archaic fury of procreation, but also the knowledge of how to live in true love and happiness in marriage. This double work has a double blessing, both to every individual and to the race.”<sup>261</sup>

### **Medical Tests**

Education at clinics was not, however, the only methods by which eugenic aims could be mixed with birth control. Perhaps one of the most overt instances of the partnership of the British birth control and eugenics movements is the pursuit of medical research. The Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress (CBC) was the preeminent vehicle for such work. The president of the CBC was none other than Dr. Marie Stopes, who already had ties to the Eugenics Society. The CBC, with its modest network of voluntary birth control clinics that were proudly advertised as vehicles for racial progress (see Figure 3), was the most “obvious connection” for the Eugenics Society.<sup>262</sup>

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260. “History of the Clinic,” 5.

261. *Ibid*, 6-7.

262. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 178.

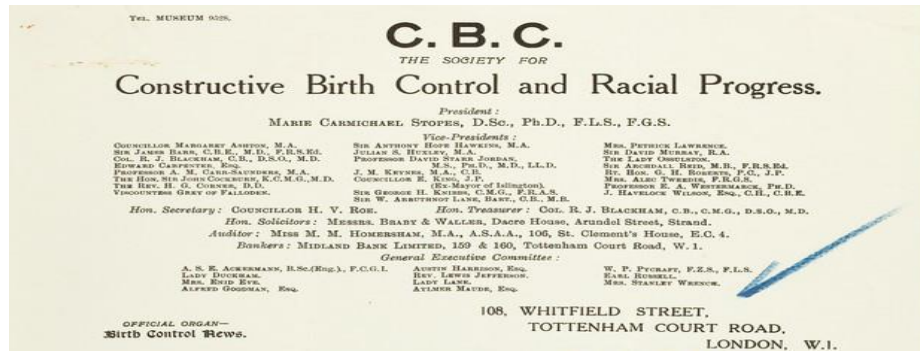


Figure 3. “C.B.C.” Correspondence, etc. between M Stopes and the Eugenics Society. Eugenics Society Archive. 1921. 20.

The name of the society itself demonstrated its overall aims. For the Eugenics Society and the CBC, birth control practices would only be “constructive” in nature if they advanced the race. “Constructive birth control” would be used in order to increase the number of babies born to higher-class families and decrease the number of “miserable” babies born to lower-class families.

The CBC was founded for the implementation of constructive birth control practices, but it needed a vehicle to carry out its program. The MCBCs provided the perfect solution to this problem. CBC aims were wedded with MCBC clinical staff and locations. Hiring medical professionals enabled the integrated clinics to not only provide birth control for mothers and families, but also medical testing as well. The Eugenics Society would help fund these schemes.

A wide range of birth control technologies were tested at the CBC clinics. Evidence of these clinical tests can be gathered from Stopes’ books and newsletters, which include detailed discussions and descriptions of intrauterine, chemical, and barrier devices. Along with her books and newsletters, Stopes also wrote pamphlets like “A Letter to Working Mothers: On How to Have Healthy Children and Avoid Weakening Pregnancies.” The pamphlet was not generically aimed at working class women, but specifically at those who had suffered injury from disease or childbirth. Of Stopes’ first five thousand cases, 196 women had a prolapsed uterus, 215 suffered

from miscellaneous internal deformations, and 496 had slit cervixes usually caused by pregnancy.<sup>263</sup> An obvious way to keep some of these ailments and injuries from occurring was to prescribe birth control to these women. The CBC thus acted as a venue for contraceptive testing and dissemination.

However, while the Eugenics Society and pro-birth control societies such as the CBC shared the same goals when it came to promoting birth control, the two groups did not agree on everything. Certain methods of birth control became a debated topic between those in charge of the Mothers' Clinics and the Eugenics Society. A good example of this arose from the Eugenics Society's financing of contraceptive research.<sup>264</sup> The Birth Control Investigation Committee was established in 1927 by the Eugenics Society for the purpose of "analyzing statistical data from birth control clinics, surveying the extent of contraceptive practices and conducting laboratory research on chemical spermicides and rubber appliances." The Society was particularly interested in supporting "the search for a cheap, safe, effective contraceptive capable of being used by all but the most incompetent of couples." One such contraceptive was Oxford zoologist John Baker's chemical suppository named "Volpar," that used phenyl mercuric acetate as a spermicide.<sup>265</sup>

The quality of contraceptive technologies became a divisive issue for eugenicists and birth control advocates. For instance, Stopes and Roe were not enthused by the use of the spermicide Volpar. In a letter written by Roe to Dr. Blacker, general secretary of the Eugenics Society, Roe stated that

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263. Peter Neushul. "Marie C. Stopes and the popularization of birth control technology." *Technology & Culture* 39, no. 2 (April 1998): 252.

264. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 198.

265. Neushul, 262-263.

At our last Committee meeting we disused the commercial product ‘Volpar’ and with some surprise noted that in the Eugenics Society’s ‘Aims and Objects,’ (proof of which was sent to our President), in Clause 5 the Eugenics Society congratulates itself on having ‘assisted the discovery of the ‘Volpar’ Group of Spermicides.’

I was instructed by the unanimous vote of our Committee to write to you to the effect that:

This Committee regrets to note that the Eugenics Society sponsors the use of Volpar as a contraceptive since the Committee is of the opinion that there is a strong presumption supported by experience at our Clinics that the ingredients of this preparation are deleterious to the human organism.<sup>266</sup>

As can be observed in this letter, the CBC objected to the Eugenics Society’s use of the spermicide Volpar as a contraceptive, because it seemed to harm not only the sperm but also the patient. It is unclear whether the Eugenics Society was aware of the effects of Volpar prior to this letter. What is clear, however, is that although the Eugenics Society and the CBC were both in favor of using spermicides as a method of birth control, the CBC seemed to be more cautious about the deleterious health effects of spermicides tested at the clinics.

### **Financial Partnership**

The staff at these clinics were not merely unbiased professionals, they were specially trained for their mission and enumerated with the help of the Eugenics Society. Nursing candidates were interviewed by Stopes personally, were encouraged to read her work *Contraception (Birth Control) Its Theory, History and Practice*, and were required to pass an examination.<sup>267</sup> However, just because birth control clinics required their nursing staff to be well-versed in contraceptive practices, does not mean that this selective process was done entirely for the benefit of the mother. The primary goal of the clinics was to offer birth control to

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266. “C.B.C. and Mothers’ Clinic.” Correspondence, etc. between M Stopes and the Eugenics Society. From the Eugenics Society Archive. 1921. 44.

267. Neushul, 270.

women, especially poor and working-class women who were biologized as racially inferior. This would stop children from being born into lower socio-economic classes and stem the tide of racial degeneracy.

Expenses reports for exhibition and hall meetings, propaganda and luncheons, advertising, postages, and press cuttings are all evidence of the amount of energy and resources that went into the education and propaganda campaigns of the eugenics and birth control movements. Interestingly, the reports also include an income column that lists “voluntary payments from some patients.” That the total for the year equals only £58, indicates such payments were not a substantial source of income for the clinics. Instead, donations and subscription fees seem to be their primary source of income. The absence of a “patient fees” or “payments” category and the presence of a “voluntary payments” category on the expense report indicates that the MCBCs did not charge some patients for birth control.<sup>268</sup>

The category “voluntary payments” actually points to the genuine aims of the clinics. The eugenicists wanted to make sure that the clinics were accessible; that there would be no monetary obstacle barring Britons from access to birth control. If they could obtain contraceptives and advice for free, Britons would be more willing to look to birth control measures as a method of family and life planning if they could obtain contraceptives and family planning advice for free. This would be especially true for lower class Britons, to whom the British eugenicists most wanted to offer birth control as a method of reducing the number of undesirable babies. The fact that these clinics took only voluntary payments that these clinics were not built for profit, but were in fact committed to using birth control in order to improve the race.

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268. “C.B.C. Expense Report.” Correspondence, etc. between M Stopes and the Eugenics Society. From the Eugenics Society Archive. 1937. 43.

If profitability were not the primary concern of those running the birth control clinics, how did they manage to stay afloat for so long? The answer lies in their partnership with the Eugenics Society. Thanks to the patronage of wealthy supporters like the retired owner of an English sheep station in Australia, Henry Twitchin, the Society could afford to be influential. Twitchin made several donations to the Society and left it a bequest of approximately £70,000 upon his death.<sup>269</sup>

Several birth control organizations were supported by grants from the Eugenics Society. In fact, by 1936-1937, the Society had already established forty-eight clinics throughout Britain via grants.<sup>270</sup> To support this sprawling network, C.P. Blacker request that the Eugenics Society Council establish a Birth Control Committee in 1933, which they did. The committee recommended that the wealthier Eugenics Society finance the activities of birth control groups like the National Birth Control Association (NBCA).<sup>271</sup> Supported partially by Eugenics Society grants, the NBCA, later renamed the Family Planning Association, was affiliated with approximately sixty-five voluntary clinics that supplemented the activities of some 280 maternity and child welfare clinics in England and Wales. These roughly 280 clinics were also established to provide women with birth control instruction in both private and public health facilities.<sup>272</sup>

The Eugenics Society did not merely finance clinics and birth control groups, they wanted to make sure that their eugenic principles would be preached at birth control clinics. Voluntary birth control clinics administered by the Society for the Provision of Birth Control

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269. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 163.

270. Mazumdar, 55.

271. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 208.

272. *Ibid*, 209.

Clinics were small financial awards. Grants of £50 were furnished to sway “sympathetic” M.P.s to convince the minister of health to extend his guidelines even further to allow local health authorities to advise married women about birth control upon their request. £125 was also made available to help the NBCA encourage medical officers to take advantage of the already existing permissive directives. By 1935 expenses for such purposes constituted about 10 percent of the Eugenics Society’s annual expenditures of nearly £5,000.<sup>273</sup>

Although approximately ten to fifteen percent of the operating costs of the Eugenics Society were allocated to supporting the NBCA, the association still ran a deficit. This partnership was so crucial to the British eugenicists that the Eugenics Society’s Birth Control Committee contemplated merging with the NBCA. However, because the larger eugenics community reacted negatively to the idea, the two remained separate. The Society continued to dole out annual grants of £100 to £300 to the NBCA and allowed it to occupy the second floor of the Eugenics Society’s premises at a low rent. Thus the partnership of the Eugenics Society and birth control groups, especially the NBCA, was symbiotic. The NBCA attained financial and operational security from the partnership, while the Eugenics Society, who already had many of its officers already on the governing board of the NBCA, gained access to the NBCA’s network of clinics and branches throughout Britain.<sup>274</sup>

### **Obstacles to the Partnership**

While the Eugenics Society and birth control associations were able to develop their own propaganda, spreading the message of eugenic birth control was not easy. At the time, the idea of

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273. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 208.

274. *Ibid*, 209-212.

using birth control to advance the race and nation was not very popular in Britain. Even the NBCA had a difficult time melding its propaganda with that of eugenicists. At a joint meeting of members of the NBCA and Eugenics Society, an NBCA member “explained the difficulties of ordinary propaganda for birth control and how greatly these would be increased by having to include also the many controversial matters included in the AIMS AND OBJECTS” of the Eugenics Society.<sup>275</sup>

Creating propaganda for birth control might have been difficult, but incorporating the controversial ideas and aims of eugenicists greatly increased the difficulty. Although the NBCA was cautious about the negative effect that incorporating the Eugenics Society’s agenda could have on their own promotion of birth control, the association nevertheless needed the financial support of the Eugenics Society. It thus proceeded cautiously towards a partnership as evidenced by the notes on the joint meeting.

As a result of discussion it was agreed that probably the most satisfactory course would be for Dr. Blacker to produce a statement on the work of the Eugenics Society stressing particularly its work and the population question and including in a brief general paragraph many of the other present Aims and Objects merely as subjects for study. If Miss Pocock were then to lecture to several Branches of the N.B.C.A., leaving with them this revised statement of Dr. Blacker’s, and encouraging them to ask about the Eugenics Society, excellent preparation would be done in educating the Branches to a wider idea of their work and also in preparing the ground for suggestions of co-operation or amalgamation later.<sup>276</sup>

The meeting represents both the cooperation of eugenicists and birth control associations, and the importance they placed on propaganda. Although the Eugenics Society’s aims were seen

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275. “Notes on a meeting of Lady Denman, Dr. Blacker, Miss Holland, and Mrs. Pyke.” From the Eugenics Society Archive. 1937. 55; the phrase: “aims and objects” was typed in all capitalized letters in the original document.

276. “Notes on a meeting of Lady Denman, Dr. Blacker, Miss Holland, and Mrs. Pyke,” 55.



as controversial, this did not dissuade the NBCA from partnering with them. The controversial nature of the Society's aims forced the NBCA to present their own aims as purely educational or academic "subjects of study." Doing so made the aims seem far less menacing and better suited as the topics of lectures given at NBCA branches. It seems the NBCA wanted to take only small steps towards its amalgamation with the Eugenics Society in order to complete a smooth transition.<sup>277</sup>

NBCA members were not the only ones dubious of the partnership with the Eugenics Society. So were some eugenicists. The notion that the NBCA branches and clinics were prepared to provide eugenic teaching was questioned by many eugenicists. Lack of preparation on the part of the NBCA would not have bothered eugenicists so much, if their Society, whose resources were thirty times that of the NBCA, had not been the latter's benefactor.<sup>278</sup> In light of the perception that birth control and even birth spacing seemed to be lowering the fertility rate of larger, less intelligent families more than that of smaller intelligent families, Leonard Darwin reluctantly approved the negotiations. However, he and other eugenicists feared that the NBCA may divert the Society's money to "noneugenic ends" and wanted greater assurances of the NBCA's "eugenic commitment."<sup>279</sup> However dubious some of the members of the Eugenics Society were towards collaborating with birth control associations, the Society still needed birth control clinics and branches to put their eugenic teachings into practice. Thus, the partnership went forward.

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277. For more on the tactic of disguising eugenic propaganda as purely educational and academic in nature see Chapter 4.

278. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 209 and 211.

279. *Ibid*, 211.

Partnership is a recurrent theme in the history of the British eugenics movement. These partnerships were not always between two domestic entities. We must remember that eugenics was a global phenomenon, and the idea of health or race enhancement did not confine itself to the British Isles. This begs the questions: Was the *modus operandi* of the British eugenicists plastic or immutable? Was it context specific or formulaic? Was there conversation, or dictation? This next section is dedicated to answering the questions.

### **Eugenics Outside of the Metropole**

The eugenics movement was not confined to Britain or even the Western world. It was a global movement well exemplified by the spreading of eugenics throughout the British empire. In the heyday of eugenics, Britain still had an empire and even influence among former colonies. These regions became the laboratory for eugenic experiments. This is to say, British eugenicists exported their ideology to areas of influence. Places like South Africa, Kenya, Hong Kong, and South Asia all followed Britain in adopting eugenic policies. However, not all of these countries followed the same eugenic path as Britain, and not all of these countries adopted eugenics as quickly as Britain. Each new local provided unique scenarios (racially and culturally) within which the outnumbered white British eugenicists had to operate. Far removed from the metropole, the ethno-cultural differences between the colonies (both former and current) and Britain led to differentiation in eugenic methodologies and aims.

Out of all the South Asian countries with links to Britain, India seems to have had the most extensive involvement in eugenics and contraceptive use. In fact, eugenic thinking informed most political and social debate from about the 1920s until 1947 when India gained

formal political independence.<sup>280</sup> A major reason for the preeminence of eugenics in India was the direct influence of British eugenics there. Indian eugenics societies had longstanding connections with British organizations like the Birth Control International Information Centre, the International Planned Parenthood Committee, and the London-based Eugenics Society.<sup>281</sup> Indian and British eugenics societies had a mutually beneficial relationship. Eugenics Society papers and journals such as the *Birth Control News* and *Eugenics Review* showcased the efforts of eugenics workers in India, and in return, the Eugenics Society provided Indian associations with eugenic educational materials and reference works.<sup>282</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s, eugenics in India became focused mainly on the promulgation of voluntary birth control associations. The establishment of the Indian Eugenics Society of Lahore in 1921 was followed by the establishment of the Sholapur Eugenics Education Society in 1929. The following year, the Eugenic Society in Bombay (1930) was established, and five years later, the Society for the Study and Promotion of Family Hygiene was established in Bombay as well.<sup>283</sup>

Although heavily influenced by British eugenics, eugenics, as practiced in India by British eugenicists in concert with local medical professionals, did not simply mirror the style of British eugenics native to the metropole. Eugenicists in India were less concerned about the “specific workings” of heredity, when compared to eugenicists elsewhere. They placed less stress on heredity for two reasons: lack of sufficient funds for extensive hereditary research and

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280. Sarah Hodges. “South Asia’s Eugenic Past.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 228.

281. Ibid, 230.

282. Ibid, 230.

283. Ibid, 228-229.

the caste system. While the British Eugenics Society carried out pedigree research thanks to the generosity of rich patrons, eugenicists in India funded their activities through donations from abroad and their own personal wealth. Although Indian eugenic associations distributed propaganda and held public meetings, many of these associations were run out of private homes. They only occasionally ran clinics. This severely limited how much research on heredity Indian eugenicists could undertake. As for the Indian caste system, it greatly complicated the study of heredity for eugenic purposes.<sup>284</sup> Eugenics researchers in India did not reach a consensus about which social groups should be studied. Although caste was perceived to be transmitted through birth, it was nevertheless considered a social, not a biological, category. Consequently, the caste system did not translate into the taxonomy of race that was central to much eugenic theory and analysis. Even the minority population of Indians who had converted to Christianity, for whom the Hindu caste system did not apply, still observed the caste beliefs and practices. The centrality of the caste system in Indian society and a lack of funding forced Indian eugenicists to turn away from heredity and stress other aspects of eugenic theory.<sup>285</sup> This turn from heredity did not occur in other colonial locations, notably in Kenya.

Colonial Kenya had a “small but vociferous” eugenics movement.<sup>286</sup> Eugenic enthusiasts among Kenya’s small British population in Nairobi established the Kenyan Society for the Study of Race Improvement (KSSRI) in 1933. There, eugenics researchers were mostly interested in intelligence and race, which controversially led them to seek British government funding to

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284. Hodges, 231.

284. Ibid, 229 and 231-232.

286. Chloe Campbell. “Eugenics in Colonial Kenya.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 289.

research the differences in mental development and brain structure between Europeans and East Africans.<sup>287</sup> The Kenyan eugenics movement's concern with intelligence was not what differentiated them from the British Eugenics Society, however, it was their methodology. In place of the population statistics, and pedigree charts used by British eugenicists to analyze the relationship of intelligence to social class, eugenicists in Kenya focused more biology, specifically cell structure and brain capacity. Counterintuitively, indications are that eugenicists in Kenya actually were interested in improving the welfare of the native population. Although their ideas were associated with the "expression of belligerent racism," they hoped to achieve race improvement not only for the white population, but also the native population. Although the methodology and ethno-cultural context was different, eugenicists in Kenya sought pan-racial enhancement just like their counterparts in Britain.<sup>288</sup>

The former British colony of South Africa was akin to Kenya in that ideas about biologized race dominated legislation and society. There, "racial categories and ascriptions determined all aspects of South Africans' lives from birth to death, and they intruded as much on private as public life."<sup>289</sup> Consequently, South Africa's brand of eugenics was "inescapably linked" to race. This is to say, racial discrimination did not need legitimacy from eugenic principles.<sup>290</sup> Eugenics was not a catalyst for racial discrimination in South Africa, the latter predated the former. Racial hierarchies were thoroughly internalized and enforced by the

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287. Campbell, 289.

288. Ibid, 292 and 294.

289. Saul Dubow. "South Africa: Paradoxes in the Place of Race." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 274.

290. Ibid, 274.

apartheid regime, thus nascent eugenic ideas were not the foundation stone of white supremacy. Thanks to over a century and a half of slavery and servitude, “paternalism and deference in the lived relations between whites and blacks” was engraved. Thus, in the mind and social behavior of South Africans, racial divisions were “finely calibrated,” thoroughly assimilated, and “naturalized” prior to the arrival of eugenics from Britain.<sup>291</sup> Be that as it may, eugenic ideas in South Africa were often used in conflicts for ascendancy among whites – namely between Afrikaans and English speakers, between “Boer and Brit.”<sup>292</sup> Eugenics in South Africa was not concerned with proving that whites were superior to blacks or racial legislation. After all, the oppressive apartheid regime had already settled that particular question of racial superiority.

Despite the pervasive influence of eugenic ideas in South Africa, eugenic institutions never established a strong foothold there. Eugenic ideas were mainly influential only through the independent agency of university and government employees. Beyond that, South African eugenicists failed to form a single organization. Unlike eugenics movements in America, but akin to the eugenics movement in Kenya, South Africa had far fewer intellectuals to organize. After its brief existence in South Africa, a eugenics society there left “no trace.” Still, this did not stop eugenic ideas in South Africa from being “disseminated in more dilute, albeit no less insidious ways.”<sup>293</sup>

The British eugenics movement had a strong influence on the South African movement. Yet the latter was not a mere carbon copy of the former. Apartheid and segregationist thinking was such an integral part of South African society that eugenics, instead of being an ideology

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291. Dubow, 274.

292. Ibid, 275.

293. Ibid, 279.

with immense ideological authority, merely became another piece of South Africa's racist "ideological amalgam." South African eugenicists relied on validation from "metropolitan science," but did not simply derive their entire eugenic ideology and practices from the British; they could not. "Fresh adaptations" were *sometimes* required for new contexts.<sup>294</sup>

Hong Kong was yet another new context for eugenics. The movement spread there by way of British and American birth-control activists. The Hong Kong Eugenics League was established in April 1936 to provide contraceptive knowledge to alleviate problems associated with the *mui-tsai* "little sister" system.<sup>295</sup> Three months later, in June 1936, the first birth control clinic in Hong Kong was established. The clinic catered to mainly working-class women and offered mid-wife training, maternity centers, maternity hospitals, infant welfare, and, upon the recommendation of the British Ministry of Health, postnatal contraceptive advice. Absent an official link between the Hong Kong Eugenics League and the Hong Kong government, the league looked to the National Birth Control Association in Britain for support.<sup>296</sup> The close association between the NBCA and the similar methodology concerning contraception displayed by both the Hong Kong Eugenics League and the British Eugenics Society demonstrates eugenic practices that were akin in methodology despite surfacing in different contexts.

## Conclusion

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294. Dubow, 284-286.

295. In the *mui-tsai* system, poor young girls were sold into 'domestic servitude' to offer the majority male population a source of Chinese women unaffected by the then rampant spread of sexually transmitted diseases. This system prevailed until the 1940s.

296. Yuehtsen Juliette Chung. "Eugenics in China and Hong Kong: Nationalism and Colonialism, 1890s – 1940s." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 267-268.

The Eugenics Society cooperated with networks of birth control clinics in Britain and beyond to amplify and implement their eugenic agenda. This relationship was symbiotic: birth control clinics received financial support from the Eugenics Society while the eugenicists gained influence through the institutional infrastructure of birth control branches and clinics. Race enhancement was the ultimate goal of this partnership as evidenced by the establishment of associations like the MCBC, the CBC, the KSSRI, and the NBCA who were all tied to the Eugenics Society. Although contraceptives like spermicides were tested at select clinics, the primary utility of the clinics from the eugenic standpoint was their ability to act as another institution through which eugenic ideals could be espoused. The *modus operandi* of British eugenicists was mutable and generally case-specific. British eugenicists in London did not issue schematics to their counterparts abroad. There was conversation, not dictation. Different locales often led to different methodology. However, the end goal was always the same regardless of context. British eugenicists at home or abroad sought to control fertility and improve the race for the welfare of current society and posterity. Whether in London or Lahore, Hong Kong or Nairobi, health and race dominated the discussion.



## Conclusion

British eugenicists aimed to refine society through the enhancement of mankind. Their *modus operandi* was educational materials such as pedigree charts that were designed to instill eugenic ideals in the minds of Britons, thus establishing eugenics as a normative societal practice. This education often took place in cooperation with birth control associations at their clinics. For the eugenicists, enhancement was meant to be pan-racial for the welfare of a future meritocratic society. The British eugenicists conflated nationality and class with race: phenotypic attributes beyond skin color and physiognomy were understood as indicators of different breeds or races. Thus, British eugenicists' conception of race was more nuanced than a simple Manichean Asian versus Caucasian or English versus French dichotomy.

Although ultimately concerned with race enhancement, the British eugenics movement was relatively benign compared to those of Germany, America, and Scandinavia – contexts in which sterilization and euthanasia were practiced. Germany's sterilization law of 1933 (*Gesetz zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses*) led to the coerced sterilization of at least 375,000 people, 5,000 of whom died from complications from the procedure. In 1939, the initial phase of euthanasia, *Tiergartenstrasse 4* (T4), led to the death of approximately 70,273 delinquent, “feeble-minded,” and physically-disabled persons deemed “unworthy of life.”<sup>297</sup> In America, 63,000 people were sterilized, a quarter of whom were sterilized in California, Virginia being the state with the next highest number. North Carolina, with its 8,000 sterilization petitions, was

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297. Paul Weindling. “German Eugenics and the Wider World: Beyond the Racial State.” In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 322-323.

logically one of the first states to implement state-supported birth control.<sup>298</sup> From the 1930s to the 1950s, around 35,500 people were sterilized in Scandinavia for social or eugenic reasons. The sterilization laws were ostensibly not coercive, however, as in the case of Sweden, where sterilization was a precondition for discharge from a mental institution. Although physical force was not allowed under the Scandinavian sterilization laws, coercion was inherent in the system.<sup>299</sup>

The British eugenics movement cannot be accurately described as radical in relation to the eugenic movements in the aforementioned national and regional contexts. Not only was compulsory sterilization and euthanasia not the desirable method for British eugenicists, the political climate in Britain would not have allowed such activity, even if it had been preferred by the eugenicists. British eugenicists deemed compulsion illiberal and thus avoided it as a tactic for attaining their eugenic goals. This mindset is evidenced by the following quote from Darwin.

There are two ways of acting when the aim is the production of smaller families by persons of bad stock; and these are persuasion and compulsion. Persuasion is always to be preferred to compulsion, if the end desired can thus be obtained. Let us, therefore, begin by considering what can be done by persuasion. To ask a man not to marry, or, if he does marry, to have no children, is to ask a great deal. But self-sacrifice is the very foundation of our ideas of what is noble in human conduct. If the world of the future would be benefitted by a man refraining from parenthood, surely it must be right for him so to refrain. We should do all that we can to help to ascertain when such conduct would be right; and, when right, to encourage those called on to make such sacrifices to follow the dictates of their consciences. Those who think that little good could be done by such persuasion should, nevertheless, do all they can in this direction.<sup>300</sup>

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298. Wendy Kline. "Eugenics in the United States." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 517-518.

299. Mattias Tydén. "The Scandinavian States: Reformed Eugenics Applied." In *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 370-371.

300. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 30.

Although British eugenicists avoided compulsory eugenic measures, this is not to say that the British eugenicists never contemplated voluntary sterilization. Darwin admitted that “in view of the possibility of thus improving the lot of all future generations, eugenics demands that careful and unprejudiced consideration should be given to the uses to which sterilization might be put.”<sup>301</sup> In this case, Darwin made sure that he was clearly discussing voluntary sterilization.

He openly denounced the practice of compulsory sterilization, when he claimed that

[s]terilization has been altogether condemned as being an unjust interference with the liberty of the individual. Now, whatever force there may have been in this objection, it can apply only to the operation if performed compulsorily. Whether compulsion in this matter should ever be legalized is a question which may perhaps be left to those who come after us to decide. At present certainly the public would not tolerate any such proposal, even if its justice could be fully proved; and no doubt it would be a dangerous innovation, unless carefully safeguarded.<sup>302</sup>

The push for voluntary sterilization started with country-wide official reports pertaining to mental disability. As succinctly described by Mazumdar, the sterilization campaign “began with the *Wood Report* of 1929, on the incidence of mental deficiency in the population, which was followed by the *Brock Report* of 1934 on sterilization, and the *Colchester Survey* of 1938, Lionel S. Penrose’s study of the Genetics of feeble-mindedness.”<sup>303</sup> Along with the implementation of official reports, the Eugenics Society formed a Committee for Legalizing

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301. Darwin, *What is Eugenics?*, 43.

302. *Ibid*, 40.

303. Mazumdar, 197; Lionel Sharples Penrose was a British geneticist. For a period, he was the Galton professor of eugenics at University College London.

Sterilization with C.P. Blacker as one of the members. This committee continued the tradition of producing propaganda, this time in the form of pamphlets supporting sterilization.<sup>304</sup>

An inspector on the Board of Control, E.O. Lewis, organized a survey of the quantity of mental defectives in representative communities throughout the country. Lewis' findings were used by the Wood Committee to assert that deficiency was both a social and genetic problem. The bottom ten percent of the social scale was deemed the problem group. However, the *Wood Report* did not endorse sterilization as a cure for this problem. The endorsement of voluntary sterilization came from both the papers by Penrose pertaining to the Colchester material, and the *Brock Report* in 1934, which arrived at a different conclusion from that of the *Wood Report* by investigating the hereditary transmissibility of mental deficiency within Lewis' social problem group.<sup>305</sup> The Brock Report and the Wood Report were supposed to have given the Eugenics Society the "scientific basis" necessary for eugenics to have legislative success. After the release of said reports, the Eugenics Society campaigned for the implementation of voluntary sterilization for mental defectives and those with the ability to transmit both hereditary illnesses or mental disease.<sup>306</sup>

Despite the efforts of eugenicists, the Eugenics Society's sterilization campaign failed. As Hart and Carr put it, "the British eugenics movement, primarily embodied in the propaganda – and education – oriented Eugenics Society, remained perpetually unable to convince its own

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304. Mazumdar, 204.

305. Ibid, 198-209.

306. Bradley W. Hart and Richard Carr. "Sterilization and the British Conservative Party: Rethinking the Failure of the Eugenics Society's Political Strategy in the Nineteen-Thirties." *Historical Research* 88, no. 242: 722.

government to pass a sterilization law throughout the nineteen-twenties and thirties.”<sup>307</sup> The several attempts made by the Eugenics Society to introduce bills legalizing voluntary sterilization for mental defectives never made it to the second floor of parliament; the bills never made it past parliamentary discussion. This legislative failure has been explained by “general ineptitude” and “lack of political insight” on behalf of the Eugenics Society.<sup>308</sup> Although, even if those in the Eugenics Society had been more politically savvy, their failure was a near certainty under the existing political conditions of the nineteen-thirties; passing sterilization legislation would have been politically impossible.<sup>309</sup> The “statist” act of placing the state before the individual was widely perceived as “an insult to the fundamental human right to home and family.”<sup>310</sup>

Although political ineptness was certainly a major causal factor for the failure of the Eugenics Society’s sterilization campaign, the bulk of the credit should go to the Society’s opposition: Catholicism and Labour. The Eugenics Society was always concerned with correcting the “socio-biological problem of human failure.”<sup>311</sup> For Catholics and the Labour Party, the sterilization campaign of the eugenicists implied a contempt for “failed individuals.”<sup>312</sup> Trade unionists and others on the political left saw sterilization of the unfit as a way to oust poor and working-class Britons, even speculating that eventually prolonged unemployment would fall

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307. Hart and Carr, 717.

308. Ibid, 718.

309. Ibid, 718.

310. Mazumdar, 212.

311. Ibid, 212.

312. Ibid, 212.

under the umbrella of unfitness. Meanwhile, Catholics insisted that the interests of the race were subordinate to the interests of “man’s spirit” or soul. From the Catholic perspective, “the interest of the soul must come first,” because “[a] great soul might inhabit a miserable body.”<sup>313</sup> In their estimation, the body is temporal, the is soul everlasting. Therefore, deference must be payed to the latter. The “entrenched opposition” of the Catholics and especially the Labour Party contributed to the Society’s legislative impotence.<sup>314</sup> “Indeed, the conclusion of most scholars that the campaign’s largest problems came from vigorous left-wing opposition to its tenets in many ways still stands as the most convincing single explanation for its ignominious failure.”<sup>315</sup>

Due to a political climate that was unconducive for the implementation of overtly illiberal eugenics practices, the British Eugenics movement was relegated to an education and propaganda society whose function was ultimately in line with the original purpose of the British eugenics movement: to instill eugenic ideals in the minds of Britons to thus establish eugenics as a normative societal practice. This instillation was attempted with the cooperation of birth control associations, and through the use of their birth control clinics. The relationship was symbiotic: the eugenicists received access to birth control branches and clinics through which they could espouse their eugenic dogma, and birth control clinics received financial support from the Eugenics Society. As has been demonstrated, race enhancement was the ultimate goal of this partnership.

Although the partnership between the eugenicists and the birth control proponents was stable for a time, the Eugenics Society could not sustain their rigor during and after the Second

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313. Mazumdar, 211-212.

314. Hart, 38.

315. Hart and Carr, 734.

World War. At the outbreak of the war, the Eugenics Society lost a leader when its general secretary, C.P. Blacker, was sent to France for military service.<sup>316</sup> However, this loss of leadership was not the main issue for the Eugenics Society. “The central problem for eugenics during the war was . . . the very survival of the movement and the preservation of what remained of the nation’s ‘eugenic conscience’. Nazism had put both in peril.”<sup>317</sup> Much of the Society’s time during the war was spent doing damage control. To ensure that the vilification of eugenics would not be so severe as to make a recovery of the idea impossible, British eugenicists vehemently insisted that their doctrine was opposite that of the Germans.<sup>318</sup> Despite their best efforts, the eugenic argument became unacceptable in the public arena after the Second World War, which made it extremely difficult for the Eugenics Society to operate and recruit new members.<sup>319</sup>

Regardless of the Nazi influence, the effectiveness of the partnership between the Eugenics Society and birth control associations is arguable in light of the fact that Britons continued to eschew technological methods of birth control, but stuck to the “old fashioned” method of coitus interruptus.<sup>320</sup> This was true even for those Britons who discussed the use of contraceptives with clinicians. Many Britons still perceived modern methods of birth control such as pessaries, condoms, diaphragms, and caps to be unsafe, unreliable, and unhygienic when

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316. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 313.

317. *Ibid*, 315.

318. *Ibid*, 315.

319. *Ibid*, 352-353.

320. Kate Fisher and Simon Szreter. “They Prefer Withdrawal: The Choice of Birth Control in Britain, 1918-1950.” *Journal Of Interdisciplinary History* 34, no. 2 (September 2003): 263.

compared to the more natural, intuitive, perceptively “harmless” act of withdrawal.<sup>321</sup> However, the manner in which fertility was raised or declined in individual or group cases should not have mattered for the eugenicists, so long as eugenic ideals were the causal factor for the acts.

Not only did both the war and the traditional contraceptive techniques of sexually-active Britons diminish the credibility and success of the British eugenics movement, the Welfare State also chipped away at the validity of the movement. According to the standard historical narrative of the British eugenics movement, shortly after the war the eugenicists lost their *raison d’etre*. The “eugenic problematic” collapsed in the post-war Welfare State as “old forms of class consciousness” were leveled. The Poor Law vanished, and with it, the pauper class as an administrative category. Social activism waned, and eugenics in Britain was relegated to “a residual social biology.”<sup>322</sup> This standard historical narrative for the diminution of the British eugenics movement is best asserted by Pauline M.H. Mazumdar:

Post-war reconstruction was dominated by the idea that a time of triumphant social justice was now here, and that the expected continuous economic growth would deal with the remaining problems of inequality. A depressed class defined administratively or biologically seemed no longer to be possible . . . The eugenic problematic had grown out of the union of a middle-class activism focused upon the pauper class, with a biological view of human failings. In the egalitarian world of welfare and economic growth, the pauper class had disappeared. A class analysis no longer carried weight, and with the loss of the class dimension, the eugenic problematic could no longer survive in its original form.<sup>323</sup>

Although there is some truth to the above statement, to suggest that socioeconomic class was the only way eugenicists could differentiate groups of Britons is incorrect. There is a naivete in thinking that once society has been flattened on an economic scale, people will stop

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321. Fisher and Szreter, 264, 273, and 279.

322. Mazumdar, 196 and 257.

323. Ibid, 258.



differentiating themselves from one another, resentment will dissipate, and the illnesses of society or the existential crisis of being human will cease. To reiterate, the British eugenicists were concerned with race enhancement. Their complex definition of race included attributes such as industriousness, temperament, intelligence, manners, prudence, etc. – all things that cannot be simply attained through wealth. Also, a subsection of the pauper class was poor due to mental and physical disabilities. The Welfare State could certainly help care for these unfortunate people, but it could not stop them from being born deficient in the first place – a goal that would be adopted by latter-day eugenicists.

In an age of rapid advances in the fields of technology and medicine, one must consider what agenda is ultimately being pursued by the use of birth control and certain medical procedures. As noted earlier, euthanasia and or physician-assisted suicide have been legalized in a number of countries. Also, new CRISPR genome editing technology may one day make the idea of enduring a life complicated by undesirable genes seem primitive. Birth control may be convenient, but it surely serves the needs of more than one party. In Welfare States or mixed economies, government-subsidized birth control can self-evidently be beneficial for the women, families, the health of the sexually active community, and the economy. However, as has been demonstrated in this paper, there may be ulterior motives behind the acceptance of birth control, and even abortion, in society, especially when one considers that a substantial number of those benefitting from subsidized birth control are on the lower end of the economic spectrum.

An individual is not an island; individuals do not operate in a vacuum. The decisions individuals make have far-reaching implications, so much so that it may be more settling to remain aloof to the ramifications of one's own actions. People can unknowingly serve both their wishes and the wishes of others. The British eugenics movement operated in tandem with birth

control associations through clinics. Is it so farfetched to think that the same thing could be happening today, or that it may happen in the future? The notion that CRISPR and legal euthanasia are not eugenics is laughable. Eugenic race enhancement starts with the freedom of individual choice, and although the pre-war British eugenics movement dissipated, it seems to have foreshadowed present-day eugenic impulses operating under the guise of liberty.

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