In Germany, a major turn was brought about in the field of eugenics by the unconditional surrender of the Wehrmacht, the final collapse of the terrorist NS-dictatorship and the liberation of Nazi-Europe by the Allied Forces. As the Holocaust, the whole project for «conquering of Lebensraum in the east» and the eugenic and euthanasia programs of the NS-State were stopped, the significance of eugenics as both a broad social movement and a scientific concept in Germany and the occupied territories was effectively reversed. Indeed, a few years later, in 1949, the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) stipulated that «the dignity of men is unimpeachable». As Nancy L. Stepan has put it: «After World War II Nazi eugenics was rightly condemned as a gross perversion of science and morality; the word itself was purged from the vocabulary of science and public debate.»¹ This semantic watershed was not limited though to the sphere of influence of the extinct «Third Reich». It had a strong impact in most European and many other countries.

1. Eugenics = Nazism?

It was in the 1960s that historical research began to question the assumption of a decisive «zero hour» in German and also European history.² Particularly after the Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963/65) the recognition of the manifold continuities before and after 1945 seeped into the public consciousness. Paradoxically, the perception that eugenics was something intrinsically tied to the NS regime was reinforced by this change. Especially in the 1970s, the identification of eugenics with Nazism became stronger than ever.³ This created a situation in which any allusion

to «eugenics» almost automatically evoked associations with the «Nazi» atrocities and violations of human rights.

When Scandinavian historians – working on Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland – came up with accounts in the 1990s on the continuation of eugenic programmes and sterilization practices in their countries up until the early 1970s, these historical findings were immediately tied to the NS-regime. The alarm that was sounded by the mass media raised the following question: Who would have ever thought that some of the worst crimes of the Third Reich could have survived in democratic countries (besides the Scandinavian countries also the United States) and Switzerland?

In this situation, historians start emphasizing «the multifarious dimensions and extraordinary appeal of eugenics to individuals of very different social background, political convictions, and national affiliations», as Frank Dikötter notes in a Review Essay in 1998. Not only did the continuity after 1945 come under scrutiny, but also the crucial question of how «the ordinary eugenics of the 1920s and early 1930s became the extraordinary eugenics of Nazi Germany?» could be raised in a new way. In their German Anthropology in the Age of Empire Matti Bunzl and Glenn Penny stated: «As the essays in this volume illustrate, however, no clear trajectory can be drawn from the complex and multiple constellations that characterized imperial anthropology to the race science embraced by the Nazis […] Instead of a nineteenth-century explanation for the crimes of the twentieth, this volume ultimately illuminates German ethnology and anthropology as local phenomena, best approached on the terms of their own worldly provincialism.»


8 Ibid., 6.

line with Paul Weindling’s understanding that «the synthesis between Nazism and eugenics was a process of adaption and appropriation on both sides.»

The study «What is National Socialist about Eugenics» summarizes the current state of research. The new explanatory framework does not deny that, after 1933, the eugenic issue was indeed closely linked to racial concepts, aggressive racist ideologies and radicalized anti-Semitism, which constituted the bedrock of the Nazi state. It also states that eugenics was not neither confined to the NS regime or fascist countries nor limited to the period before 1945. It was, on the contrary, embedded in the democratic principles of societies with a full-blown legal system and a highly developed sense of social justice and responsibility. As a «biologically based movement for social reform» eugenics was a pervasive trend and ingrained in population politics, family planning, disease prevention, public cost control and other fields of activity of the modern social state. In re-evaluating eugenics in twentieth-century France, William H. Schneider shows how it «provided a broad cover for a variety of movements that aimed at the biological regeneration, such as natalism, neo-Malthusianism, social hygiene and racist immigration restrictions». More generally, eugenic efforts were expected to contribute to the solution of some of the most urgent problems of industrialization and urbanization. Apparently, democratic societies were not bound to a strict compliance with the civic and civil rights which form

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15 Schneider, Quality and Quantity, 4.
the basis of their constitutions. With the rise of nationalism and the accelerated formation of nation states in the nineteenth century, the very concept of rights was permeated by an ideology of community which generated strong emotions of solidarity and which could also be used to expel groups, «foreign bodies», «inferior races», «vagrant individuals», etc. from the body of the collective. These «moral sentiments» were not universalistic but confined to national boundaries, ethnic identification or racial affiliation and organized in terms of criteria like public health, homogeneity and purity.

Stating these priorities does not confound the totalitarian NS state with the political *modus operandi* of democracies nor does it distort the «global history of eugenics» in a way proposed by Edwin Black in his book *War against the weak*. Black suggests that the phantasmagorical imagination of a «pure and supreme master Aryan race» was concocted in the United States of America before 1933 and then exported to Germany to form the ideological nucleus of Nazi racial hygiene policy.\(^{16}\) Certainly, the NS regime did not rely on American racism and expertise in order to implement eugenic legislation founded on a racist and anti-Semitic worldview. While they were on an equal footing in terms of science and eugenic legislation and this was passed and applied in both countries, the social and political context was significantly different, as were the levels of public resonance and scientific support for eugenic racism.\(^{17}\) The strong argument, driven home by Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment* in 1944 and reintroduced by Zygmunt Bauman in his *Modernity and the Holocaust*\(^ {18}\) in 1989 is misunderstood when it results in the thesis that there is no significant difference between democratic systems and dictatorship. Quite the reverse, in stating that, in its intrinsic ambivalence, modernity is not automatically related to political and social progress (of any kind), it fosters an awareness of the importance of institutional mechanisms that are capable of maintaining a decisive difference, not between the modern and the barbaric, but between modern democracy and modern dictatorship.

2. Multiple Genealogies of Eugenics

Propositions about how to guarantee the health and robustness of the population through political supervision of human reproduction can be traced to antiquity. Since the eighteenth century, Plato’s *Republic* became a topic in debates concerning selective breeding in both the animal world and among humans. This appropriation of old ideas in a new context changed their meaning. During the last third of the nineteenth century, a Darwinian approach was mingled with degeneration fears,
mostly of Catholic origin. The result was a contradictory eugenic thinking that was shaped by the imagined threats and advanced by the shared aspirations of social groups which were eager to fashion society «in accord with their purposes by taking some of these beliefs, transforming some of them, and adding new elements».

The threshold for the advent of eugenics as a legal-medical concept and a broad palliative for all sorts of social evils was crossed only after 1900. In the previous decades, a multitude of theoretical trajectories, political visions and social capacities had developed in a way that might be described as «simultaneity of the non-simultaneous».

One important impetus came from Francis Galton’s *Hereditary Genius*, published in 1869. Galton aimed at coping with the problem of physical, intellectual and moral degeneration which was placed on the agenda by different authors, especially the French psychiatrist and devout Catholic Bénédict Augustin Morel, who released his seminal *Traité des dégénérences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l’espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés maladies* in Paris in 1857. Influenced by the so-called «Morel’s law» – which had found resonance beyond its initial religious connotation in liberal strands of thinking, accelerating the dissemination of biological values since the 1860s – Galton advanced the hypothesis that intellectual abilities were transmitted over time from generation to generation. The British scientist was among the first to assert that «intelligence» was a scientifically meaningful concept, that it was subject to laws of heredity and, as a consequence, accessible to human engineering. He closely coordinated the practice «to obtain by careful selection a permanent breed of dogs or horses gifted with peculiar powers of running» and the project «to produce a highly gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations».

In order to prove this assumptions were correct, Galton gathered and produced statistical evidence.

Although Galton never produced a satisfactory measurement of intelligence, his claim had a strong impact on discussions of social problems. The apparent lack of scientific concepts was overcompensated for by the proliferation of a colourful language that permitted cultural and social phenomena to be translated into biological facts and hereditary circumstances. The appropriate solution to such problems had to coincide rhetorically with the paradigms of biological evolution and heredity. The Galton proposals for human intervention into the problem of differential birth rates in the late 1860s and 1870s were subsequently labelled «positive» because they were addressed to the upper classes. They should – this was the chief message – recognize their responsibility and spread their «genius» by means of an intensified pro-

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creation within large families. *Avant la lettre*, eugenics was about the promotion of higher reproduction among those social classes with superior hereditary traits.

In the following decades, however, the problem of degeneration became part of the debate on the socially negative effects of the industrialization process. Around the same time, a fundamental crisis of «old liberalism» occurred. As a consequence, the perception of the issue of degeneration changed dramatically. Moreover, from the 1870s onward the British upper and middle classes, unlike the lower social classes, limited family size in order to stabilize or raise their financial living standard. Consequently, the elites became uneasy about the prospect that they could be overwhelmed by so-called «inferior stocks» or «trash people» – that is, by an accelerated demographic growth triggered by fertile strata of the population which were considered to be either problematic or potentially revolutionary. Under the new regime of perception, the so-called positive approach was substituted by the negative one: motivation (to produce more of the «desired») was replaced by repression (of the «undesired»).

In this context, the debate on «eugenics» and – with a certain time lag – on sterilization programmes emerged. The decisive semantic innovation was again made by Galton. In 1883, he coined the term «eugenics».

As a fervent advocate of quantitative analysis, Galton pursued an empirical approach, based on statistical methods, in order to end up in «racial improvement» through selective human breeding.

Galton’s emphasis was on class. He uses the term «race» rather to describe a «stock», an aggregate of individuals which can be described by statistical measures like average and variation. Galton’s primary assumption is that biological value and hereditary fitness are expressed in social standing and that the class position of each individual is therefore a social marker of his genetic worthiness. He mapped out British society along the lines of class hierarchy, which made his suggestion appealing to the elites and the better-off. Thus even before the eugenic movement started to flourish around 1900, it was a good example of the «relationship between scientific ideas and the interests and purposes of social groups».

Galton attracted attention not only by advancing new theses about the problems of British society, but also in using innovative visual representations of his statistical findings which were displayed in many of Galton’s articles from that period and which also started to circulate in popular media. He uses scientific knowledge to embark on a new understanding of social morality. In his «Essays in Eugenics», published in 1909, he stated that «Eugenics strengthens the sense of social duty» and «Eugenic belief [...] sternly forbids all forms of sentimental charity that are harmful to the race, while it

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eagerly seeks opportunities for acts of personal kindness, as some equivalent to the
loss of what it forbids.» Accordingly, «eugenics is a virile creed, full of hopefulness
and appealing to many of the noblest feelings of our nature.» In this way, Galton
established a pernicious feedback loop between the support of eugenics and a noble
character. Those groups that were attracted to eugenics, and approved and sup-
ported the concept, in effect demonstrated their intellectual, moral and biological
superiority. Critiques from other groups, conversely, gave unequivocal proof of their
inferiority.

3. Lamarck, Darwin, Mendel

Even if Galton thought of eugenics as being more than «a mere vision in Utopia»,
underlining that «the practice of Eugenics has already obtained a considerable hold
on popular estimation, and is steadily acquiring the status of a practical question», there
was a utopian drive in the eugenic mission of middle-class «Darwinian demagogues»
who propagated «racial hygiene» and «public health». They tried to
strengthen their position by crusading for eugenic ideas in the name of overarching
social norms and moral values or by claiming that the survival of the race underpin-
ning the state could only be guaranteed by a consequent eugenic reconfiguration of
races or national populations. This moral enterprise was intimately bound to a ca-
creerist mentality, for it implied the opportunity for social advancement as well as for
greater earning potential.

It took two decades, however, before eugenics had both gained scientific respect-
ability and become a social movement and project for biological solutions for social
problems. The rediscovery of the Mendelian laws in 1900 unleashed new im-
pulses for eugenic thinking. In Britain, it was Karl Pearson, professor of applied
mathematics and mechanics at University College, London, and a beacon for statisti-
cal analysis, who explored what he considered to be relevant phenotypical differ-
ences (stature, cephalic index, eye colour, fertility, and longevity). This obsession
with difference among humans and nations produced a strong hierarchical bias,
whereby differences were mainly perceived in terms of superior versus inferior and
of intelligent versus feebleminded. Whenever scientists start to judge populations
through the lenses of «racial improvement», their prejudices are inevitably correbo-
rated. In the end, eugenic assumptions worked as kinds of propagandistic self-ful-
filling prophecies. In general, eugenic concepts like that of an inherited constitution
were accepted in medicine, especially in psychiatry, biology, sociology and social
work.

26 Galton, Essays in Eugenics, preface.
27 Weindling, Health, Race and German Politics, 36.
28 Ibid., 33.
29 A. McLaren, Our Own Master Race. Eugenics in Ca-
nada, 1885–1945, Toronto 1990, 16.
30 Weindling, Health, Race and German Politics, 9.
Neither Mendelianism nor Darwinism was a theoretical prerequisite for developing eugenic approaches. In France, neo-Lamarckianism, based on the assumption that acquired characteristics could be inherited, flourished and was combined with pro-natalist measures and positive eugenics. The scientific framework was in general so blurred and heterogeneous that no uniform scientific discourse could be established.\(^{31}\)

The driving forces for a law enforcement of eugenic measures were public health reformers and social-Darwinist ideologists who aimed at implementing effective cures against what they judged to be a degenerative threat to the society.\(^{32}\) They made their first appearance in the United States in the last years of the nineteenth century. In 1896, Connecticut introduced marriage restrictions and many US states imitated this type of law. In 1907, Indiana became a pioneer in the compulsory sterilization of individuals. The Indiana Supreme Court repealed the respective law, but the US Supreme Court verified its constitutionality in 1927. Since 1894, an Immigration Restriction League fought for eugenic goals, whereas at the beginning of the twentieth century laboratory research was intensified in the Station for Experimental Evolution, headed by Charles B. Davenport. In 1910, the Eugenics Record Office started to document eugenic measures in the United States.\(^{33}\) Another early forerunner was Switzerland. Auguste Forel, a renowned psychiatrist (and, at the same time, a social reformer, sexologist, researcher on ants, socialist and a pacifist) became an early advocate for sterilization practices. In 1907, the Swiss parliament adopted a national Civil Code that went into effect in 1912 and included an eugenically motivated marriage restriction article.\(^{34}\) This law would later become a model for many other countries.\(^{35}\)

4. International and National Institutions and Organizations

The organizational achievements of the eugenic movement in «the West» in the decade before the First World War were impressive. National eugenics societies mushroomed: in Germany (1905), in England (1907), in the United States (1910) and in France (1912). In 1912, on the initiative of the British Eugenics Education Society, the First International Eugenics Congress met in London. It was dedicated to Francis Galton, who had died in 1911, and presided over by Leonard Darwin, a son of Charles Darwin, and listed among its vice-presidents Winston Churchill.\(^{36}\) An


\(^{32}\) Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, 283.


\(^{35}\) Schneider, *Quality and Quantity*, 236 ff.

important outcome of this congress was the creation of a whole series of national eugenic associations and the establishment of the Permanant International Eugenics Committee, which was designed to foster transnational cooperation in the rapidly expanding field.37

The First World War had complex effects on the rising international eugenic movement. On an organizational level, the effort to strengthen transnational cooperation was interrupted. But a new common denominator took shape. There was a wide consensus that, in terms of collective genetic fitness, the war resulted in a contra-selective effect. The «best stock» of every nation, the young soldiers, had died in a «technical-industrial» war. To steer in the opposite direction, the claim for eugenic pacifism achieved support and was combined with the demand to radicalize eugenic practices in order to re-establish pre-war levels of hereditary health. This project brought eugenicists and geneticists into close interaction. In the first years after the war, it seemed to be evident that US science-based and professional eugenics had taken the lead of the international movement.38

This could be observed at the Second International Eugenics Conference in 1921, whose motto was «Eugenics is the self-direction of human evolution».39 The conference papers were published in 1923 under the title Eugenics, Genetics and the Family.40 In order to foster the idea of eugenic engineering around the world, the International Federation of Eugenic Societies (IFES) was founded to coordinate the activities of the numerous national organizations and the various legal initiatives developed since 1912. A third international conference was held, again in New York, in 1932. The fact that the Swiss psychiatrist and eugenicist Ernst Rüdin41, who emigrated in 1928 to Germany, was unanimously elected as president of the IFES is a clear hint that the relative coherence of the US approach had been undercut and that the eugenic movement was already past its apogee in terms of being a self-confident, future-oriented project for the biological social engineering of national communities and – in the long run – mankind.

The internationalization of eugenics evolved, even before the First World War, but especially in the interwar period, because several countries outside of Europe and the United States in Asia (especially Japan),42 Australia,43 Latin America44 and

38 Kühl, Die Internationale der Rassisten, 48–63.
Africa adopted eugenic concepts. They applied them to traditional marriage constraints and birth control practices, which themselves acquired new significance and potency.

Had they been asked whether they would be able to present a clear-cut analysis of the dynamics of heredity, most of the members of the scientific community of the 1920s and 1930s would have admitted that there was not sufficient knowledge available in order to prove any significant interconnection between public health, heredity and eugenic measures. As a matter of fact, the international rise of eugenics in the public sphere was paralleled by a weakening of the scientific basis of the eugenic movement (in terms of its contemporary self-evaluation).

Eugenics was never the outcome of experimentally tested biological models, but it was on the other hand propelled by scientific discoveries and assumptions of how heredity works among populations. Thus the connection between eugenics and genetics was emphasised already at the time when William Bateson coined the term «genetics». What was changing was the assessment of the «eugenics as science» argument by advanced scientists themselves. In this regard, disillusionment about the possibility of a scientifically accurate and dispositive eugenics runs rampant. The more the NS regime linked eugenics with the «Aryan myth» and a megalomaniac racist and anti-Semitic project of rebuilding a «racially pure» society, the more doubts were also exacerbated in scientific and epistemic communities.

The process of internationalization was therefore not paralleled by converging scientific concepts but rather by an intensified popularization of behavioural norms and mental attitudes. Eugenic arguments merged in a new way with everyday preoccupations with family, marriage, childrearing, sexual behaviour and many other aspects of popular beliefs and demographic developments. Eugenic pop science intermingled with the rise of mass culture in the interwar period. With the ascent of new media – including newspapers, novels, comic strips, posters, cinema and museum exhibits – public opinion and entertainment united to create a «cultural industry».


Eugenic ideas literally had sex appeal: popular advisors were «Explaining Sexual Life to Your Daughter» and horror films brought the «Eugenics of Dracula and Frankenstein» to the screen. A wave of popular writing was accompanied by new methods of «Drilling Eugenics into People’s Minds». The visual aesthetics of US popular culture and mass entertainment during the 1930s provided a new touchstone for the eugenics of identity formation, linking concepts of economic efficiency and success in the marketplace with biological fitness and outstanding health. Alternative avenues for popularization were also developed in Nazi Germany and other European countries. One striking example was the eugenics exhibit prepared by the Deutsches Hygiene Museum of Dresden and funded by the American Public Health Association in 1933, shortly after the Nazi party had gained power. In other countries – and especially in France – «negative eugenics» stand in the shadow of a widely discussed problem of declining birth rates and a pervasive fear of depopulation. Marriage counselling and premarital physical examination were propagated through popular media and eventually, under the Vichy regime, became law.

5. Racial Hygiene and Aryan Myth in Germany

One feature of interwar-eugenics was the move towards more authoritarian and state-enforced concepts, especially in those countries that abolished the liberal-democratic trajectory and became dictatorships or «authoritarian democracies». In the process of the politicisation of eugenics, the fear of degeneration as well as heredity produced phantasmatological hopes, were linked with a mythical narrative of consanguinity and pedigreed descent. In many countries, a shift towards decidedly right-wing eugenics was under way. As Peter Weingart et al. have pointed out, the more aggressive, anti-Semitic and xenophobic the milieus were that propagated the purity of race, the more hostile or indifferent they were towards scientific knowledge. Nonetheless, eugenic and racial hygiene propaganda was based on the permanent popularization and vulgarization of scientific knowledge. It intervened with discriminatory campaigns against handicapped persons and «inferior races». The symbolic capital of science was used to promote «national biology», «racial politics», and the persecution of the «Jews» (defined in terms of race).

See S. Currell / C. Cogdell (eds.), Popular Eugenics. National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s, Athens/Ohio 2006. All the expressions between quotation marks come from titles in this reader.


Weingart / Kroll / Bayertz, Rasse, Blut und Gene.
In Germany, the idea of eugenic engineering became closely bound with the notion «racial hygiene», introduced by Alfred Ploetz in 1895. In that year, Ploetz published Part I of his «Baselines of a racial hygiene». In the book entitled *The efficiency of our race and the protection of the weak* he postulated that a policy of racial hygiene aims at enhancing happiness and health. Ploetz coupled this secular doctrine of redemption with the aspirations of the nation-state, thereby instilling universal aims with particular national interests and a social-Darwinian meaning. Since the early 1890s, he had denigrated both the ideas of the Enlightenment and the chance-equality postulates of the German Social Democrats. He denounced public assistance and state benefits for the «weak» members of society as ominous «sentimentalism» and proposed a «smooth death» for deformed or feeble newborns by the application of a «small dose of morphine». In 1904, he founded the journal *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschaftsbiologie* with Fritz Lenz as chief editor, and a year later the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene. Looking for political leverage for the promotion of his ideas of a racially healthy society, he became a supporter of the NSDAP and eventually a party member in 1937. Already in 1933 he expressed his hope that Adolf Hitler would give racial hygiene a new and decisive momentum. He became a member of the «expert advisory committee for population and racial policy» which was charged with proposing and implementing Nazi legislation in the field of racial politics and eugenic issues. In this function and also as a professor, he propagated the idea of the supremacy of the Aryan race.

Racial hygiene is often used as a synonym for eugenics, and it was in fact inspired by the concept of eugenics. Nonetheless «hygiene» had a different semantic connotation than «eugenics». Since the «hygienic revolution» in the 1850s and the «bacteriological» paradigm-shift in aetiology in the 1880s, hygiene became synonymous with a purity-based power of resistance. It was related to the lethal threat foreign bodies posed to organic systems. There was a wide variety of propaganda terms attached to the concept of hygiene which could be used to defend the «völkisch» community against both national enemies and hereditary burdens.

Politically, the notion «hygiene» retained two conflicting meanings, one relating to social hygiene, the other to hereditary fitness. Whereas the latter notion understood the improvement of «phenotypes» to be a fallacious concept that made no sense in the long run and even (concealed) an indifferent view on the state of the «German race», the former was tied to reform movements which tried to ameliorate the living conditions of broader strata of the population. To a certain degree, the «social» concept was related to social-democratic programmes aimed at improving

52 Ibid., 91.
the living conditions of the broad «working» population at the bottom of the industrial society. Alfred Grotjahn, who acquired the first chair for «Social Hygiene» at Berlin University in 1920 and was a member of the SPD and a Reichstag deputy from 1921 to 1924, was a decided proponent of such a programme. The new «genotype»-based strategies were a response to the relative success of this social-hygiene approach.

Opponents contended that the «social» approach worked against the mechanism of natural selection by preserving rather than eliminating the weak. They insisted that such a policy would in fact end up ruining the race in terms of its genetic value. In this regard, the propaganda in favour of racial hygiene was against the politics of social hygiene. Whereas the concept of «racial hygiene» corresponded to the social-Darwinist anxieties of nationalist, xenophobic and racist right-wing movements, «social hygiene» was supported by left-wing parties and also transformed ideologically into a welfare-state concept. It was also integrated into the missions of organizations, often lead by women, advocating birth control and sexual reform.55 Apart from their clear-cut differences, social and racial hygiene were interwoven, and many social hygienists turned out to be strong supporters of racial-hygiene measures, as was the case with Grotjahn, whose call for the forced sterilization of «imbeciles, cripples and alcoholics» and permanent asylum for about one per cent of the population fit well with the objectives of «racial hygiene».56 The scientific ideology of progress in the labour movement was based on a strong belief in the interrelationship between – as Reinhart Mocek puts it – «biology and social emancipation».57 Thus there was a broad tradition of left-wing, socialist eugenics.58

After 1933, the Nazi state forcibly sterilized hundreds of thousands of people (approximately one per cent of Germany’s population).59 The declaration of «racial purity» as the superior national value already led in 1933 to the persecution of Jews, gypsies (Roma and Sinti) and homosexuals. In order to protect the German body politic, the regime relied more and more upon medical killing and the «euthanasia» programmes may be seen as the first deliberate step towards the extermination camps and the Holocaust.

6. Eugenics in Democratic Countries

From the 1920s to the 1940s, this positive association between emancipation and eugenics, which was quite strong before the First World War, either faded away or was replaced by a collectivist and authoritarian understanding of «social liberation». The democratic states were themselves not free of such influences, as there, too, increasingly coercive elements were now being introduced. Sterilization, which was formally «voluntary» but in fact compulsory in many cases, became a forceful instrument used to reach eugenic and public health goals. The United States and Switzerland were among the first countries to test this surgical procedure. Although no exact number can be established for Switzerland, it can be said nonetheless that several thousand women were sterilized in the interwar period. Unlike the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland did not introduce any national legislation beyond the discriminatory articles in the Civil Code of 1912. To be sure, the canton of Vaud introduced a law in 1928 that allowed the sterilization of the «mentally ill» – the first of its kind in Europe. This legalization, however, had a dampening effect on these surgical interventions, as it was feared that treated individuals might decide to take legal action. Thus operations were carried out in a legal grey zone – especially in Zurich, where most of the sterilization cases were recorded. The doctors and psychiatrists preferred to act without a legal foundation. When the new Swiss penal code came into force in 1942, only sterilizations for medical indications were allowed. This made those social and medical indications that would always allow for eugenic motives all the more important. Generally speaking, the example of Switzerland shows particularly well that in most cases medical, social, political and eugenic reasons were interchanged and combined and that the psychiatrists were able to draw from a range of conceptual «registers» in making their assessments.60

In the US, more than 64,000 sterilizations took place between the turn of the century and the 1960s.61 In the case of Sweden, it can be shown that the proponents of eugenics already had an effective lobby in the 1920s, using the members of parliament as multipliers to «sell eugenics».62 Under the social-democratic government since 1934, there was a strong welfare-state motivation behind the sterilization programmes. Between 1935 and 1975, 63,000 Swedes were sterilized, in accordance with a law passed by the parliament in 1934 and modified in 1941.63 Analogous figures may be discovered for other countries.

After 1945, racial hygiene was finally discredited by its association with the racist and anti-Semitic ideology of Nazi Germany. As already mentioned, however, in

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60 For references to the Swiss case see the contribution of R. Wecker in this volume.

61 Dowbiggin, Keeping America Sane.


63 Broberg / Roll-Hansen, Eugenics and the Welfare State; Rundis, Steriliseringsar i folkhemmet.
countries like the United States, Switzerland and Sweden, there was – judged against the backdrop of Nazi-related eugenics – an astonishing continuity in eugenic thinking and related practices. It was only in the 1960s and 1970s when the new tendencies in eugenics came to the fore. In many countries, the impact of the movements of 1968 disrupted this continuity with the interwar period, causing political conflicts and a strong anti-psychiatric movement. Although there was a fundamental change in these years, it is nonetheless important to recognise that the «old eugenics» did not simply disappear. In Canada, for example, it was not until 1972 that sterilization legislation was nullified in Alberta and British Columbia. Just the same, it was discovered in 1978 that in the absence of any legislation hundreds of such operations were still being carried out each year in Ontario.\footnote{McLaren, Our Own Master Race, 169.}

7. Religious Contexts, Gender Relations, National Identities

There are two critical objections to the traditional mainstream of comparative work: the first questions the «nation» as the given «unit» for making comparisons; the second looks at the presence of cultural exchange and the ongoing transmission of knowledge and concepts between different regions of the globe, undermining the idea that relatively independent nations might be evaluated with a view to their differences and similarities. Concepts like «histoire croisée» or «entangled history» support the assumption that the «units» of any comparison are shaped by constant and intensive knowledge transfers in trans-national networks. Eugenics is a transnational phenomenon and eugenicists always aimed to express their concerns at an international level. As shown equally in the cases of the US, Sweden and Switzerland, these countries maintained close scientific relationships with Germany. Proponents of eugenics like the Swede Herman Lundborg (professor and head of the newly established National Institute for Racial Biology in Uppsala in 1921) and the Swiss Ernst Rüdin (who played a leading role in the drafting of the «Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring» in 1933 and was appointed judge a year later on the «Hereditary Health Court») are examples of this close-knit collaboration. The German historian Stefan Kühl states in his book The Nazi Connection that even if nationalist tendencies may be observed in the eugenic movement, the leading scientific exponents had an international vision that primarily concerned the improvement of the white, «europoid» race and aimed at the construction of an international network. Although the title of the study is somewhat misleading, Kühl’s approach opened a new way to analyze whole variety of transnational factors – religion, gender, political orientations, etc.

One focus of recent research was the role of religion and confessional divisions in regard to eugenic and racial hygiene. A new study by Monika Lötscher centres on
this issue, examining the Catholic eugenics in Austria before 1938. The author shows that the Catholic Church made an official statement regarding eugenics in 1930 in the papal encyclical «Casti connubii». While eugenic efforts were accepted in principle, sterilization, abortion and euthanasia were nevertheless rejected as methods for achieving eugenic goals. The Church was primarily interested in preserving large families. In the language of the experts, this reflected a «positive eugenics». It was moreover aimed at strengthening Catholic marriage counselling positions, which were generally understood as a means of promoting Catholic religiosity. In such a historical analysis, confession serves as an explanatory variable. In Protestant Prussia and in northern Germany in general, before 1933, there was a high acceptance of eugenic measures and the Nazi state could rely on cooperative medical and social policy experts. In southern Germany and Austria, this kind of support was far less in evidence.

Another interesting and revealing aspect is the gender ratio in sterilization practices. From a strict eugenic standpoint, the distinction between men and women makes no sense. Any individual who did not meet the normative expectation of the racial collective was targeted by public health agencies, charged with the task of executing the measures of racial hygiene. It is therefore no surprise that the sterilization and castration programmes of the National Socialists were to a high degree gender blind, hitting men and women in about the same proportion. From a comparative perspective, it is striking to see that in Sweden 90 per cent of the 63,000 sterilizations concerned women. The same is the case for other democratic countries, in particular Switzerland where the high ratio of women was curbed after the new federal penal code was introduced in 1942 from 90 to 75 per cent. This gender bias can be explained by looking at the indications and also the sterilization-abortion plan, which was often proposed by medical doctors inclined towards a «social indication» and worried about the financial and moral capacity of the examined pregnant women. Although there is a strong interrelationship between social concerns and eugenic commitments from the side of the medical authorities, they were open to additional rationalisations. As a result, women who already had a number of children were sterilized without any eugenic justification, whereas woman without offspring but diagnosed as hereditarily problematic were not. The results of many studies can be summarized by the conclusion that where racial hygiene in Nazi Germany constituted a violent approach aimed at strengthening the Aryan race along strict «biological» criteria, sterilization practices in democratic countries

66 Bock, Zwangsterilisation im Nationalsozialismus.
67 Broberg / Roll-Hansen, Eugenics and the Welfare State, XI; Rundis, Steriliseringar i folkhemmet.
68 Dubach, Verhütungspolitik.
were situated at the crossroads of medical, social, psychic and also eugenic concerns.  

The gender perspective is also conceptually linked with that of race and nation. Nancy Stepan has analyzed the analogous concerns that arise in both the concepts of «race» and «gender». The idea of a biologically determined social entity that has inherited and unchangeable traits is thus equally present in both. The cultural effect depends nonetheless largely on specific social situations, which means that a broad spectrum of variations may be observed in regard to the same basic assumption. In a similar vein, Christian Geulen has identified an «elective affinity» between race and nation. They constitute congenial imaginative communities and defend their «harmony», «purity» and «homogeneity» by denigrating «the other» or «the foreign». The power to include and exclude discriminatory violence are therefore manifested in about the same way. Apart from this similarity between concepts that organize political spaces, eugenics should also be analyzed in terms of a left-right/democracy-dictatorship matrix. Stepan demonstrates that the eugenicists of Latin America diverged considerably from their counterparts in Britain and the United States in their ideological approaches and their interpretation of key texts concerning heredity.

Examining how eugenics was understood and implemented by scientists and (mainly leftist) social reformers in Latin America, the author analyses the eugenic movements in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina and shows that scientific circles and others were influenced by neo-Lamarckian theories of heredity. It was the Latin Americans’ long-standing reliance on French scientific definitions that provided one basis for their emphasis on what since the end of the nineteenth century had come to be recognised as an unscientific theory of inheritance. The appeal at that time of the hypothesis about the inheritance of acquired features and traits is also shown in Mark B. Adams’ study The wellborn science, which looks at France, Brazil and Russia from a comparative and, at the same time, relational perspective. Another study, published by Richard Cleminson, examines the reception and the controversial science of eugenics in Catalan and Valencian anarchist reviews in the early twentieth century. The result – not surprisingly – is that «anarchist eugenics [...] was not stable and shifted focus and scientific rationale over time as new ideas came to fore». By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the intersection between progressive science, eugenics and revolutionary change came under increasing criticism. The negative and impractical aspects of eugenics were highlighted and there was a grow-

ing awareness of the authoritarian and abusive uses to which eugenics was being put, especially in the eyes of the anarchists.\textsuperscript{[73]} To sum up this point, Stepan correctly emphasises that «eugenics was embedded in local value systems of communication and value» and that «the meanings and social uses of eugenics cannot be understood without reference to these various contexts».\textsuperscript{[74]}

8. Eugenics as a Multifarious Project of Modernity

The preceding historical overview has shown that the notion «eugenics» had different meanings for a great variety of supporters and opponents from the start. It was associated with compulsory and coercive policies, especially against women, as well as programmes of social promotion appealing to voluntary participation. It also comprised «private» and «utilitarian» motives for eugenic «improvements». As a politically ambivalent and ideologically adaptable project eugenics was entangled with the history of public and reproductive health, social reform and population control. It was propagated by defenders of a superior race, reactionary critics of human rights, socially engaged scientists, progressive anarchists, revolutionary Bolsheviks and reform-oriented Social Democrats.

After the Nazi regime collapsed in 1945, «social welfare» became a political keyword in Western European societies, combining the ideals of inclusive consumerism and democratic participation. Eugenic aspirations therefore gained new momentum after 1945 within the framework of a «Keynesian State».\textsuperscript{[75]} A wide array of measures was introduced to improve both the general state of health and the overall degree of genetic fitness of the (mainly national) population. The case of France is of special interest, because, as William H. Schneider elucidates, the continuity of eugenics there was much stronger than in Germany or the United States: «The survival of eugenics in the post-war period was more than simply the carry-over of old ideas […] It also depended on the introduction of new ideas and the attraction of new followers.» It was the «persistent desire by governments to use that scientific knowledge to correct the biological problems» which made it possible for «eugenic thought in France (to survive) even so traumatic an episode as the Second World War».\textsuperscript{[76]}

The new context of the after-war period was also rooted in century-old traditions. Not only the political project of Social democracy, but the welfare state in general has also stood for «more insurance for more people» since its origins in the nineteenth


\textsuperscript{[74]} Stepan, «The Hour of Eugenics», 197.

\textsuperscript{[75]} John Maynard Keynes was a fervent advocate of eugenics and as such from 1937–1944 the Director of the British Eugenics Society. 1946, a few months before his death, he considered eugenics to be «the most important, significant and, I would add, genuine branch of sociology which exists», thereby stressing the continuity of eugenics after 1945. J. M. Keynes, «Opening Remarks: The Galton Lecture», in: Eugenics Review 38 (1946) 1, 39–40.

\textsuperscript{[76]} Schneider, Quality and Quantity, 287–292.
Controlling the primary causes of expanding costs became a major goal of all political forces involved in the development of social security and modern medicine. Especially in small European countries, a healthy state budget, a sound currency, improved public health and social solidarity were often mentioned in the same breath. All these developments fit into a broader picture of the rationalization of social relations.

In the after-war period, applied science permeated nearly all areas of modern society with an unprecedented intensity. The acceleration of social processes, the cost regression for consumer goods, through standardized mass production, and the normalization of human involvement in medicine and social policy converged in a widely accepted and deliberately supported effort to improve living conditions, most notably expressed in a sustained increase in life expectancy and the Gross National Product (GNP) per capita. Under such circumstances, the idea to reduce medical costs and social problems by influencing mate selection, marital attitudes and reproductive behaviour through education, counselling and even coercive programmes for «problematic» minorities found public resonance and political support. Whereas any semantic reference to the new genetic research and counselling with eugenics was suppressed in Germany and also in the United States, European countries that did not undergo a period of dictatorship continued their eugenic programmes. They were integrated into the fabric of everyday life and corresponded with widely shared opinions about the foundations of heredity with regard to private and public health.

In the 1960s, however, criticism against those approaches also intensified in these societies. The more «individual fulfilment» and «self-determination» became catch phrases of a movement, which was later labelled «68», and the more moral changes gave rise to a permissive society, the more difficult it became to continue a programme of «top down» eugenics, enforced by law (as in the case of the Scandinavian countries) or executed in a legal grey-zone by medical or psychiatric experts (as in the case of Switzerland).

For some decades now, the constellation has changed again and some salient new features have come to the foreground. On the one hand, the traditional model of the welfare state is challenged by political parties and social forces looking to foster the value of individual self-responsibility as a panacea against hypertrophic social insurance costs. The idea that social groups considered to be problematic have to be controlled and disciplined has returned. On the other hand, genetics, reproductive medicine, in-vitro fertilization and preimplantation genetic diagnosis open a new space for family-planning aspirations. These can easily be identified as «eugenic», as they track down genetic defects, phenotypical anomalies or severe diseases of
human beings to a phase of the growth of an embryo, which can then be eliminated. But this «liberal eugenics» \(^79\) or «eugenics from below» \(^80\) is based on a new political-judicial paradigm.\(^81\) Explicitly criticizing any form of coercion in the name of collectivist rights, it operates by the free choice of individuals or families. This individualisation of eugenics, which is tantamount to the atomization of decisive power, produces nonetheless important and formative consequences on a social level. By establishing new standards for health, perfection and happiness, these aggregated effects can be analyzed in their impact on further individual decisions. The «freedom of choice» is subverted by a stigmatization of deviant social behaviour or human beings. Social constraints strike back in the utilitarian practices deliberately designed to overcome them.\(^82\) Simultaneously, the choice of individuals is not politically circumventable in a way that can prevent or prohibit the use of reproductive medicine.

The notion of «biopower», as proposed by Michel Foucault, may help in understanding the long-term problem associated with eugenics. Foucault introduced the concept in 1979 in his lectures at the Collège de France in order to denote a third «dispositive» besides the disciplinary techniques and judicial power. Biopower is a technology of power that allows for the control of entire populations by governing individual bodies. In *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault observes that since the enlightenment of the eighteenth century there has been «an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations».\(^83\) From this perspective, eugenics is not just an aberration of public health in the three-decades-long «age of catastrophe» before 1945. On the contrary, it is, even in its recent transformation into a «bottom up» concern of individuals and parents, an expression of a «liberal governmentality» which aims not at exhausting or «consuming», but at producing and multiplying life.\(^84\) It is deeply rooted in the normality of a modern society, with its ongoing inequalities and hierarchies, governed by scientific knowledge, democratic procedures and expanding dispositives of prevention in order to make people happy, sound and safe.

Eugenics before 1945
An appropriate understanding of eugenics before 1945 implies that this break is questioned and put into perspective. The article conceives eugenics as a multifarious project of modernity that derived from the biopolitical aspiration to improve public health and enhance human capabilities. Consequently, it was supported across the political spectrum. In the course of the Twentieth Century, an international eugenics movement took shape and found widespread and transnational resonance in the public opinion. However, the conflation of the Aryan myth, racial purity and medical coercive measures in Nazi-Germany discredited the concept of eugenics after 1945. Nonetheless, such measures, often combined with elements of soft coercion, were applied in many countries, particularly in the U.S., the Scandinavian countries and Switzerland up to the 1970s. Meanwhile, the feasibility of Reproductive Medicine gave rise to a «liberal eugenics» which is entrenched in the promises of health and happiness descending from the Nineteenth Century.

Eugenik vor 1945

Eugénisme avant 1945
Une bonne compréhension de l’eugénisme avant 1945 exige une interrogation et une mise en perspective de cette rupture. L’article conçoit l’eugénisme comme un projet de modernité multiforme provenant d’aspirations biopolitiques visant à améliorer la santé publique et à renforcer les capacités humaines. Par conséquent, il reçut le soutien de l’ensemble de la classe politique. Au cours du XXème siècle apparut un mouvement eugénique international qui fut fort bien accueilli par l’opinion publique transnationale. La confusion entre eugénisme, mythe aryen, pureté raciale et mesures médicales coercitives qu’eut lieu dans l’Allemagne national-socialiste conduisit néanmoins au discrédit du concept de l’eugénisme après 1945. Toutefois, de telles mesures furent appliquées dans de nombreux pays.
jusqu’aux années 1970 et furent souvent combinées à des dispositifs de coercition subtile: en particulier aux États-Unis, dans les pays scandinaves et en Suisse. En attendant, les possibilités de la médecine de la reproduction défrichèrent le terrain pour un «eugénisme libéral» s’inscrivant dans le sillage des promesses de santé et de bonheur héritées du XIXème siècle.

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