

Foreword

In 1959, Garrett Hardin complained that, “no historian of ideas has yet devoted his attention to the eugenics movement” (Hardin 1959, 221). He was right. It was not until the 1960s and 1970s that such professional historians as Mark Haller, Kenneth Ludmerer, Ruth Schwartz Cowan, Lyndsay Farrell, and Donald MacKenzie began to focus on Anglo-American eugenics, and not until the 1980s that eugenics elsewhere in the world received much attention. With the important exception of Jonathan Glover, philosophers evinced even less interest in the subject.

But what had begun as a steady stream of works would eventually turn into a flood. Developments in medical and behavior genetics — especially the race and I.Q. issue and sociobiology in the period 1968–1975, followed by the launching of the Human Genome Project — made the subject seem urgent. Suddenly, discussions of eugenics were everywhere. Not only specialist books and articles, but also popular magazines and television and radio programs asked whether there were connections between modern genetics and the older eugenics and, if so, what these connections were and what they meant.

Eugenics was conceived by its founders towards the end of the nineteenth century out of concern for the social and cultural structure — and somewhat later, of the hygienic aspects — of European society. Its call for controlling reproductive decisions of individuals on behalf of the public good was based on a belief in the rational consequences of scientific advances of the day. The history of eugenics in the first half of this century proved to anyone who needed such proof that scientific theories, rational as they may be, do not exist in a social or political vacuum. Even if we grant that at least some eugenicists, such as Wilhelm Schalmayer, Raymond Pearl, Herman J. Muller, and J. B. S. Haldane, were well-motivated in their advocacy of eugenics, they certainly revealed a most naive utopian perception of social and cultural processes.

By the time scholars came to focus on eugenics, eugenics itself was already out of fashion. Indeed, it would come to be taken for granted that the whole project was morally unacceptable (as well as scientifically unworkable). To label a policy “eugenics” became *ipso facto* to condemn it. Still, in spite of the annexation of notions of eugenics by persons with unsavory social and political agendas, the social, political, and health measures of modern life do have biological consequences. But whereas eugenicists of the beginning of the twentieth century were ready to subjugate the individual to the needs of society, toward the end of this century we face the dilemma of how to prevent risk to the community without usurping personal autonomy.

Given the contemporary plethora of works on eugenics, why devote a special

issue of *Science and Context* to the subject? This issue is comprised of a selection of papers that were presented at a conference, "Eugenic Thought and Practice: A Reappraisal Towards the End of the Twentieth Century," held in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, May 26–29, 1997. As the editors of this issue, we aimed to stretch the boundaries of discussion in at least three ways. First, we sought out papers on little known or poorly understood aspects of the subject, such as the program of proletarian *Rassenhygiene* in Germany (Mocek), eugenics in Japan (Otsubo and Bartholomew), and the relationship between eugenics and the Zionist movement (Falk). We were particularly interested in the important but neglected religious aspects of eugenics (Lepicard, Zenderland, Zohar, Rispler-Chaim, and Carmi et al.). Second, we sought papers from biologists who would treat the scientific issues in detail (Balaban, Benjamin, Templeton) and from a variety of perspectives. Third, we sought papers from philosophers and practitioners who took the moral issues seriously (Chadwick, Daniels, Wikler, Paul, Sagi, Resta, and Holtzman). By the time scholars came to focus on eugenics, there were as few efforts to explain what exactly was morally objectionable as to explain what was scientifically erroneous. Thus we aimed to confront, rather than simply dismiss, the ethical questions. In these ways, we hope to contribute to a literature that is increasing not just in size but in sophistication.

The conference was one of the annual international workshops convened by the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas at Tel-Aviv University, the Edelstein Center for the History and Philosophy of Science, Technology, and Medicine at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. It was also supported by the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities and in cooperation with the Division for Development and Public Relations of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Genome Center at the Weizmann Institute of Science, and the Goethe Institute, Jerusalem. We are grateful to these organizations, and also to all the conference participants.

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Guest Editors

Reference

Hardin, Garrett. 1959. *Nature and Man's Fate*. New York: Rinehart.