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Source: *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Jun., 1937), pp. 389-397

Published by: American Sociological Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2084871>

Accessed: 01-11-2015 12:48 UTC

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# DEVELOPMENT OF A EUGENIC PHILOSOPHY

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**D**URING recent years there has been renewed interest in the critical examination of eugenic theory, and in the reformulation of a reasonable and effective eugenic philosophy. This development has attracted the attention of professional students in the fields of population, genetics, human geography, sociology, and social philosophy, as well as of laymen active in various fields of administration. Out of what seemed at times a wide divergence of opinion, considerable agreement is possible on a broad philosophy of eugenics which appears not incompatible with present knowledge. Any such philosophy must, however, be recognized as tentative and experimental. The present scientific knowledge as to human inheritance and its relation to our social system is too limited for any dogmatic formulation of ideas.

In the field of heredity, biologists are agreed that the genetic constitution of modern man is exceedingly heterogeneous. This carries certain very practical implications. Any program of negative eugenics, even of a very drastic sort, must therefore have limited results. The actual sterilization of as much as one percent of the population might be justified from a social point of view, as social economy, and as a protection to children from the tragedy of being reared by feebleminded parents. It would also be justified eugenically because it would prevent propagation among a group of individuals, many of whom are carriers of serious defect. But the trend of the race would still be largely determined by the birth differentials among the remaining 99 percent of the population. Similarly, an increase of births among the limited number of people recognizable as carriers of superior genes would not directly affect the trend to any great extent, even if the difficulties of bringing about such an increase could be surmounted. It must not be overlooked, however, that such an increase would be vastly more important than a corresponding decrease in defectives through sterilization. This limited upper group is the one that has suffered most from a decline of the birth rate, and therefore is the one that most needs to be restored to a normal condition. Nevertheless, a eugenic philosophy dealing only with the extremes would be limited in its effect, as well as socially controversial.

As a corollary to the heterogeneous genetic composition of most of our people, it appears reasonable to make an assumption as to the distribution of socially valuable hereditary capacities. While at the present time it is impossible to measure differences in such capacities among the majority

of mankind, because people are brought up in quite varying environments, it can, nevertheless, be safely assumed that, if individual differences in hereditary capacity could be measured and charted, they would show a normal curve of distribution with few people at either extreme in respect to any given quality and the great majority clustered about the middle of the curve. Such evidence as is available indicates that every socio-economic group, every large regional group, and every large racial group contains many individuals above the national average in valuable hereditary traits and also many who are below the national average. Any adequate method of selection should, therefore, largely disregard class lines.

On first thought, it would seem much more difficult to base eugenic selection on individuals widely distributed throughout the population, than to favor one or another of the more or less clearly defined groups. Even if a clear line could be drawn between individual couples with valuable hereditary capacities above and below the average, how could any selection be made effective without violating a host of established habits of thought and action?

*Present Conditions Affecting the Small Family System.* Consideration of what is actually taking place today as to size of family seems to throw some light on this question. Among urbanized peoples, more than two or three children are usually a serious handicap in the struggle to improve the level of living, and for all but a favored few a really large family almost inevitably means a serious lowering of standards. The desire to climb to a high level of living is the major prevalent ambition. Those parents who are most thoughtful of the future and care most for their children appear under these conditions likely to limit the size of their families, in order that what children they do have may have the best possible opportunities. Economic conditions react on attitudes, so that at the present time both social attitudes and social organization among urbanized people in this country tend to confirm the ideal of a small family among large numbers of people who would seem specially qualified for parenthood. On the other hand, those less thoughtful for the future, less responsible for the conduct of their own lives, and less responsive to the outside interests of modern life are likely to make less effort to restrict the size of their families. Among those who are conspicuously inadequate, large families frequently appear to be the product of hopelessness as well as carelessness for the future.

This brief review indicates that, under present conditions, many persons who would like to restrict the size of their families have not the opportunity to do so, while others who would like to have more children are restricted in their freedom of choice by the economic handicaps attaching to a large family. Education and home environment may also condition people in attitudes and points of view which make children seem undesirable. At the same time, numerous other people are not free to limit the size of their

families because information as to birth control is not available or is not sufficiently effective under the conditions in which they live. It would appear, therefore, that a process of selection is actually taking place at the present time. In other words, within the limits of each of the various social classes, one type of parents is likely to have larger families than another type. This is the natural result of the present organization of our varied social activities. In the generality of instances the present tendency is probably towards a dysgenic distribution of births.

*Possibilities of a System of Relatively Free Choice.* If a society could be so organized that parents were relatively free in determining the size of their families, it is likely that on the whole the trend of births would be eugenic. Where the number of children is now limited for fear that more children would lower the standard of living and lessen the educational opportunities of those already born, freedom from economic handicaps would cause an increase in births. An economic change of this sort would at the same time tend to modify social attitudes and make them more favorable to larger families. It seems reasonable to suppose that under these circumstances those parents would tend to have most children who were above the average not only in physique and health, but in love of children, compatibility of husband and wife, ability to get along with other people, willingness to assume responsibility, and willingness to make sacrifices for the sake of the family. It is generally agreed that these are socially desirable qualities. On the other hand, it is likely that the smallest families would tend to be found among those poorest in physique and health, least fond of children, most difficult to get along with, least happily married, most self-centered and unwilling to assume long-time responsibilities, and least willing to make sacrifices for the sake of others. Among such families, as well as among those who still remained economically incompetent in spite of adequate opportunities, a fuller spread of contraceptive knowledge and improvements in contraceptive technique may prove to be an effective method for reducing the proportion of births, except in the case of the feebleminded. The latter should certainly be segregated to prevent reproduction, if they are not sterilized. The argument that, if contraceptive knowledge were readily and easily available, so-called inadequate people would not practice it to prevent their families from becoming excessive is not supported by recent experience in Germany and Scandinavia. In Stockholm, where an effective knowledge of birth control is almost universal, differentials in birth between the socio-economic groups have disappeared or been reversed.

*A Major Aim of Eugenics.* For the present, therefore, greater freedom of choice as to size of family should be regarded as a major aim of eugenics. True freedom of parenthood can only be brought about by a very general change in social attitudes, together with changes in economic relationships

which will modify the serious economic burden of raising a family among urbanized peoples. The difficulties in the way are very great, but recent developments in Europe indicate how rapidly points of view may change on a subject of this sort. The German system of marriage loans and Mussolini's efforts to increase the birth rate in Italy have been widely publicized. It is not so generally known that in all of French industry the basis of pay is in proportion to the number of children of the worker. This system was started first on a voluntary basis in the steel industry after the war. It spread rapidly over France and became compulsory in 1932 and will shortly be compulsory in agriculture as well. A similar law was passed in Belgium in 1934. These measures are not of themselves eugenic, being directed solely at an increase in the birth rate. Neither do they as yet appear to be carried out on a scale of child allowances large enough greatly to influence the birth rate. Nevertheless, they indicate that the economic problem of rearing children may be capable of solution.

*Eugenic Implications of Various Accepted Social Activities.* The eugenic aim of freedom of choice in size of family is not antagonistic to other social effort. In a series of conferences held in New York this winter the community of interest between eugenics and other social activities was clearly brought out. A brief summary of these conferences will make it easier to understand the way in which this new philosophy of eugenics would permeate almost every form of social activity.

*Recreation and the Use of Leisure Time in Relation to Family Life.* The development of the simpler types of non-commercial recreation should tend to increase the birthrate through improvement in physique and in nervous balance, and by developing healthier attitudes towards family life. Co-recreation, if properly handled, should make for normal adjustment between the sexes and wider opportunities for the selection of mates. It should be a force for early marriage and greater compatibility of husband and wife after marriage, based on the similarity of their interests. Home and family recreation should, if properly handled, develop the feeling that house and family represent the attractive milieu in which to live and which one would covet for one's later life.

Rural recreation is at present particularly weak in the age group fifteen to twenty-five. This is the age at which decisions are being made as to marriage, and particularly as to migration from the farm to the city. If the migration from the farm is selective so that the most active and ambitious young people move to the city where their average size of family is greatly limited, the effect must be dysgenic. There should therefore be a greatly increased emphasis on rural recreation at the age from high school to the middle twenties. It was agreed that recreation in its best forms touches very intimately the most important problems of eugenics. With the continuing increase in leisure time, and the increasing specialization of

labor, recreation must share a large part of the responsibility for conditioning young people in those standards of family life which are essential to any sound program of positive eugenics.

*Eugenics in Relation to Nursing.* Apparently there was little doubt that the visiting nurse who knows her district would have little difficulty in making up her mind which families in the district should be encouraged to have more children and which should be urged and helped not to have any more. In the hands of this group, eugenics seemed to lose its theoretical and controversial aspects and to be something merely requiring the application of experienced and practical good sense.

From the nature of her work, the nurse must have a keen interest in the success of family life. For this reason she must be educated as far as possible to understand the eugenic implications of nursing. At present, there is danger that the indiscriminate giving of birth control advice would develop false attitudes inimical to childbearing. The work of the nurse would take on new interest and value if more of her time could be spent in helping and encouraging desirable families. At present, the eugenic opportunities of nurses are restricted by the time taken in caring for inadequates, which seems so hopeless and fruitless a task.

The function of the nurse is in great part that of interpreter and translator. She has learned to render this service with respect to public health. She must now learn to do it with respect to eugenically desirable size of family. The intimate knowledge of the families with whom she is in contact gives the nurse a particular advantage in considering whether or not they are justified in having more children. Consciously or unconsciously, the nurse is constantly giving advice which affects the decision of the parents as to size of family, and this has important eugenic implications.

From this conference one gained the impression that the public health nurses would welcome a shift in public opinion which would enable them to devote more of their time to the eugenic aspects of their work.

*Education and Eugenics.* It was agreed that the teaching of eugenics should be indirect. The development of a sound body and a healthy physique, of a balanced personality, and of normal attitudes towards family life, should be included among the functions of any sound educational system, and these things should not be made secondary to improving the I. Q., or increasing subject matter. Education should include elementary knowledge of genetics, and of heredity and environment, particularly some of the recent work of psychologists in this field; and, in addition, sufficient elementary work in population to give an idea of the social and biological effect of various trends in birth rates. Finally, education must somehow inculcate the ideal of parenthood as fundamental in a well-rounded philosophy of life. It was recognized that means must be found not only to reverse the present association of education with a low birth rate, but also



to increase the birth rate among the teaching profession. There was constant emphasis on the desirability of the indirect attack on eugenics. The development of physique, of personality, and of healthy attitudes are ends desirable in themselves, as well as for their eugenic implications.

*Eugenics and Medicine.* The attitude and advice of the family physician may greatly affect individual decisions as to size of family. Advice on contraception should be solely a medical function, and the doctor should use his best efforts to make birth control valuable to society as well as to the individual. There is need for much basic research on heredity in disease. It will be necessary for the medical profession to advise on laws regulating eugenical sterilization and before long on measures for increasing the birth rate. They should keep in close touch with the eugenicist so that they will understand the eugenic implications of all medical work and its effect on the distribution of births. Doctors are in a position to influence a favorable distribution of births more perhaps than any other group. The new philosophy of eugenics presented at the meeting is in full agreement with the aims of the medical profession and should have their close co-operation.

The list of social activities which carry important eugenic implications might be extended indefinitely. In a democratic country there are great opportunities for developing such conditions of society that the processes of eugenic selection shall be voluntary and natural.

*Some Secondary Effects of Free Choice.* Changes which would tend to increase the freedom of parents in their choice of size of family would have various social advantages in addition to the eugenic improvement which would be their primary aim. Inasmuch as our knowledge of human heredity does not yet enable us to measure the genetic effect of changes such as have just been discussed, it is particularly worth while to consider the secondary effects which would accompany the application of a eugenic philosophy.

(1) An increase in freedom of parenthood should tend to improve the environment in which children are reared. It would, in effect, increase the proportion of children reared in homes with the best cultural background of every type. The concept on which this proposed development of eugenics is based is that when external environmental conditions are generally similar, individual differences in personal qualities are to a significant degree related to differences in genetic inheritance. This means that in the majority of cases children whose parents are above the average of their associates in socially valuable qualities are also superior in hereditary capacity. Thus, under changed conditions, the voluntary determination by parents themselves of the size of their families would tend to increase the proportion of children among parents with the best heredity, as well as in homes which would provide the best environment. The effort to develop such a trend would have the support of both hereditarian and environmentalist.

(2) The ideal of increasing freedom of parenthood places its major

emphasis on an increase in births. Such an increase would appear desirable in view of present population trends. Intrinsic rates of reproduction in this country are already at or below the rate required for replacement, and there is much indirect evidence that birth rates will continue their decline for some time to come. Eugenists as such may have no opinion as to whether or not a rapid decline would be harmful, but they must recognize that public opinion is likely to be much aroused against it when once the knowledge of such a decline becomes widespread. Under such circumstances, if eugenics is associated in the public mind with an increase in births, it may be more strongly supported than if the major emphasis is placed on further restrictions.

(3) The eugenic philosophy which we have outlined would make eugenic selection a natural and voluntary process. It is thus in full agreement with the concepts of individual liberty and of non-interference by government, which are so closely associated with the form of our democracy.

(4) The ideal of freedom of parenthood has been proposed as a substitute for the present processes of society which are probably dysgenic and appear to have reversed the older processes of natural selection. It is worth noting that were parents truly free to determine the size of their families, the selection which would result might well tend to an increase in the proportion of human beings more co-operative and more adapted to the requirements of civilized life than many of the types developed in the past by nature's "survival of the fittest."

*Need for New Types of Study.* Competent eugenists are the first to recognize the need for adequate studies, in order to test the validity of the theory which has here been discussed. Great advances have been made in methods of population study in the past ten years, but the results so far obtained do not bear directly on the major problems of eugenics. Birth differentials and net reproduction rates have been studied for the available classifications of population groups, such as the socio-economic, the occupational, the regional, and the racial classifications. But hardly any light has been thrown on the differences in birth and reproduction rates of different types of people within each one of these groups. The need for such studies of differences within groups has been greatly emphasized by the advance of psychology. We now know pretty definitely that whatever the average differences between occupational or socio-economic or regional groups in capacity for developing qualities of the kind that are measured by intelligence tests, the differences between individuals within each of the groups are very much greater. It is practically certain that the overlapping in socially valuable qualities between even the most diverse social classes is very great. Studies in birth rates would be of more interest if they indicated trends of individual types rather than trends between large groups whose average hereditary capacities may not differ very greatly.



An important first step would lie in developing measures which are not only indicative of personal qualities of a socially valuable sort, but which would also be readily available for population studies on a large scale. It is probable that the use of existing measures can be modified for this purpose. The next step would be to afford the geneticists every possible facility for discovering exactly how these personal qualities are inherited.

*Measures of the Social Value of Individuals.* "Intelligence" as measured by psychological tests certainly has a part in determining social value. The tests used are objective, they can be applied to large groups of people, and psychologists have had enough experience in their use to recognize many of the limitations within which they must be interpreted. Tests of character and personality are being rapidly developed by psychologists. They can also play a useful part in measuring social values, but the limitations on their use are likely to be great for a long time to come. Tests of genetic fitness, such as may be made by studies of ancestry and near kin, are especially important for determining not only defective stocks, but those of superior ability. They are less applicable to large groups of the population. All of these methods represent attempts to measure peoples' qualities directly and objectively.

Another, and indirect method, is to measure the accomplishment of people in their daily lives. For this purpose, criteria must be used which will reach the whole population. Comparatively few people find expression in art, literature or active leadership. The great majority give tangible expression of their qualities in three chief ways: first their daily work; second, their relation to the community in which they live; and, third, the quality of their homes.

Vocational success can be measured by advancement in skill and status within any given line of work, by the extent to which a man or woman rises above his or her fellows in the same group, or even by rate of pay and continuity of employment. The moment we compare different vocations, however, the purely economic test loses much of its value; the poorly paid scientist may possess more desirable qualities than the business man with a salary ten times as large. In many cases the measure of economic success in terms of money would be different from its measure in terms of the contribution made to society.

The reputation of a family in its own community may also be used as a criterion of personal qualities. The comparative extent to which people are good neighbors, good citizens, and interested in activities outside their immediate circle, can be measured within any given group.

The comparative quality of the home appears to excel both occupational success and local repute as an index of the combined value, both social and genetic, of a husband and wife as parents. If a married pair are able to raise their home life to a standard above that of other homes in the income group

to which they belong, they may properly be credited with qualities above the average. Character, affection, and intelligence, if they are present in the parents, can find as effective expression in the homes of the poor as in the homes of the rich.

Such a broad group of general measures appears to be a necessary supplement to the objective tests of the psychologist in carrying out studies of differential births among different types of people. It must be constantly borne in mind that any given parents can only be compared with others who share very similar handicaps and opportunities in a common environment. Subject to this important limitation, it should be possible to employ criteria already in general use to construct a rating scale for parenthood which might be of considerable value in a new type of population studies. Thus, existing measures, if carefully used, should be sufficient to give a fairly practical measure of eugenic trends.

The science of population should receive new impetus from the development of refined methods of measuring personal qualities. The important advances in population studies in the past ten years have given us knowledge of birth differentials as between different occupational, regional, and socio-economic groups in this country. The next step would lie along the lines of determining what differentials there are within these groups as between different types of individuals. From such studies we should obtain new light on the causes of differential births and the extent to which they are affected by differences in economic standing, by differences in physique, in personality traits and in social attitudes and aspirations.

All of these studies would contribute to the development of eugenic policies capable of broad application throughout the population. The cumulative decline in births which is now taking place is likely to arouse great public interest in all questions affecting the quality and distribution of our population. In such a situation there is always danger that important matters of policy may be determined by the emotional bias of one group or another. A great public service will be rendered by students of the social sciences if they can develop material adequate to an understanding of what changes are actually taking place and what forms of social control might be effectively employed to improve succeeding generations.