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# The Galton Institute

## NEWSLETTER

Issue Number 74

September 2010

### Tracing the Trajectory of 'Positive Eugenics' in Britain

by

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What follows is **Part 2** of a dissertation submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Master of Science in the Faculty of Life Sciences. **Part 1** appeared in the last issue of the Newsletter.

#### Positive Eugenics in Britain

The general theory of eugenics in Britain arose from investigations into how society affects evolution and 'natural selection', and whether humans could employ the laws of evolution to improve their social condition. In essence, the eugenicists wished to direct human evolution. From the earliest days of Galton's research into eugenics, he considered eugenic improvements through elimination of the worst or 'unfit' traits, and through an increased propagation of the best or 'fit' traits. Although Galton coined the term 'eugenics' in his *Inquiries into Human Faculty* in 1883, the roots of his concept for improving the human social condition through evolutionary means began much earlier, and a number of developments which had profound social impacts precipitated the popularity of Galton's new science. The next section will explore the various scientific and social origins contributing to the rise in the eugenic paradigm and how they specifically advanced the development of 'positive eugenics'.

#### *Origins of Positive Eugenics in Britain*

The term 'positive eugenics' came into prominence early in the history of eugenics, although not before the foundation of the Eugenics Education Society in 1907. Several authors have credited its creation to Caleb Williams Saleeby (1878-1940),<sup>64</sup> an early leader of the eugenics movement. Saleeby was a gifted speaker and propagandist, though not an investigator. As such he was contentious in the eyes of many of the scientists in the movement, although he played a significant role by interpreting complicated genetics issues for lay members of the eugenics community. A letter he wrote to Francis Galton in 1909 lends support to Saleeby's nature as a eugenic neologist. The letter asks Galton's opinion on the term "dygenics versus kakogenics. I am for the former as neater and sufficiently correct" and expresses gratitude at Pearson "using my 'eugenicist' rather than 'eugenician'."<sup>65</sup> The introduction of the term 'positive eugenics' did not come without dissent, however. Numerous debates were recorded in the *Eugenics Review*, for example in 1910, Montague Crackanorpe (1832-1913), second president of the Eugenics Education Society, wrote in his presidential address that the terms 'positive' and 'negative' eugenics might be renamed due to mathematical confusion as "...Negative and Positive Eugenics reinforce instead of cancelling or neutralising each other."<sup>66</sup> He also feared that the terms would be seen as generally pejorative and distract people from the eugenic cause. Instead he suggested using the terms 'restrictive' and 'constructive' to replace 'negative' and 'positive', respectively. Both sets of terms were used interchangeably during the early years, though 'positive' and 'negative' eventually won permanence. The issue was again raised in 1939 in a letter from R. Austin Freeman to the secretary of the Eugenics Education Society, Carlos Blacker. "Referring to the point raised by Lord Horder at the

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Published by:  
The Galton Institute  
19 Northfields Prospect  
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LONDON SW18 1PE  
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Council meeting as to the use of the words, 'positive' and 'negative', I find myself in strong agreement with him, especially in regard to the word 'negative', which is quite inappropriate to any kind of active policy...if it should seem necessary to retain the distinction, the two modes might be designated by words more appropriate to the ideas, such as Constructive and Eliminative or Inhibitory or Restrictive."<sup>67</sup> These efforts were again unsuccessful and the terms 'positive' and 'negative' eugenics retained general favor in the society. While the origins of the term 'positive eugenics' and its usage come relatively early in the history of eugenics, the origins of the theory date at least a half century prior.

In the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, a number of social and scientific developments gave impetus to eugenics solutions. Among the social contributing factors were a declining birth rate, a differential birth rate, a rise in individualism, a trend of social reform, and a rise in conservatism. Scientific advances, such as Darwinism, natural selection, a persistence and reapplication of Lamarckian theories, the rediscovery of Mendel, and the application of statistics to biology, supported and were supported by the social changes creating a new biological paradigm for social reform. While these factors contributed to a general rise in eugenic interest, each of these factors contained specific implications for the development of 'positive eugenics'.

Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, census records began to show a general decline in the population of Britain. The sociologist and historian of Victorian families, Joseph Banks, wrote in the 1950s that the perceived fall in the birth rate was enough to convince some contemporary experts that "by another generation the growth of numbers will have come to an end altogether."<sup>68</sup> Eventually, the population would become so critically diminished that it would be unable to recover. The obvious solution was to increase the rate of births in Britain, though many, especially the Malthusians, believed that an increase in the birth rate required control and close observation. According to Malthus' calculations at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, an unchecked birth rate would increase faster than the production of essential supplies, such as food. A

counter-argument presented by the pro-colonial Charles Kingsley in 1858, however suggested that over-population would not be possible; furthermore it was the duty of the British to spread their race as much as possible.<sup>69</sup> In either case, 'positive eugenics' provided a satisfactory solution, and MacNicol, in his article on Inter-War sterilization in Britain, identifies eugenics as one of the "ideological outcomes of the decline in the birth rate."<sup>70</sup> In fact, this trend of declining birth rate appeared in population statistics across Europe and America creating fears of national decline and influencing many nations to seek solutions through eugenics. In Britain, many people began to fear that not only the birth rate, but the "general fiber of their nation – its overall moral character, intelligence, energy, ambition, and capacity to compete in the world – was declining."<sup>71</sup> The shockingly bloody and long drawn out Boer Wars in South Africa, supported by military statistics, convinced many British citizens that the physical well being of the nation was waning. "Political concerns were added to social fears by the Boer War crisis; the chronic ill health and physical weakness of the English working class revealed by the recruitment programme and the subsequent 1904 Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration brought forcibly home to the public the seriousness of the situation."<sup>72</sup> In 1916, a National Birth Rate Commission presented their investigation of the birth rate crisis. Among the members of the Commission were a number of leaders of the Eugenics Education Society. In their findings, they concluded that a decline in birth rate, rather than an increase in mortality, was the cause for the population crisis in Britain.<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps even more crucial to the development of 'positive eugenics' in Britain was the differential birth rate. From their statistical findings, the National Birth Rate Commission drew links between fertility, occupation, and income.<sup>74</sup> The Galton Laboratory provided the numbers for the statistical studies which showed steep declines in the middle classes and slow declines in lower classes. That the decline was studied with respect to class stratification, reflected an important underlying factor in British eugenics. The 'professional middle class', an actor's category identified by MacKenzie, recruited membership through achievement and education.<sup>75</sup> They were also the over-

whelming majority of eugenic-minded individuals in Britain. According to Mackenzie, eugenic theories appealed to the 'professional middle class' because eugenics not only justified their position above the working classes but also reassured their "technical and moral superiority" over the aristocracy.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, however, their class was suffering the greatest losses according to the statistics of the declining birth rate. The 'professional middle class' feared that this differential birth rate combined with a general reduction in British population would lead to 'race suicide' and degeneration of national quality.<sup>77</sup> In fact, some social commentators argued that this differential birth rate was specifically "because the upper and middle classes were restricting their fertility."<sup>78</sup> MacKenzie's analysis claims that "much of positive eugenics was a straightforward response to this situation."<sup>79</sup> Major Leonard Darwin (1850-1943), one of the most influential presidents of the Eugenics Education Society and son of Charles Darwin, wrote in 1913 that "When the marriages amongst the higher types of the fit are more fruitful than the marriages amongst the lower types or the unfit, then mankind is on the upward path; and, when the reverse is the case, the nation is degenerating."<sup>80</sup> In 1920, he again wrote an article echoing this sentiment.<sup>81</sup> Darwin squarely blamed the degeneration of Britain on the results of a differential birth rate, and as a firm supporter of both 'positive' and 'negative' styles, he continually lent support to reversing the trend of the differential birth rate by encouraging members of the 'professional middle class' to conceive more children.

Other social trends also contributed to the rise of 'positive eugenics' in Britain. Issues such as the changing role of motherhood, an increase in feminism, Poor Law reform, and a general sense of conservatism signified a tendency towards individualism in Britain around this time. The Poor Law gave more rights to the government to take away children from unfit parents, but with Poor Law reform in the early 1900s, the rights of the individual became more recognized.<sup>82</sup> In the wake of the waning influence of the Poor Law, eugenicists would find it increasingly difficult to pass legislation which might restrict the growth of the lower classes through 'negative eugenic' means. Moreover, this individualism and conservatism provided for an increased

sense of moral duty and individual responsibility, which contributed towards a general tendency for social reform. Membership and goals of social reform societies such as the Moral Education League and the Sociological Society greatly overlapped with that of the Eugenics Education Society providing a desire to improve the situations of the poor.<sup>83</sup> While many 'negative eugenic' measures were intended to ultimately alleviate the plight of the poor by reducing their numbers, those who were both eugenic-minded and social-minded tended to endorse environmental rather than biological improvements for the poor, relying on 'positive eugenic' techniques and general eugenic education to correct the imbalanced birthrate.

Whether these social changes were causative or reflective of the rise in eugenics, the changes in biological understanding and application provided a scientific basis upon which eugenicists could argue their case. Prior to the rediscovery of Mendel's work on genetics around 1900, and indeed for many years following its rediscovery, competing theories of genetic inheritance supported a variety of measures intended to fulfill the goals of eugenics. One of the most influential, non-Mendelian theories of heredity was the Lamarckian concept of 'acquired traits', which claimed that an organism's environment could alter its 'protoplasm' and that these newly acquired traits could be passed on to future generations. As demonstrated in this dissertation's 'Literature Review', versions of this theory persisted for many years in countries like France and Russia. While British genetics largely embraced Mendelian heredity, the Lamarckian notion continued to appeal especially to those who worked towards social reform. Michael Guyer in the second edition of his 1916 work on childhood heredity definitively claims that "since surrounding influences are especially powerful on young and developing organisms, we should realize that great care must be exercised in behalf of the young child to secure an environment which is saturated with wholesome influences. For it is a rule of development that if the environment is faulty the organism is impaired."<sup>84</sup> Guyer was implying that by improving the environment, the genetic make-up of a developing child improves. On the other hand, Kevles credits eugenics with casting "the light of science upon superstitions concerning conception, pregnancy, and

childbirth, notably the law of maternal impressions – a commonplace assumption, rooted in folk belief and Lamarckian theory, that the characteristics of offspring were shaped by the experiences of the pregnant mother."<sup>85</sup> The law of maternal impressions suggested, for example, that visualizing beautiful children during pregnancy would improve the physical beauty of the unborn child. Whether or not eugenics helped to clear up these misconceptions, there were eugenicists especially in the early days of eugenics, who acted by eugenic principles intending a Lamarckian outcome. This form of improving heredity through environmental changes can be seen as supplementary to both 'positive' and 'negative' eugenics. The social application of Darwin's principles was far more influential on the eugenicists.

Darwin's description of evolution and his suggested mechanism, 'natural selection', played an important role in shaping the scientific concerns of the eugenicists, and "brought about a flow of proto-eugenic writings that foreshadowed the salient concerns of the post-1900 movement, particularly the notion that "artificial selection" – state or philanthropic intervention in the battle for social survival – was replacing natural selection in human evolution."<sup>86</sup> Social Darwinists believed that charity, social reform, and general human compassion had upset the natural order of biological action through 'natural selection' and Herbert Spencer's catchphrase explanation, 'survival of the fittest'.<sup>87</sup> Because of these actions, the 'unfit' were allowed to survive and in some cases flourish, while the 'fit' were forced to restrict their own propagation in order to help the 'unfit'. Crackanthorpe wrote in his 1907 monograph, *Population and Progress*, that due to the assistance of charitable institutions "the rigour of 'Natural Selection' has been greatly relaxed. Assisted Selection, if I may so call it, has largely taken its place."<sup>88</sup> He further explains that there are three stages of evolutionary selection: Natural Selection, Assisted Selection, and Purposive Selection. Darwin had described the first form, the second came about through the intervention of charity, and the third, which had the potential to rebalance the natural order, could be achieved through eugenics.<sup>89</sup> While this popular reasoning amongst eugenicists had the greatest impact on supporting 'negative eugenics', it also contributed to the 'positive eugenic' idea

that if the financial burden which had been placed on the 'professional middle class' to care for the lower class were lifted, they would be able to have more children.

Of all the scientists and scientific theories that contributed to the development of 'positive eugenics', none had a more direct impact than its founder, Francis Galton (1822-1911). He viewed eugenics as a progressive measure by which humanity might improve itself through selective breeding.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore he hoped that it might form a "secular religion, with moral duty urging a couple to include eugenic attributes as part of a marriage decision." Initially, Galton did not intend eugenics to mimic natural selection as was Crackanthorpe's interpretation. Galton wrote that "Natural Selection rests upon excessive production and wholesale destruction; Eugenics on bringing no more individuals into the world than can be properly cared for, and those only of the best stock."<sup>91</sup> In his first studies on this 'best stock', he collected and published the pedigrees of gifted families, an investigation which appealed to his interest in statistics. Even from this humble beginning as a theoretical study, however, eugenics drew fire. He shared his ideas on eugenics through correspondence with his cousin, the famous Charles Darwin who "questioned whether such superior individuals actually existed."<sup>92</sup> Apart from questioning who is 'fit' and whether 'fitness' can be quantified, Darwin, in a 1873 letter to Galton, offered the scientific criticism that from the view of nature, the individual is unimportant compared to the race.<sup>93</sup> Galton, however considered his statistical studies as bridging the gap between the individual and the race. Responding to criticism of his eugenic theories, Galton, in his 1901 Huxley Lecture, wrote that eugenics occupies "a less dignified position in scientific estimation than it might. It is smiled at as most desirable in itself and possibly worthy of academic discussion, but absolutely out of the question as a practical problem."<sup>94</sup> Later in this same lecture, Galton reaffirmed his endorsement of 'positive eugenics' as the most promising means to success, writing that "the possibility of improving the race of a nation depends on the power of increasing the productivity of the best stock. This is far more important than that of repressing the productivity of the worst."<sup>95</sup> Until the early twentieth century, however, no institutional

support for the advancement of eugenics existed in Britain. It was merely present in the theoretical studies of Galton and other eugenic-minded individuals.<sup>96</sup> Galton later explained in his memoirs the lengthy delay between theorizing eugenics and acting upon it. "Popular feeling was not then ripe to accept even the elementary truths of hereditary talent and character, upon which the possibility of Race Improvement depends. Still less was it prepared to consider dispassionately any proposals for practical action. So I laid the subject wholly to one side for many years. Now I see my way better, and an appreciative audience is at last to be had, though it be small."<sup>97</sup> This modest appraisal of his 'appreciative audience', in fact, consisted of a growing number of eugenicists, social reformers, biometricians, and geneticists centered around two increasingly influential organizations, the Galton Eugenics Laboratory at University College London and the Eugenics Education Society. By 1907, public awareness had increased so much that Karl Pearson (1857-1936), a student of Galton's and the first director of the Galton Laboratory, wrote in a letter to Galton, "You would be amused to hear how general is now the use of your word Eugenics! I hear most respectable middle class matrons saying if children are weakly, "Ah, that was not a eugenic marriage!"<sup>98</sup> Through the two British eugenics organizations, eugenicists would even further popularize Galton's theories.

### *Eugenics Organizations in Britain*

Kevles credits the Galton Laboratory and the Eugenics Education Society with popularizing British eugenics which "derived energy from the organizational efforts of its advocates."<sup>99</sup> Both groups derived their goals from the writings of Galton, though they played vastly different roles in the promotion and advancement of eugenics. The Galton Laboratory took upon itself an uncompromising position as a scientific institution attempting to legitimize the new academic field of eugenics through theoretical study of human heredity. The Eugenics Education Society, on the other hand, controlled the national agenda on social and legal applications of eugenics. Through their publications, they centralized eugenics and its proponents, who did not all come from the same background, nor did they agree on the methods to be used. In fact, the relationship between the two organizations was

often strained by differing interpretations of Galton's intentions. At best their relationship was very complicated. In 1950, Julia Bell, an early member of the Galton Laboratory, wrote to C.P. Blacker, Secretary of the Eugenics Education Society, in an attempt to clarify years of tenuous dealings between the two organizations. "I think there is no unfriendly feeling between our laboratory and your Society, but there is some difference in the relative weighting of our respective purposes and aims in accordance with the original intentions of Galton and of course their difficulties in the early days arising from this very fact."<sup>100</sup> Indeed, from the very conception of the two organizations, their goals were different. Galton himself acknowledged this fact and relied on their differing objectives to actualize his academic and social goals. A particular incident in 1909 accentuates the feelings of Galton towards the sometimes overlapping roles of the two organizations. In February 1909, Sybil Gotto (1887-1955), one of the founding members of the Eugenics Education Society asked permission of members of the Galton Laboratory to publish their lectures in the *Eugenics Review*, the organ of the Eugenics Education Society. Pearson, in a letter to Galton, expressed his reluctance to allow such a publication on the grounds that their lectures were based on unfinished scientific studies which required completion before publication in order to maintain academic integrity.<sup>101</sup> Galton replied that he would explain to the Eugenics Education Society that their work is separate from that of the Laboratory and that they must not utilize the lab in such a way. The publications of the two organizations "are supplementary, and in no sense rivals. The Laboratory gives the foundation, the Society the Super-structure."<sup>102</sup> Pearson, apparently content with Galton's suggestion, wrote back "I agree so wholly with what you say. There is need for the purely scientific research, and for the propagandism."<sup>103</sup> This relationship between the two organizations is important for the development of 'positive eugenics' because, from a very early stage, eugenicists saw it as one of the most promising forms of eugenics, but one which required further investigation to support a practical program. The following two sections will investigate the origins, leadership, and 'positive eugenics' philosophy of the two organizations.

### *The Galton Laboratory*

Founded in 1904, the Galton Laboratory grew out of the Biometrics Laboratory at University College London through a bequest by Francis Galton. His will and codicil set out the specifications and duties for a Professor of Eugenics. Apart from collecting and analyzing data, the Professor would promote the knowledge of eugenics by "(a) Professional instruction, (b) Occasional publications, (c) Occasional public lectures, (d) Experimental or observational work which may throw light on Eugenic problems".<sup>104</sup> Galton significantly dismissed political and social action from this list of duties and Pearson, director of the Biometrics Laboratory and Galton's hand-picked Professor of Eugenics, made no attempt to pursue these actions. In a 1910 interview with *The Standard*, Pearson described the activities of the Galton Laboratory. "The work [on eugenics], as conducted there [UCL], falls into two departments: the older, or Biometric Department... and the more recent Eugenics Laboratory" whose object is "scientific investigation, and as scientific investigators the staff do not attempt any form of propaganda. That must be left to outside agencies and associations. They simply study the problems that appear to be of social importance, examine the facts statistically, and publish the results that flow from their analyses."<sup>105</sup> Pearson had been making his point about the role of the laboratory for years and had broken off relationships with other organizations in the past over it. In 1903, for instance, Pearson had a spat with the American eugenicist, Charles Davenport over the issue of propaganda in scientific publications. Davenport was Pearson's co-editor of *Biometrika*, the organ of the Biometrics Laboratory and later the Galton Laboratory, but a letter from Davenport to Pearson foreshadowed the coming fallout as Davenport wrote that he was glad he had an understanding in which "you do not think our respective plans antagonistic".<sup>106</sup> Two years later, in another letter to Pearson, Davenport cites their irreconcilable difference over opinion and conjecture in the conclusions of published scientific articles in *Biometrika*. Pearson wanted to hold biometry to a higher scientific standard, relying solely on the numbers to express the results of experiments.<sup>107</sup> Davenport offered his resignation and pursued his objectives through his own institution, the Eugenics Records Office at Cold

Spring Harbor Laboratory. The significance of this episode is that, whereas the United States combined efforts between their academic and social organizations, Britain did not. Pearson's main goals were not to enact eugenics but to establish it as an academic discipline.<sup>108</sup> While the Galton Laboratory pursued both 'positive' and 'negative' eugenics from a theoretical perspective, it put forth no efforts to popularize or politicize either form of eugenics. The Eugenics Education Society was entirely responsible for the pursuit of practical programs and social propaganda.

### *The Eugenics Education Society<sup>109</sup>*

Following a meeting of the Committee of the Moral Education League in 1907, "a Provisional Council was elected to draw up a constitution for a new Society to be called the 'Eugenics Education Society.'"<sup>110</sup> Upon approval of the Society's rules "Mr. Francis Galton paid the Society the high compliment of consenting to be its Honorary President."<sup>111</sup> From its inception the Eugenics Education Society espoused a broad spectrum of goals and objectives. The Society wrote that it would achieve its goals "by persistently setting forth, by oral and written teaching, the National importance of Eugenics, educating public opinion, and creating a sense of the responsibility of the nation," "by spreading a knowledge of the Laws of Heredity," and "by denouncing as a crime against the future, parenthood on the part of the Diseased, the Insane, and the Habitually Alcoholic."<sup>112</sup> Their methods would include arranging lectures, popularizing research results, educating the young on eugenic principles, opposing legislation "threatening to impair the racial qualities of the Nation, while advocating measures having a contrary object", and forming a Lending Library.<sup>113</sup> These sentiments were again echoed in their First Annual Report.<sup>114</sup> This loose set of objectives amounted to promoting and publicizing eugenic ideas, however, no distinct programs or eugenic goals were ever identified by their charter. In 1913, President of the Society, Leonard Darwin was still attempting to solidify an actual goal as he wrote, "Our problem is, therefore, how to spread abroad this keen sense of racial responsibility."<sup>115</sup> In many ways, determining the details of their broad mission statement became the most challenging task for the Eugenics Education Society, particularly among

positive eugenics proposals because of the breadth of opinions regarding them. Some of this difficulty came from centralizing their membership, which came from diverse backgrounds. This issue became increasingly problematic as the Eugenics Society branches formed across Britain and abroad including London, Birmingham, Cambridge, Manchester, Southampton, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Sidney, Australia.<sup>116</sup> Regarding member support of specific styles of eugenics, C.P. Blacker recalled in 1950, "From the start, the idea of negative eugenics seemed to appeal to people of a certain temperament and outlook; that of positive eugenics to people otherwise constituted."<sup>117</sup> The only common trend in membership was that its "activists were drawn almost exclusively from the professional middle class."<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, academia, science, and medicine were more heavily represented than law and clergy.<sup>119</sup> Their ambiguity towards 'positive eugenics' could most readily be seen in the decades-long debate over the wording of the 'Aims and Objects' of the Society. Various drafts of the 'Aims and Objects' included nearly all the proposals introduced by members. Apart from 'Family Allowances', 'Taxation', and 'Education', few proposals remained part of the Society's official policy for any length of time. More than anything else, the leadership of two influential directors of the Eugenics Education Society held the group together.

From 1911 to 1928, Leonard Darwin served as president of the Eugenics Education Society. As one of the earliest presidents, much of Darwin's charge was to organize the eugenics movement and set goals for its success. In Soloway's estimation, his leadership was "essentially defensive and reactive."<sup>120</sup> While he entertained the broadest range of suggestions from the fringes of the eugenics movement, he also restricted the official activities of the society to those issues of common interest throughout the group. He personally supported 'positive eugenic' measures, but only officially endorsed those agreed upon by the Society. He carefully indicated when he was writing opinion and when he was acting in an official capacity. Still, as a firm believer in both the 'positive' and 'negative' aspects, he used his influence to keep 'positive' eugenics on the table for discussion and within the objectives of the organization. He often ignored calls by members to establish more

solidified objectives, instead favoring limited action until more scientific knowledge had been gained. In 1922, Charles Vickery Drysdale (1874-1961), a prominent member of the Eugenics Education Society, noted that "The reluctance to act in advance of sufficient knowledge is wholly scientific and praiseworthy, and is in sharp contrast to the behaviours of the generality of social reformers, whose zeal usually greatly outruns their discretion; yet it is a serious bar to the popularity of the Eugenics movement, as mankind is never satisfied with purely academic or negative teaching concerning social problems."<sup>121</sup> Yet, Drysdale still proposed no clear practical measure for eugenics in this article. Darwin tried to appease Drysdale and his allies in 1924 with some personal suggestions for practical eugenics. These suggestions included segregation of the mentally deficient, voluntary sterilization, education in 'positive eugenics' and natural sciences, general Income Tax reform, and further study without action regarding alcohol, syphilis, and race mixing.<sup>122</sup> In 1927, Darwin wrote that he was aware of the desire for more concrete goals but that he had reservations in doing so because "I had always felt that any move in this direction was not without its dangers; for I feared it might reveal some serious differences within our ranks and therefore do more harm than good."<sup>123</sup> He continued by stating that it would be wiser at that early point in eugenics to "concentrate the attention of the public on the ends rather than on the exact means."<sup>124</sup> By tabling the suggestion for more specific goals for the Society he stunted the organization's political and legal actions, but kept the Society's options open for future action when further study and internal unification would lead the way. Because the members refrained from pursuing particular goals, the Society tended to have a broader range of voices and suggestions than other eugenics societies, including a persisting interest in 'positive eugenics'. One of his successors, C.P. Blacker, would take an entirely different approach to leading the Society.

While Darwin brought many qualities to the Society such as a sense of leadership, name recognition, respect, and enthusiasm, he was not a scientist, and his lay knowledge of heredity may have contributed to his reluctance to pursue particular programs. For example, in 1911, Darwin wrote that altering an

environment had the possibility of altering the genetic make-up of future generations, an idea which was largely overturned by the discovery of Mendelian genetics.<sup>125</sup> Carlos Paton Blacker (1895-1975), with his background in science, had greater confidence when dealing with the biology of eugenics. He served as General Secretary of the Eugenics Society from 1931 to 1952, and firmly supported 'negative' over 'positive' eugenics. As Soloway described him, Blacker was "the aggressive architect of a reform eugenics that focused on negative or restrictive policies, primarily birth control, taking into account the need to weigh more accurately the interaction between heredity and environment as it affected the qualitative reproduction of people in all classes."<sup>126</sup> Though Blacker and Darwin came from vastly different backgrounds and disagreed on the future direction of the Eugenics Society, they still managed to form an alliance under the principle that eugenics studies were vital to the future of humanity. In fact, on numerous occasions during his tenure, Blacker sought and received congenial advice from Darwin on how to best lead the Society. Most of this advice centered on manipulating the Committees and Councils of the Society and pacifying its fringe members. In one letter from Darwin to Blacker in 1930, Darwin warned the incoming General Secretary that "You will have a good many defective oars to row with; but as a rule they should not be thrown away."<sup>127</sup> This statement in particular highlights one of the main problems encountered by the Eugenics Education Society. The fringe members were a liability, but were also necessary to maintain membership numbers. In the same letter he acknowledged his reluctance to pursue a single objective for fear that it would leave 'positive eugenics' in the background. "It has been suggested lately, I think that we should stick to one aim at a time. This is a tendency I have had to resist on several occasions...This method of procedure would probably leave the promotion of the fertility of the more fit always in the background, though it is, in my opinion, nearly at the top of the tree in importance."<sup>128</sup> Where 'positive eugenics' had clearly been an important part of Darwin's agenda, Blacker was convinced that the more biologically potent method was 'negative eugenics'. In his 1952 monograph on the history of eugenics, Blacker justified his dismissal of 'positive eugenics' because he claimed that Galton, himself, had

changed his mind on the relative importance of 'negative' and 'positive' eugenics. Where first Galton had endorsed 'positive eugenics' as the more important of the two methods, he seemed to reverse his opinion in a 1908 *Nature* article, calling 'negative eugenics' the more "pressing" concern.<sup>129</sup> From the context of this statement, however, it is unclear if Galton was truly reversing his position or simply acknowledging that 'negative eugenics' worked on a shorter time scale than 'positive eugenics'. Even Blacker admitted that "it does not follow that the most important things are the most pressing".<sup>130</sup> In any case, Blacker did not view the 'positive eugenics' proposals as being well thought out. In 1946, he wrote that these plans come across as "unrealistic, impracticable or else insufficiently worked out in detail."<sup>131</sup> Even with his more focused objectives, Blacker met with resistance and criticism from some of the most prominent eugenicists. One of the first practical programs he proposed in 1931 was legislation for a voluntary sterilization program. Pearson wrote a letter to Blacker in response to this program stating that, while he was "strongly in favour of a bill legalising sterilisation of the mentally defective," no such program could be 'voluntary' because it would result in the paradoxical situation where "the man or woman whose mental capacity is sufficient to give freely their consent is clearly mentally capable of taking other and less drastic precautions against reproduction."<sup>132</sup> The Eugenics Society, in an effort to explore possible 'positive eugenics' programs, formed a Positive Eugenics Committee in 1934 to investigate the successful measures taken in other countries, such as Germany and Italy.<sup>133</sup> In an article from the *Eugenics Review* in 1936, the Positive Eugenics Committee concluded that the issue is more complicated than anticipated and that their next step should be to determine why "biologically well-endowed persons are in effect sterilizing themselves" by choosing not to have children.<sup>134</sup> When a proposal was introduced around 1937 to form a joint venture with a Royal Commission to deal with the problems of 'positive eugenics', Blacker, who was never a strong supporter of 'positive eugenics', expressed his concern that should a Royal Commission be appointed, it would ask for the Eugenics Education Society's position and proposals on the matter.<sup>135</sup> His implication was that since the formation of the Society, they had agreed on virtually no practical action

towards 'positive eugenics'. The following section will discuss the numerous programs proposed by the British eugenicists.

### ***Positive Eugenics Proposals***

While the philosophical underpinnings of the Eugenics Education Society shifted on the issue of 'positive eugenics', there were, nonetheless, nearly as many proposals for practical 'positive eugenics' programs as there were members supporting this line of eugenics. The proposals, which met with varying degrees of success and failure, could generally be consolidated as variations on a few themes: eugenic certificates, recruitment of professionals, financial incentives, education, opposition to war, positive population growth, and birth control. The methods proposed constitute both a promotion of 'positive eugenics' and a discouragement from actions detrimental to 'positive eugenics' - what one might call 'anti-positive eugenics'. The proposed measures often supported each other's objectives and, in some cases, were only viable as part of a network of supporting ideas. In addition, there were other proposed methods, such as providing adequate housing and improving other environmental conditions to advance the positive development of children.<sup>136</sup> It remains unclear whether these proposals were advocated under neo-Lamarckian assumptions or if they were part of a general social reform method to improve living conditions. In either case, however, these methods would not fall directly under the category of 'positive eugenics', but would fall under a sort of 'acquired-trait eugenics'.

### ***Eugenic Certificates***

Long before the inception of the Eugenics Education Society, Galton had been making his own proposals for 'positive eugenics'. In fact, his earliest proposals were all of a 'positive' nature. In the 1860s, while gathering data for his *Hereditary Genius* (1869), Galton formulated the idea of a registry for geniuses. His proposal was based on the underlying principle that intelligence is inherited - an idea he develops in this work.<sup>137</sup> He had been gathering lists of geniuses, their immediate ancestors, and those ancestors' occupations. If intelligence were inherited, then a register of all geniuses in Britain would yield a viable list from which 'positive eugenic' matches could be made. In a letter from 1873, Charles Darwin wrote to his

cousin, Francis Galton, that he questioned the feasibility of such a register. Darwin notes that “the greatest difficulty, I think, would be in deciding who deserved to be on the register.”<sup>138</sup> In conjunction with his registry, Galton proposed a system of marriage certificates which would be used to encourage people with top qualities to marry and have children. In an incomplete manuscript on race improvement *circa* 1888, Galton elaborates on the incorporation of marriage certificates into society. “Popular opinion would perhaps in time approve of the marriage of the certificated, and more or less condemn that of the clearly unfit. It is quite possible that then certificates might ultimately produce a decided effect in favourably modifying the present haphazard system of marriage.”<sup>139</sup> Galton again returned to this idea in a 1906 manuscript on ‘eugenic certificates’. This time certificates would be given out as social proof that one was “distinctly superior in Eugenic Gifts to the majority of those in a similar social position.”<sup>140</sup> Galton even goes so far as to list the conditions of awarding these certificates: that the awardees be men between 23 and 30 years of age from the educated classes, that accomplishments cited for awarding the certificates be on record and verifiable, and that consideration should also be given to the achievements of his immediate kin.<sup>141</sup> Though Galton’s proposals continually met with opposition regarding the subjectivity of such awards, a number of members in the Eugenics Education Society did support measures to supply health certificates to individuals before marriage in an effort to educate them as to their eugenic potential.<sup>142</sup> These proposals began appearing in the earliest days of the Eugenics Education Society and continued though the 1930s. To eschew criticism for lack of objectivity, the Society would need to establish a scientific method for determining whom to support with marriage certificates. To do so, they relied on the qualifications of professionals.

### **Recruitment of Professionals**

One of Leonard Darwin’s personal contributions to supporting ‘positive eugenics’ was his persistent recruiting of medical professionals as new members of the eugenics movement. While there had been numerous attempts by members of the Eugenics Society to propose that medical professionals should act as ‘negative eugenicists’, discouraging

dysgenic couples from marrying or having children, Darwin was particularly in favor of recruiting them as ‘positive eugenicists’. In a 1933 letter from Darwin to Blacker, Darwin espoused the importance of elevating the role of ‘positive eugenics’ in medicine writing, “We must teach the medical profession to be eugenic advisers, and not mere experts about defects, however important that side may be.”<sup>143</sup> Darwin felt that there was an imbalance in the perceived importance of ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenics by medical professionals, and that, if left to chance, ignoring ‘positive eugenics’ might do much harm to the overall effect of eugenics. In the 1930s, ‘health examinations before marriage’ became an objective under the heading ‘Positive Eugenics’ in the “Aims and Objects of the Eugenics Society”.<sup>144</sup> This was not the first time, however that the Eugenics Society had sought the involvement of professionals. In 1917, R.A. Fisher (1890-1962) had suggested that the Eugenics Education Society seek the assistance of the professional societies to measure eugenic fitness since they would have the authority and knowledge to decide who is ‘fit’ within their societies. Fisher, therefore, suggested that eugenicists would support the development of trade unions and professional societies.<sup>145</sup> Unfortunately for Fisher, his suggestion, while published in the *Eugenics Review*, did not receive support from the overall community.

### **Financial Incentives**

The most universally accepted and pursued proposals, which were also arguably the most successful, were those which supported financial incentives for ‘positive eugenic’ action. From the earliest days of the Eugenics Education Society, most members agreed that decreasing the financial burden of parenthood for the professional middle classes would stimulate the growth of that class. By his first Presidential Address in 1911, Leonard Darwin was already discussing its advantages for both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenic ends.<sup>146</sup> Again in his 1913 Presidential Address, Darwin noted that the Eugenics Education Society’s discussions had concluded that lowering taxes and raising wages would facilitate eugenic reform.<sup>147</sup> For many years following these discussions, members of the eugenics movement put forth significant efforts towards Income Tax reform, creation of ‘family allowances’, and

implementation of eugenic scholarships.

Since income tax was levied primarily on the middle classes, eugenicists theorized that reducing the rate of the tax would help finance child-rearing among the ‘fit’. Sybil Gotto, in a 1917 article in the *Eugenics Review* specifically claims that “income tax should be graded inversely to the size of the family.”<sup>148</sup> Generally, the Eugenics Education Society agreed with the sentiment that such tax breaks should only be offered for families. Their assurance to the lower classes was that unmarried men and women from the middle would shoulder the burden of the tax reductions for middle class families. Through this method, no further hardships would be put on the lower classes.<sup>149</sup> Not only would the Income Tax reform encourage marriage and reproduction, it would also reprimand members of the ‘professional middle class’ for remaining single or not having children. Furthermore, the early Income Tax reforms proposed to draw a distinction between inherited wealth and earned wealth so as to further favor those who obtain wealth through their own intellectual accomplishments.<sup>150</sup>

By the 1920s, the Income Tax reform measures had been altered, and another solution, ‘family allowance’, was gaining support. The strongest proponent of the ‘family allowances’ was its pioneer, the feminist campaigner, Eleanor Rathbone (1872-1946). In 1924, she published *The Disinherited Family* which argued that mothers should be paid directly and in proportion to the number of children they had. She claimed that women remained dependant as a result of all tax rebates being awarded to males. With regard to eugenics, Rathbone cites topics of interest to eugenicists such as birth rate, nationalism, and birth control, though she never mentions eugenics by name. She discusses their effects on the quantity and quality of births and sharply criticizes the propagandists who abuse these causes to distract the public from the facts of motherhood and the financial plight of women.<sup>151</sup> In her introductory essay to the reprinted edition of Rathbone’s work, Suzie Fleming examines Rathbone’s relationship with the eugenics movement stating that, in the “atmosphere that the widespread eugenics debate engendered, women generally used the terminology of eugenics to put their case, and Rathbone was no exception.”<sup>152</sup> In essence, she claims that Rathbone engaged in the

eugenics debate because that was the dominant language of the time for discussing reformist causes. Furthermore, Fleming describes Rathbone's distaste for "those eugenicists concerned at the falling birth rate as being politically motivated by the ambition that the Anglo-Saxon race should dominate the world."<sup>153</sup> Though her book made no mention of the eugenicists, she did attend Eugenics Education Society meetings. In 1925, Rathbone spoke to the Eugenics Society in support of increased government expenditures to achieve a 'living wage' as well as a 'family allowance' for skilled workers.<sup>154</sup> During the vigorous discussion following her talk, the 'family allowance' clearly comes out as a divisive topic among the eugenics community with one member exclaiming that "what we have heard put forward here, is what we have heard during the past twenty years" and with another member even accusing Rathbone of being a Socialist.<sup>155</sup>

Despite these conflicts, Income Tax reform and 'family allowances' made great legislative strides, and in 1928, R.A. Fisher wrote an article assessing the effects of the legislation. Although eugenicists had achieved the goals of Income Tax reform, restructured to proportionally offer rebates based on family size, Fisher reported that "In about thirty years, more or less, with our present birth-rate, whatever is worth keeping in the genetic potentialities of the upper and middle classes, in England and Scotland, will have been reduced to half its present quantity."<sup>156</sup> The problem, as Fisher assessed it, was that they had overestimated the influence of economics on 'positive eugenics'. Nevertheless, Fisher supported further measures to provide increased family allowances. Leonard Darwin, in a 1933 letter to Blacker, supported Fisher's efforts towards increased family allowances writing that "sixty years thought... has made me thoroughly agree with Galton in regarding the differentiated birth rate as a factor of the very highest importance; and I have argued strongly in favour of Fisher's view that family allowances constitute one of the most important ways of counteracting this danger if, but only if, framed on right lines."<sup>157</sup> He then ended the letter by criticizing Rathbone's lack of eugenic concern, stating that she seemed "only to seek eugenic help to push family allowances with social objects in view."<sup>158</sup>

Finally in 1936, the Positive Eugenics Committee found that "it would be a mistake of the first magnitude to suppose that no more is needed than to smooth the path to parenthood by removing the disabilities under which parents suffer. If married couples are to have children, they must desire them; they cannot be bribed into parenthood."<sup>159</sup> Despite this admission, the Eugenics Society again attempted to garner support for a program of financial incentives on behalf of 'positive eugenics'. A 'scholarship' proposal was put forth in 1946 which would pay parents who had two or three exceptional children to have a third or fourth child.<sup>160</sup> Blacker wrote that this new program came on the coattails of the Nazi eugenics program. He felt that for any British eugenics program to be successful it would have to be tactful and not relatable in any way to Nazi eugenics.<sup>161</sup> Distance from Nazi eugenics was not enough, however, and the new program found little support.

### Education

Another category of programs which seemed to receive perennial support from members of the Eugenics Education Society was 'positive eugenic' education. In Britain, where Parliament passed few legislative controls for eugenics, education and propaganda became key tools for the eugenics movement. Members of the Eugenics Education Society saw this method as essential to the success of both the 'positive' and the 'negative' means of eugenics. Their plan involved teaching young people both the principles of heredity and those specific to eugenics. They hoped that this would normalize eugenics and allow it to become a part of an everyday eugenic-mindedness of the entire population. Furthermore, they would encourage eugenic ideas, such as early marriage, spacing births, and having large families. In 1917, Sybil Gotto endorsed these measures, writing "The need for encouraging early marriage and parenthood among the *efficient* cannot be too strongly advocated."<sup>162</sup> Another member of the Eugenics Society, Byron S. Bramwell (1977-1949), described the importance of early marriage in a 1937 article for the *Eugenics Review*. He promoted marriage at a younger age for the professional classes noting that "even if no larger families resulted, the space between generations would be lessened and this would in the long run be a gain to the community."<sup>163</sup> This relatively passive measure would take countless generations to produce any quantifiable

results, a fact of which many members of the Eugenics Society were becoming keenly and disappointingly aware.

### Opposition to War

Not all 'positive eugenics' programs were designed to encourage the 'fit' to breed more. Some proposals, such as the opposition to war, discouraged measures which were dysgenic. This eugenic anti-war sentiment became particularly prominent during and immediately following the First World War. The position of many members of the Eugenics Education Society was that the best soldiers were placed on the line and because of their superior courage and physical abilities, often led the charges during war. In many cases the military rejected the 'unfit' from even participating in war, allowing them to remain behind and contribute their genes to future generations. As a result, those wounded soldiers who returned from the line represented the 'fit' in society and local communities were encouraged to recognize them as such, so they could marry and have children.<sup>164</sup> The Eugenics Society was particularly concerned that physical disfigurement from war might render the 'fittest' members of society unappealing to women. In the years leading up to World War II, opposition to war again became a position of the Eugenics Society. Versions of the "Aims and Objects of the Eugenics Society" from the 1930s described 'war' as "dysgenic - (1) because the persons most likely to be killed in wars are above the physical average: (2) because war and the prospects of war deter from parenthood parents who take into account the well-being of their children."<sup>165</sup> These sentiments were not shared by all members of the Eugenics Society, however. Following the inclusion of 'War' in the "Aims and Objects of the Eugenics Society", Dr. Langdon-Down presented a counter-opinion in a 1936 memorandum. His greatest fear regarding 'opposition to war' was that the Eugenics Society was spreading itself too thin and embracing too many causes "on which we claim no special right to speak" and "of which we can take no effective action as a body".<sup>166</sup> In a response letter to the Eugenics Society, D. Caradog Jones, a statistician at the University of Liverpool, wrote that "War is one of the major forces subject to human control that is capable of affecting the future population immediately and appreciably; for the flower of the human race, potential parents in the prime of their manhood, can be cut off by a great



war in the space of a comparatively few months. Therefore, I do not think the Society ought to shirk the issue of expressing an opinion upon the subject.”<sup>167</sup> The Eugenics Society publicly published ‘opposition to war’ as part of its objectives but there was never consensus among its members.

### **Positive Population Growth**

One of the fears that war added to the pre-existing alarm over population decline was that a generally lower British population might be vulnerable to destruction by invading forces. As a result the more patriotic eugenicists often endorsed a ‘positive population growth’. Though not entirely a ‘positive eugenic’ measure, supporters of ‘positive population growth’ often phrased their concerns in a nationalistic, ‘positive eugenic’ rhetoric. In his notes on a proposed ‘positive population’ policy by Eugenics Society member Alexander Carr-Saunders, Leonard Darwin described his reaction to the plan. “By a positive population policy is meant, I presume, a scheme aiming at an increase in numbers without any reference to quality. In contrast to this, a positive eugenic policy may be held to mean a scheme aiming at a relative increase in the numbers of those with superior natural endowments. If we hold that our race is superior to the black and the yellow races, a positive eugenic policy does on this account necessitate paying some attention to our total numbers.”<sup>168</sup> By expanding the scope of ‘population’ to include all people of the world, and not just the British population, the argument for ‘positive population growth’ essentially became an imperialistic form of ‘positive eugenics’. Most Eugenics Society members did not agree with this line of reasoning.

### **Birth Control**

A final ‘positive eugenic’ issue which was frequently a topic of debate among members of the Eugenics Society but on which the Eugenics Society rarely offered an official position was ‘birth control’. Soloway writes that Darwin avoided the issue of birth control through much of his presidency “helped by the knowledge that most of the men and women in the Eugenics Education Society still considered any public discussion of birth control distasteful.”<sup>169</sup> Birth control was not only a tricky issue because of its obvious political implications, but also because support for birth control constituted both a ‘negative eugenic’ measure

and an ‘anti-positive eugenic’ measure. Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) elaborated on this issue in a 1917 article describing birth control, from the eugenic point of view, as appearing dysgenic since it improves social conditions but presumably is implemented more by the intellectual class than the lower classes.<sup>170</sup> Whether or not eugenicists endorsed birth control was largely dependant upon their political views and upon which style of eugenics, ‘positive’ or ‘negative’, they felt held the greatest potential. In the 1930s, however, the “Aims and Objects of the Eugenics Society”, the Society endorsed birth control “by persons of superior biological endowment only with a view to spacing births”.<sup>171</sup> By spacing births, eugenicists believed that parents were offering the best chances for survival and development to each child. In this sense, birth control acted as both a tool of both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenics, and it often appeared under a separate heading for both styles in Eugenics Society literature.

### **Characterization of Practical Techniques**

One of the most striking aspects of the techniques proposed in support of ‘positive eugenics’ is the diversity with which it took form. Following the logic that the ‘professional middle classes’ contained the best genes, nearly all aspects of life affecting their reproductive ability could be argued in ‘positive eugenics’ terms. As Blacker wrote in his 1950 reflection on eugenics, “Certain antitheses or dualities of standpoint came to be revealed among those who had assimilated Darwin’s reasoning, and who were conscious of the eugenic and dysgenic possibilities confronting the human race.”<sup>172</sup> Among these divisions in eugenics, the most problematic with regard to ‘positive’ eugenics were the differences between (1) ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenics and the traits they considered, (2) direct and indirect eugenic influence, (3) compulsory and voluntary submission to eugenics, and (4) legislation and personal responsibility. Other dualities which had less bearing on ‘positive eugenics’ included authoritarian and liberal influence, class and race divisions, and the separation of theory from practice in eugenics.

### **‘Positive’ and ‘Negative’ Eugenics Overlap and Divergence**

The relationship between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenics changed between the

inception of eugenics and the end of the Second World War. Initially, ‘positive eugenics’ was Galton’s primary method for describing humanity’s potential to shape its own evolution. In the earliest days of the Eugenics Education Society, ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenics had roughly equal standing in the Society. Generally, eugenicists saw the two styles of eugenics as complementing each other. By eliminating the ‘unfit’, the ‘fit’ had more opportunity and resources to dedicate to their own reproduction. As the ‘fit’ increased the size of their gene pool, the ‘unfit’ had less genetic influence on future generations. However, whereas many of the ‘negative eugenics’ proposals could operate independently of each other and could affect future generations by action on a single individual, the ‘positive eugenics’ proposals often relied on working together as a united concept which produced slow change over a long period. This fact contributed to an overall trend towards ‘negative eugenics’. There remained fervent supporters of ‘positive eugenics’, and even those who supported ‘negative eugenics’ never particularly disliked ‘positive eugenics’, they simply saw it as a distraction from the more effective and immediate solution of ‘negative eugenics’. In 1917, Havelock Ellis presented his case for support of ‘positive eugenics’ through ‘negative eugenics’. “The two fundamental eugenic aims – more urgent to-day than they have ever been before – are to impede the production of bad stocks and to favour the production of good stocks. The prevention of bad stocks may be put first, not only because it is the most promising line of progress, but because in itself it indirectly, and even directly, favours the development of the good stocks.”<sup>173</sup> While this may appear to suggest that ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ eugenics remained on equal standing and that efficiency alone dictated a preference towards one over the other, Blacker recalled that “from the start, the idea of negative eugenics seemed to appeal to people of a certain temperament and outlook; that of positive eugenics to people otherwise constituted.”<sup>174</sup>

An important factor in the eventual divergence of ‘positive eugenics’ and ‘negative eugenics’ may have been the traits their supporters investigated. As Kevles notes, an underlying principle that determined which traits eugenicists considered was that “heredity determined not simply physical characteristics but

temperament and behavior.”<sup>175</sup> Still, eugenics largely based its analysis of ‘fit’ and ‘unfit’ upon statistical studies which determined average, below average, and above average ranges for traits. For this reason, Leonard Darwin remarked that “No doubt the ability to make a good living is not the most important of human qualities; but it is important, and moreover it is found to be associated with other good qualities.”<sup>176</sup> In addition, ‘ability to make a good living’ was quantifiable. By removing ‘inherited wealth’ and focusing solely on earned income, Darwin suggested that one could quantify the ‘fit’. Unfortunately for Darwin, many liberal eugenicists disagreed with his pro-capitalist assessment of the ‘fit’. In 1949, Blacker wrote that “sound physical health, intelligence, social usefulness, freedom from genetic taints, and philoprogenitiveness are five desirable qualities. Of these, intelligence is the only one which is accurately measurable.”<sup>177</sup> Disregarding the degree to which intelligence was accurately measureable, the physically and mentally ‘defective’ traits examined by ‘negative eugenics’ were simply more identifiable and more quantifiable than those examined under ‘positive eugenics’.

#### ***Direct and Indirect***

Another stylistic difference among ‘positive eugenics’ proposals was between those which acted directly to increase the population of the ‘fit’ and those which indirectly acted on the causes preventing the ‘fit’ from breeding. In 1917, Fisher’s article “Positive Eugenics” amounted to an endorsement of the problem that getting people to breed is harder than getting them to not breed.<sup>178</sup> Apart from ‘education’ and the issuance of ‘health certificates’ which might be considered a direct method of ‘positive eugenics’, the other major categories of ‘positive eugenics’, the concept of financial incentives, opposition to war, and restriction of birth control, all acted indirectly to remove barriers preventing the propagation of ‘fit’ genes. At the same time most of the ‘negative eugenics’ programs acted directly to prevent the ‘unfit’ from breeding. For this reason, ‘positive eugenics’ may have appeared less effective.

#### ***Compulsory and Voluntary***

An important distinction between British eugenics and American or

German eugenics, which was especially relevant to ‘positive eugenics’, was the Eugenics Society’s view of compulsory and voluntary programs. Since the beginning of the Eugenics Education Society, its members had repeatedly included some form of the qualifier “being careful not to endorse compulsion” when discussing legislative measures for eugenics.<sup>179</sup> Charles Drysdale, in 1922, likened compulsion to the German Race Hygienists, remarking that if replicated in Britain, it “would damn the Eugenic movement.”<sup>180</sup> The British eugenics movement struggled to express ‘negative eugenics’ in practicable voluntary terms. Conversely, ‘positive eugenics’ proposals were typically voluntary both in Britain and abroad. In his analysis of Britain’s Inter-War voluntary sterilization proposal, MacNicol identifies the impetus for a voluntary, rather than the more effective involuntary, programme as coming from a pursuit of ideology over practicality.<sup>1</sup>

#### ***Legislation and Personal Responsibility***

A final characterization of the practical ‘positive eugenics’ techniques is that they tended towards reliance on personal responsibility rather than legislation. This issue might be seen as an extension of the compulsory/voluntary issue. In general the British eugenics movement relied more heavily than elsewhere on the belief that its citizens wanted to be responsible and would fulfill their duty to race development if asked. In the United States and Germany, where ‘negative eugenics’ took stronger root, legislation provided for coercive eugenics. In her 1917 article, Gotto credited the war with initiating a resurgence of duty and responsibility in the British population, thus allowing eugenics to move forward without the necessity of legislation.<sup>182</sup> They found, however, that appealing to a sense of moral duty simply wasn’t an effective ‘negative eugenics’ campaign measure. Conversely, it was the only direct measure in support of ‘positive eugenics’. The Eugenics Society did support indirect legal measures towards eugenics ends, such as the proposed legislation for financial reforms which began in 1917 with discussions in Parliament and continued through the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>183</sup> They also monitored other parliamentary bills and editorialized their opinions through the newspapers.<sup>184</sup> Legislation was never a significant part of the Eugenics Society’s objectives, however.

#### ***‘Positive Eugenics’ and Other Societies and Movements***

While the Eugenics Education Society itself generally retained organizational distance from other Societies and movements, its membership often contained a great deal of overlap. In some cases the eugenics movement was the secondary affiliation of members. These underlying cross-movement affiliations contributed greatly to the divisions in motive, goal, and endorsement of proposed eugenic actions discussed by the Eugenics Education Society. Some historians, such as Soloway, have suggested that the members of the Eugenics Society took a negative view towards institutional involvement with other societies, however it seems that the general sentiment of the eugenicists was that as the two causes were not in conflict with one another, eugenics might prosper from their relationship.<sup>185</sup> In fact, some members felt that involvement with other societies would allow them to infuse eugenic ideas into the theoretical basis for other causes. Fisher, for example, wrote that, “There is scarcely any movement of social life with which the eugenic movement is not closely concerned and in which understanding eugenic principles does not give a deeper insight and a more lively interest. Particularly is this the case with what has come to be called Positive Eugenics.”<sup>186</sup> When Blacker set out to form a Joint Committee to deal with the problems of ‘positive eugenics’ around 1937, he proposed a list of about twenty organizations which the Eugenics Society might approach for help.<sup>187</sup>

Among the most significant societies with overlapping goals and membership were the Malthusians and the public sanitation and hygiene movement. One of the earliest movements with which the eugenicists found noteworthy overlap was the Malthusian League. Individuals with an interest in declining birthrate regularly participated in both Societies. They both believed in controlled population growth, but where the Malthusians were concerned more with the resources of population growth, the eugenicists were concerned with the genetic health of the population. Neither Society objected to a controlled increase in the population through ‘positive eugenics’. Likewise the sanitation reform movement shared membership as well as overlapping goals with the eugenicists. In 1913, Leonard Darwin compared the campaign for eugenic reform to sanitation reform,

stating that what social reformers have done for people's environment, the eugenicists were doing for their genetics.<sup>188</sup> This relationship was not always convivial, however. As 'negative eugenics' took stronger hold in the Eugenics Society more of its members saw sanitation reform as contributing to the growth of the lower classes.

A more tentative and often strained relationship formed between the eugenicists and the feminists, the birth control movement, and the political left. At times the eugenics movement seemed to support feminism and at other times it rejected feminist ideals. MacKenzie describes the conflicting opinions as a desire to have women "return to their traditional roles and stop 'shirking' motherhood" on the one hand, and a desire for the benefits of financial independence in women which would allow them to select a father for their children based on biological, rather than financial, superiority.<sup>189</sup> Likewise, the feminists at times supported and at times rejected the theories of eugenics. In 1920, for example, an article by the League for the Removal of the Tax on Marriage appeared in the *Daily Express* calling on feminists to oppose the 'tax on marriage' which was creating financial hardships for women and would-be mothers.<sup>190</sup> This article along with an explanatory letter was sent by the League's organizer, Marie C. Stopes (1880-1958), to the Eugenics Education Society asking them to circulate the article to their membership since their stance was "essentially a eugenic proposition to protect the middle class against this iniquitous interference with their likelihood of having means to support children."<sup>191</sup>

Perhaps a more significant role played by Stopes was as proponent of birth control through the National Birth Control Association, which also saw significant overlap in membership with the eugenicists. Stopes approached birth control as a result of her previous involvement in the Eugenics Society and the Malthusian League, as the common problem these organizations faced was differential birth rates and overpopulation.<sup>192</sup> Concerning her views towards 'positive' and 'negative' eugenics, Soloway writes, "While she certainly promoted positive eugenic policies encouraging the most highly evolved men and women to increase the number of their progeny, she was also one of a growing number of eugenicists who

vigorously advocated new policies of negative eugenics based upon sterilisation, and, far more important, birth control."<sup>193</sup> As an indication of the position taken by the majority of the Eugenics Society, Stopes was considered a controversial figure, not because of her endorsement of compulsory programs, but because of her endorsement of birth control. In the 1930s, a number of attempts were made to "establish a basis of agreement between National Birth Control Association and the Eugenics Society."<sup>194</sup> They agreed upon common positions, such as the national birth rate in the UK was continually declining, a lower and more controlled population in England would be optimal, and contraception information should be more available for the purposes of spacing births, aiding women's health, and informing economically and hereditarily unfit parents. It did not, however, elicit much agreement among members of the Eugenics Society. In a 1936 letter to Blacker, eugenicist and committee on birth control member Stella Churchill expressed her dissatisfaction with the one-sidedness of the relationship between the movements by writing that "I have visited a great many birth control clinics which are presumably connected with this organisation. I have not usually found much, if any, eugenic teaching at such clinics, and I think if any amalgamation is to take place this aspect should be discussed."<sup>195</sup> Though such conflicts over birth control punctuated Stopes' involvement with the Eugenics Society, she remained a life-long member, never wavering in her support for birth control.

One group of eugenicists with whom the birth control movement found favor was the liberals and the political leftists. This group also contained some of the strongest support for 'positive eugenics'. Kevles characterizes "the most vigorous advocates of positive eugenics in the United States and Britain after the turn of the century" as "social radicals, many of them inclined to utopian visions."<sup>196</sup> They surmised that as long as economic factors and the class system governed society, a biologically based eugenics program would remain corrupted. Some members of this faction supported 'negative eugenics' and others condemned it, however nearly all of them supported 'positive eugenics'.

A perpetual thorn in the side of the eugenics movement, religious groups, particularly the Catholic Church, con-

summately condemned eugenics. While this was the official position of the Church, eugenicists often argued that local clergy were not all so quick to dismiss eugenics. In fact, the Eugenics Education Society at times attempted to use religious rhetoric to convert the faithful to the eugenic point of view. In a 1920 article in the *Eugenics Review*, an appeal on religious terms was made. "Ethically, eugenicists claim that the motto of Christianity, that we should do to others as we would be done by, should be interpreted as having application also to our relations with future generations, our duty to which ought to influence in many ways the dispositions we make in the present."<sup>197</sup> It is questionable whether the argument, phrased in this manner, ever convinced anyone from either side.

### *Objections to 'Positive Eugenics'*

Disregarding the opinions of outside organizations, members from within the Eugenics Society suggested many of their own objections to 'positive eugenics'. When Leonard Darwin first set out to lay groundwork for the 'positive eugenics' program as President of the Eugenics Education Society, he was clear in identifying it as a long-term method of eugenics. Preemptively confronting the concerns of doubters in his 1913 address "The Eugenic Ideal", Darwin rhetorically questioned what is ideal and how long it will take to see eugenic effects. He responded, "The better plan is rather to copy the example set by Nature, and to advance by one small step at a time, thus ensuring that some little racial progress will certainly be made as generation succeeds generation."<sup>198</sup> While he sustained the patience necessary to wait many generations for results, many members of the Eugenics Society began to feel disillusioned by the lack of immediate results from 'positive eugenics'. The opposition to 'positive eugenics' rose out of the very questions he was hoping to avoid by his address: What constituted ideal? and How long before there would be results? In addition, 'positive eugenics' had to contend with the rising appeal of 'negative eugenics' and development of a new scientific faction of eugenics which rejected the claims of 'positive eugenics'.

The question of what 'fit' meant had plagued the eugenics movement since Charles Darwin first responded to Galton's proposal of a register for geniuses in 1873. In an attempt to clarify the meaning of 'fit' for the nascent

Eugenics Education Society, Montague Crackanthorpe wrote in 1908, "By the 'right people' I mean not those who, in Herbert Spencer's phrase, are the 'fittest to survive,' but those who give the most promise of 'civic worth,' that is to say, will be most likely to be at once useful to themselves in the way of enjoyment and self-support, and also useful to the community at large."<sup>199</sup> The nominal amount of clarification ascertained by this redefinition of 'fit' did nothing to assuage doubters. Searle reports on the much more straightforward response by Saleeby in 1909. "Thus, a common view among eugenicists was that again expressed by Saleeby: 'we may not know what worth is, but we can all recognize "unworth"; hence, it was better to concentrate on 'negative eugenics'."<sup>200</sup> This common sentiment, that it was easier to identify and quantify 'unfit' traits, led to a general assumption that 'negative eugenics' would be simpler to enact than 'positive eugenics'. Equally problematic for proponents of 'positive eugenics' was the timescale on which it operated. Best estimates by geneticists suggested that several generations of selective breeding would be required to produce a positive effect in the overall population. The concept of waiting a couple of hundred or thousand years for results was a hard sell, even by the most gifted of propagandists.

Among those who supported 'negative eugenics' over 'positive eugenics' there was a fundamental belief that eugenics should behave as a rational method for rebalancing 'natural selection'. As Drysdale described in his 1922 article for the *Eugenics Review*, evolution acts in nature based on the principles of 'negative eugenics'.<sup>201</sup> Furthermore, he claimed that eugenic theorists had insufficient knowledge to pursue a meaningful 'positive eugenics' program.<sup>202</sup> When evidence of a continually declining population was found, despite the efforts of 'positive eugenics' to educate the 'fit', it further justified the argument against its effectiveness. Most members of the Society sought a more immediate solution in 'negative eugenics'.

By the 1930s, a new faction was gaining prominence in the Society. The group was primarily made up of geneticists from the left whose biological studies had shown environment to have more influence on behavior than eugenicists had previously believed. With that

in mind, they proposed an increasing political distance from capitalism, which they felt corrupted the influence of biology in eugenic studies, and they largely dismissed 'positive eugenics' as being less biologically significant. As early as the late 1910s, geneticists like R.A. Fisher compared their role in the eugenics movement to separating quacks from physicians, in essence bringing professionalism and science to eugenics.<sup>203</sup> Leaders of this movement such as Lancelot Hogben (1895-1975) and Julian Huxley (1887-1975) feared that ethnic, racial, and class differentiation were at the basis of the mainstream movement and that these divisions had little to do with genetic differences.<sup>204</sup> Kevles identifies the impact of their ideas within the eugenics movement. "The knowledge they injected into public discourse combined with the lay dissent to form a corrosive and increasingly effective case against the authority of mainline eugenics."<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, they effectively eliminated any chance for political eugenics action by either 'negative' or 'positive' measures.

## Conclusion

During and following World War II, opposition to 'positive eugenics' rose and as it got pushed to the periphery of the eugenics movement, British citizens banished the eugenic movement to the periphery of social action. Since the first eugenics investigations, however, 'positive eugenics' was a part of the eugenic theory and, throughout the Eugenics Education Society's history, it played a large role in shaping its policies and objectives. If nothing else, most members of the Society followed the philosophy that 'every bit helps', and as Soloway writes, "To a person who believed human heredity was an incremental process, even a slight shift in the qualitative contribution to future generations would in time prove to be statistically and, consequently, biologically significant."<sup>206</sup> The patience required to pursue these results, however, was not a virtue many members of the Eugenics Society possessed.

This dissertation has shed light upon the largely hidden effect that 'positive eugenics' has had on the British eugenics movement. In doing so, it has revealed that 'positive eugenics' was broader and more diverse than it has previously been given credit. This dissertation has

identified some of the reasons that 'positive eugenics' was more prolific in Britain than elsewhere. There was a great deal of flexibility in its programs, so that they could graft onto other social movements fairly easily. Confusion over the aims and objectives of the Eugenics Education Society led to more opportunity for the proposal of 'positive eugenics' programs. The minimal amount of legislation and interest in coercive practices supported 'positive eugenics' as it was generally of a voluntary nature.

At the same time, 'positive eugenics', while more successful in Britain, was generally not a successful tactic. Reasons for this include the difficulty of identifying ideal traits, the slow progression of 'positive eugenics', an increasing appeal of 'negative eugenics', and a reduced view of the effectiveness of 'positive eugenics' based on biological findings. Partly because it was unsuccessful, it has escaped evaluation by many historians. The subtlety of the programs may have contributed to its hidden influence. Its programs relied mainly on indirect methods of affecting the reproductive rate of the 'fit'. For example, what could historically be viewed as Income Tax reform was, to eugenicists, removal of a financial barrier to encouraging more children in middle class families. It was less obvious when 'positive eugenics' was being implemented and it was largely discussed internally by eugenicists rather than by the general public, as 'negative eugenics' was. Finally, 'positive eugenics' relied on a sense of personal responsibility and moral duty, a position which could easily be dismissed by those opposed to eugenics. In the first half of the twentieth century in Britain, eugenics formed a biological and social paradigm for its followers, and 'positive eugenics' was one aspect of this paradigm.

## *Limitations of This Dissertation and Areas of Future Research*

Given a greater length of time to conduct research, there are numerous personal collections which might prove valuable to the study of 'positive eugenics'. One of the difficulties of this study was to determine the general opinions of the Eugenics Society. They attempted to provide a voice for any eugenic-minded discussion, even for those on the fringe and those who disagreed with eugenic theories. Consequently, it became difficult to determine which opinions were well received by the eugenics community and which were dismissed

quickly. This was complicated by the fact that the Eugenics Education Society officially pursued very few proposals. Perhaps by viewing the personal papers of other influential eugenicists such as R.A. Fisher, Lancelot Hogben, Julian Huxley, and others, one could make a more well-rounded assessment of 'positive eugenics'. An additional difficulty of this project was to determine the national influence of the Eugenics Society in Britain. The *Eugenics Review*, while a profound source for eugenic writings, only provides the view of the Eugenics Society. Research conducted on articles from newspapers may provide an avenue for determining the public's overall awareness of 'positive eugenics'.

Apart from the above-mentioned solutions to the limitations of this article's research, there are two areas which hold particularly significant potential for future research. Based on the findings of this article, 'positive eugenics' may have been much more prominent around the world than is given credit. Because of its subtle and indirect nature, it may have been part of the paradigm behind many turn-of-the-century social reform movements in the world. A comparative study of 'positive eugenics' in Britain and abroad may yield significant results regarding the pervasiveness of 'positive eugenics' in worldwide eugenic practices.

Another area of potential research is the place of 'positive eugenics' in modern bioethical debates. As described in the introduction of this article with the advances in genetics and biotechnology, eugenics has found resurgence in bioethical debates. As Robert Sinsheimer explains, "Today there is much talk about the possibility of human genetic modification – of designed genetic change, specifically of mankind. A new eugenics has arisen, based upon the dramatic increase in our understanding of the biochemistry of heredity and our comprehension of the craft and means of evolution."<sup>207</sup> Even more recently Mai and Angerami have raised questions of whether we can separate the strictly biological from the social implications of such genetic studies.<sup>208</sup> They claim that the advent of improved genetics and biotechnology brings new meanings to eugenics. "A possibilidade de intervenção direta sobre o patrimônio genético traz novos significados e contradições ao debate em torno da eugenia [The possibility of direct intervention over genetic

heritage brings new significance and contradictions to the debate of eugenics".<sup>209</sup> This is an area in which 'positive eugenics', in particular, might have the potential for providing greater insight than it has yet.

**Anthony J. Dellureficio** is an American who has previously worked at the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in the US. His personal interests have long been in the scientific and social work of H.J. Muller, one of the few American 'positive eugenicists'. Anthony believes that Muller developed his theories through meetings with his friend Julian Huxley who was, of course, a Vice-President of The Eugenics Society. Anthony has just taken up the post of Systems Librarian for The New School in lower Manhattan. The School was founded as a specialty school in social sciences by British Fabians in the early 1900's and became well known for bringing over European scholars during World War II to what was called the 'University in Exile'.

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