

EUGENICS AND PROGRESSIVE THOUGHT: A STUDY IN IDEOLOGICAL AFFINITY

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I

The issues raised by eugenics are of more than passing interest for the student of political thought. In itself a minor offshoot of turn-of-the-century socio-biological thought which never achieved ideological 'take-off' in terms of influence or circulation, there was certainly more in eugenics than nowadays meets the eye. The following pages propose to depart from the over-simplistic identification of eugenics, as political theory, with racism or ultra-conservatism¹ and to offer instead two alternative modes of interpretation. On the one hand, eugenics will be portrayed as an exploratory avenue of the social-reformist tendencies of early-twentieth-century British political thought. On the other, it will serve as a case-study illustrating the complexity and overlapping which characterize most modern ideologies. While recognizing, of course, the appeal of eugenics for the 'right', a central question pervading the forthcoming analysis will be the attraction it had for progressives of liberal and socialist persuasions,² with the ultimate aim of discovering the fundamental affinities the 'left' had, and may still have, with this type of thinking.

Some difficulties relating to the definition of the field already point to ensuing problems. The coiner of the term 'eugenics', Francis Galton, who established it as a specific area of study with scientific aspirations, defined it as 'the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally'.³ This definition was, however, only arrived at after lengthy debates by a committee that included Karl Pearson, the biometrician. Galton himself had preferred a definition he had forwarded during the first large-scale discussion of eugenics under the auspices of the newly

¹ See, for example, J. B. S. Haldane, 'Eugenics and social reforms', *Nation*, 31 May 1924; Ashley Montagu, *Man's most dangerous myth: the fallacy of race* (5th edn, New York, 1974), p. 236.

² I am using the term 'progressive' as an abbreviation for liberal social reformers and moderate socialists, while recognizing that they are not an ideologically monolithic group.

³ F. Galton, *Memories of my life* (London, 1908), p. 321; D. W. Forrest, *Francis Galton: the life and work of a Victorian genius* (London, 1974), p. 260.

established Sociological Society, at the London School of Economics in 1904: '...the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race; also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage'.⁴ The difference between the two definitions had significant bearing upon the ideological debates that shortly began to vitiate the scientific standing of this new branch of inquiry, and a number of commentators 'unearthed' the latter definition, which suited their inclinations better. It included within eugenics nurture or environment as well as nature or heredity and consequently appealed to those who preferred what may broadly be termed the socialist⁵ or new liberal point of view, with its stress on the social and (to a lesser extent) physical surroundings which mould human nature.

As against categorical statements, such as Pearson's, that the influence of environment was one fifth or one tenth that of heredity,⁶ two basic claims were opposed. The first made much of the perception of society as a complex originating in social transmission,⁷ but as this argument ignores the question of eugenics as such it is outside the scope of this article. The second – continuing the late-nineteenth-century debate – stressed the relative weight of environment in comparison to heredity. Havelock Ellis spoke of 'a real underlying harmony' of the two.⁸ The biologist J. A. Thomson, also an active eugenicist, referred – when delivering the second Galton lecture in 1915 – to the 'pruning shears... in the hands of the environment' and summed up: 'As eugenicists we are concerned with the natural inheritance and its nature, which is fundamental, as men we are also concerned with our social heritage, which is supreme.'⁹ Most progressive eugenicists, however, carried their argument a great deal further. In the words of one of them, S. Herbert: '... we have the environment acting, as it were, like a sieve, separating the fit from the unfit and selecting those who are best adapted to their surroundings. Every change of environment necessarily alters the incidence of selection, the type of the survivors in each instance being determined by the survival-value.'¹⁰ This was developed by Julian Huxley, who not only decried the antagonism between the environmentalist and the eugenicist but later came to hold emphatically that genetic improvement 'can only be realized in a certain kind of social environment, so that eugenics is

⁴ F. Galton, 'Eugenics: its definition, scope and aims', *Sociological Papers* (London, 1905), p. 45.

⁵ In the non-doctrinaire sense. See M. Freeden, *The new liberalism: an ideology of social reform* (Oxford, 1978), ch. II.

⁶ K. Pearson, *Nature and nurture: The problem of the future* (London, 1910), p. 27.

⁷ See L. T. Hobhouse, *Social evolution and political theory* (New York, 1911), p. 54.

⁸ H. Ellis, 'Individualism and socialism', *Contemporary Review*, CI (1912), 526. Reprinted with revisions in H. Ellis, *The task of social hygiene* (London, 1912).

⁹ J. A. Thomson, 'Eugenics and war', the second Galton lecture, *Eugenics Review*, VII (1915), 6, 14.

¹⁰ S. Herbert, 'Eugenics and socialism', *Eugenics Review*, II (1910), 122.

inevitably a particular aspect of the study of man in society'.¹¹ Elsewhere he succinctly summed up the two factors of environment: 'We can alter the expression of those inborn qualities which exist, and we can alter the selection which presses differently on different genetic types in different environments.'¹² C. W. Saleeby – perhaps the best-known propagandist and popularizer of eugenics for over twenty years – raised the issue in a series of articles in the *New Statesman* (writing under the pseudonym 'Lens'). To counter the objection to including nurture within eugenics he not only invoked Galton's 1904 definition but observed simply: 'we desire not fine germ-cells, but fine human beings'.¹³ And the *New Statesman's* founder, Sidney Webb, had already written in 1910, in a sympathetic reference to eugenics, that its object was 'not merely to produce fine babies but to ensure the ultimate production of fine adults'. Therefore 'we cannot afford to leave... bad environment alone... The "survival of the fittest" in an environment unfavourable to progress may... mean the survival of the lowest parasite.' The typical and all-applicable Webbian conclusion was in effect the assimilation of eugenics into the following formula: 'It is accordingly our business, as eugenicists, *deliberately to manipulate the environment* so that the survivors may be of the type which we regard as the highest.'¹⁴ H. J. Laski, too, in an article published when he was only seventeen, had praised eugenics while precociously reminding his readers that: 'Man cannot be separated from his environment, and it is well that we should render it as healthy as we can.'¹⁵

These views certainly do not bear out the sole association of eugenics with an extreme 'anti-environmentalism' – whose position was, as the psychologist J. M. Cattell wrote: 'If the congenital equipment of an individual should prescribe completely what he will accomplish in life, equality of opportunity, education and social reform would be of no significance.'¹⁶ The many progressives who understood that to be the eugenic viewpoint were appalled by the idea that, in the words of the liberal weekly *Nation*, eugenics conceived of social justice as self-defeating because social justice allowed the multiplication of the least worthy members of a society. Consequently, 'the danger of the inverted view is that social reforms destined to the noblest objects of succouring the weak and caring for the backward in the race may be thwarted by the argument that the loser has himself to blame, and that it is his stock that

¹¹ J. Huxley, 'The case for eugenics', *Sociological Review*, xviii (1926), 289; 'Eugenics and society', *Eugenics Review*, xxviii (1936), 13.

¹² 'Eugenics, socialism and capitalism', *Eugenics Review*, xxvii (1935), 113. J. Huxley in debate at members' meeting.

¹³ Lens, 'Imperial eugenics, V. nurtural eugenics', *New Statesman*, 26 Feb. 1916, p. 489.

¹⁴ S. Webb, 'Eugenics and the poor law: the minority report', *Eugenics Review*, II (1910), 235-7. Italics in original.

¹⁵ H. J. Laski, 'The scope of eugenics', *Westminster Review*, CLXXIV (1910), 30.

¹⁶ Quoted in W. E. Castle, *Genetics and eugenics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1916), p. 266.

should be extirpated'.¹⁷ Saleeby felt called upon to dissociate himself from such characterizations and expressed the hope that: 'Time and truth will rescue eugenics from its present state as a class movement and a cover for selfish opposition to social reform.'¹⁸ In sum, for many adherents of eugenics environmental reform was at the very least a complementary, and often integral and essential, component of the eugenic outlook. It was thus, as will be clarified below, not too far a step to proceed from a eugenics that insisted upon extensive social reform to a social reformist perspective that utilized, among others, physical and racial improvement to realize its vision of a good society.

Other fissures in the eugenicist ideology would further corroborate the existence of pluralistic elements which eventually led off in different directions. Indeed, in one sphere the British variant of eugenics rarely displayed tendencies manifest in its European, especially German, and even American counterparts. This was on the question of the breeding of a single type of superman. Not only popular, but some scientific opinion as well, often regarded eugenics as aiming at moulding 'the whole human race . . . into a homogeneous society which shall progress toward a standard, previously determined, of a noble humanity'.¹⁹ Images of 'stud-farms' in which men would be bred like cattle abounded. Alternatively, Bernard Shaw, whose written and dramatized eccentricities caused much alarm, entered a plea to save democracy by creating a Democracy of Supermen.²⁰ However, as Havelock Ellis remarked, whereas men bred animals solely to secure advantages to the breeders, 'there is as yet no race of super-men, who are prepared to breed man for their own special ends'.²¹

Indeed, most British eugenicists would have rejected out of hand the 'Prussian glorification of the "blonde beast"'.²² Already in 1915, J. A. Lindsay expressed his opinion that the Nietzschean superman was contrary to the teachings of biology, for genius was a rare mutation not under scientific control.²³ As Huxley made quite clear:

No eugenicist in his senses ever has suggested or ever would suggest that one particular type or standard should be picked out as desirable, and all other types

¹⁷ 'The dangers of eugenics', *Nation*, 13 Mar. 1909.

¹⁸ Lens, 'Imperial eugenics, VI. The racial prospect', *New Statesman*, 4 Mar. 1916, p. 516. See also Lens, 'Two decades of eugenics', *New Statesman*, 17 May 1924, pp. 154-5.

¹⁹ L. T. More, 'The scientific claims of eugenics', *Hibbert Journal*, XIII (1914-15), 355.

²⁰ G. Bernard Shaw, *Man and superman: The revolutionist's handbook and perfect companion* (London, 1971), pp. 751, 755. Even eugenicists regarded his support with unease. Galton wrote to Pearson on 26 Feb. 1910: 'Bernard Shaw is about to give a lecture to the Eugenics Education Society. It is to be hoped that he will be under self-control and not be too extravagant' (K. Pearson, *The life, letters and labours of Francis Galton* (3 vols., Cambridge, 1930), III, 427). His fears were founded, for Shaw caused a furore in the press, which responded with sensational headlines about free love and lethal chambers.

²¹ H. Ellis, 'Eugenics and St Valentine', *Nineteenth Century*, LIX (1906), 780-1.

²² See editorial comment, *Eugenics Review*, XII (1920), 40, quoting from Dr C. G. Seligman.

²³ J. A. Lindsay, 'Eugenics and the doctrine of the super-man', *Eugenics Review*, VII (1915), 258-61.

discouraged or prevented from having children... it takes all kinds to make a world... It will be time enough after a thousand or ten thousand years of this to look into further questions such as the precise proportion of poets, physicists, and politicians desired in a community, or the combination of a number of different desirable qualities in one human frame.²⁴

Leonard Darwin, the long-time president of the Eugenics Society and fourth son of Charles, observed that 'we should now, and perhaps for ever, abandon the hope of creating a superman'.²⁵ In fact, by the late 1920s an important element in the eugenic creed had become 'the improvement of the whole population, not... any one section of it'. Eugenics was recognizing 'the paramount importance of the great mass of the more or less mediocre and the relative insignificance, in a eugenic sense, of the small minorities of the extreme types; the eminently superior and the abjectly inferior'.²⁶ A. M. Carr-Saunders, the population expert and member of the Eugenics Society, explained that positive eugenics – the promotion of the propagation of desirable types, was 'not an attempt to breed a race of supermen, but to raise the fertility of those who are not definitely subnormal until at least they replace themselves'.²⁷ All this is not, of course, to deny that class eugenics, in the sense of securing the predominance of a specific social group or cultural type, was a central motif (though, as shall be seen below, definitely not alone in the field). Rather, this is a dismissal of the myth that eugenics aimed at the creation of a dominant race of men with unassailable qualities that would bring with it a solution to the problems of humanity.

What, then, was the ideal of British eugenicists? No doubt, a good number of them had clear-cut notions about the attributes of a socially desirable type, which would correspond to those of the respectable, solid, middle-class citizen, with an extra dose of health for good measure. The influential conservative churchman, publicist and eugenicist Dean Inge envisaged a new nobility with 'rules for health, rules of intellectual culture, rules of honourable and heroic conduct... [and] a somewhat austere standard of living' – something of a transmutation of the Protestant ethic! Typical of the conservative eugenicists was his remark: 'We certainly do not want a society so plethoric in altruistic virtue, and so lean in other goods, that every citizen wishes for nothing better than to be a sick-nurse to somebody else.'²⁸

But, again, not all eugenicists were prepared to regard with equanimity the advent of these new Victorians. As one progressive eugenicist

²⁴ J. Huxley, 'The vital importance of eugenics', *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, CLXIII (1931), 330-1.

²⁵ L. Darwin, 'The future of our race: Heredity and social progress', *Eugenics Review*, XVI (1924), 96-7.

²⁶ R. Austin Freeman, 'Segregation of the fit: a plea for positive eugenics', *Eugenics Review*, XXIII (1931), 207.

²⁷ A. M. Carr-Saunders, 'Eugenics in the light of population trends', *Eugenics Review*, XXVII (1935), 11-12.

²⁸ W. R. Inge, 'Some moral aspects of eugenics', *Eugenics Review*, I (1909), 32, 28.

commented, 'we cannot know what types ought to survive until we know individually what surroundings they live in'.²⁹ Others dissociated themselves from an obvious class definition of characteristics, and between the wars this had become the rule, as may be seen from the preference of C. P. Blacker – a future secretary of the Eugenics Society – for qualities such as good health, vitality, intelligence, character and psychological robustness over wealth or social position.³⁰ A group of leading biologists of the 1930s, including Crew, Darlington, Haldane, Hogben, Huxley, Needham, Dobzhansky and Waddington, came up in a statement entitled 'Social biology and population improvement' with a specification quite opposed to Inge's:

The most important genetic objectives, from a social point of view, are the improvement of those genetic characteristics which make (a) for health, (b) for the complex called intelligence, and (c) for those temperamental qualities which favour fellow-feeling and social behaviour rather than those (to-day most esteemed by many) which make for personal 'success', as success is usually understood at present.³¹

This last item displays an unmistakable bias towards the progressive ideology that liberals and socialists had been espousing from the turn of the century, but did not contradict eugenic ideas then current.

II

Having established certain divergences of opinion on eugenic principles, we can now proceed to examine the main issue – the compatibility of eugenics and socialist, social-reformist and social-liberal thought. To put it bluntly, the question is – how could a socialism stressing environmental influences and devoted to the doctrine of the inherent equality of man, how could a social reform policy whose intention was to preserve the weaker elements of society, and how could a liberalism which emphasized the right of every man to attain free and maximal development and which regarded questions of procreation as entirely private, cohabit with eugenics? The obvious answer would be that they could not and, as a rule, did not. Yet what is interesting is the exception rather than the rule, for in establishing which elements of the progressive ideologies were able to assimilate eugenics, we may both be able to understand some of their characteristics better and to estimate the chances for eugenic views to resurface, once the trauma of Nazism abates.

²⁹ J. Lionel Tayler, 'The social application of eugenics', *Westminster Review*, CLXX (1908), 418–20.

³⁰ C. W. Saleeby, *Parenthood and race culture* (London, 1909), p. 230; M. Eden Paul, *Socialism and eugenics* (London, 1911), p. 13; C. P. Blacker, 'Citizenship and eugenics', *Journal of State Medicine*, XLII (1934), 135.

³¹ 'Social biology and population improvement', statement printed in *Nature*, 16 Sept. 1939, pp. 521–2.

There are basically three claims to be made about the relationship between social-reformist and socialist tendencies on the one hand and eugenics on the other, claims that may be placed in an ascending order. First, it was possible to maintain – at the very least – that here were two separate but complementary approaches to the improvement of human society. Secondly, socialism could be presented as a necessary condition for eugenics. And finally and most interestingly, there existed within the eugenic creed elements common also to the socialist and reformist mentalities.

The 'separate but complementary' position was usually a sop thrown to the environmentalists by the 'hardline' eugenists, often expressing explicit hostility to current methods of social reform. Thus Dean Inge could write that 'humanitarian legislation, or practice, requires to be supplemented, and its inevitable evil effects counteracted, by eugenic practice, and ultimately by eugenic legislation'. And Leonard Darwin thought that more attention should be devoted to the separate study of heredity and environment, the dividing line being concern with future generations on the one hand and aiding one's own generation on the other. The socialist S. Herbert also maintained that the principles involved should not be obscured 'because Eugenist and Reformer have separate fields. . . it becomes necessary to supplement the method of the former, which is essentially a selection for parenthood, with that of the latter, which aims at the protection of the parent and his offspring'.³²

Most appraisals of environmental reform as a *sine qua non* for eugenic measures revolved round the issue of social mobility. As a correspondent to the *Eugenics Review* explained, 'we should try to arrange that there should be an equal chance for all to succeed, so that we might have the best possible chance of finding inherited talent which is now submerged by lack of opportunity'.³³ This, too, was Huxley's position: '... we must equalize environment upwards... before we can evaluate genetic difference'.³⁴ For some eugenists the obvious conclusion was the provision by the community of economic and social conditions which could create approximately equal opportunities. This was often considered the only valid basis for estimating and comparing the intrinsic worth of individuals.³⁵ But to appreciate the meaning attached to 'equality of opportunity' one must understand some nuances in the liberal-reformist tradition. A pattern of thought had been set by Benjamin Kidd's 1894 bestseller, *Social evolution*, which had justified the promotion of equality of opportunity as enabling true and efficient rivalry – a refined competition in which ability would be pitted against

³² Inge, 'Some moral aspects of eugenics', p. 29; L. Darwin, 'Heredity and environment', *Eugenics Review*, VIII (1916), 112; Herbert, 'Eugenics and socialism', p. 121.

³³ J. R. Baker, 'Eugenics and snobbery', letter to the editor, *Eugenics Review*, XXIII (1932), 379.

³⁴ Huxley, 'Eugenics and society', p. 18.

³⁵ 'Social biology and population improvement', *ibid.*

ability.³⁶ The social result would be, of course, an unequal society in which the fitness of an individual could be correctly ascertained and made the basis of social organization. This argument naturally appealed to conservative, class eugenists, but was in fact adopted by many progressives as well. Thus a socialist eugenist could claim that 'we socialists... maintain that there should be equal opportunity from birth for all members of the community. That is a very stable and, I think, a very shrewd form of competition.' And Herbert had written already in 1910 that socialism would 'by giving equal opportunities to all, create such social conditions as would lead to the automatic and natural survival of the types most desired'.³⁷ Could this not be interpreted as a legitimization of the struggle for survival, now unencumbered by hindrances to its effective conduct? The link Kidd had forged between equality of opportunity and calculating social efficiency was carried on into socialist theory, as the following lines, first printed in the *Labour Leader* in 1911, demonstrate: '... by the perfection of our social environment under Socialism, the effects of bad inheritance [will] become the sole factor in producing inefficient and anti-social members of the community. A Socialist Commonwealth which should allot to all such defectives a share of the communal product, without imposing any restrictions on their right to perpetuate their kind, would deserve all the evil that would ensue.'³⁸ Socialist shades of Kidd indeed!

Social mobility and equality of opportunity were by their very nature intimately linked with the issue of class. The class conception of worth, as expounded by conservative eugenists – a typical representative of whom was W. C. D. Whetham – denied the importance of social mobility as the condition to giving natural selection full play. This, Whetham held, was an almost universal fallacy because the social risers tended to postpone marriage so as not to hamper their advance. It was far better, he observed, displaying an aristocratic if not Platonic bent of mind, 'to hold before each man's eyes as his natural goal a leading position in his own class... to give ability its due advantage within certain defined limits, but not to make it too easy for those limits to be passed'.³⁹ On the whole, however, even conservative eugenists were not opposed to social mobility, though their arguments differed noticeably from those of the progressives. L. Darwin pointed out that men of exceptional strength and ability were constantly being selected out of the poorer ranks and transferred to the richer, while failures among the rich kept falling down into the lower economic ranks.⁴⁰ In other words, mobility ensured real eugenic differentiation, for the richer strata would thus contain a higher proportion of 'inherently superior types'. This free-for-all conception of

³⁶ B. Kidd, *Social evolution* (London, 1894).

³⁷ S. Churchill in 'Eugenics, socialism and capitalism', *Eugenics Review*, xxvii (1935), 111; Herbert, 'Eugenics and socialism', p. 123.

³⁸ Paul, *Socialism and eugenics*, p. 13.

³⁹ W. C. D. Whetham, 'Eugenics and politics', *Eugenics Review*, II (1910), 246.

⁴⁰ L. Darwin, 'Quality not quantity', *Eugenics Review*, VIII (1916), 305.

social mobility was highly individualistic, whereas the progressive notion of social mobility was a socially controlled one, according to criteria which were not primarily biological.

Most eugenisists, however, had come to reject the brutal struggle for existence while not relinquishing its end. The progressives among them would have adopted the new liberal and socialist refinement and humanization of competition as a struggle for excellence after survival had been guaranteed. Equal conditions were thus the necessary condition for the emergence of true quality, and this was evidently contrary to the class conception of worth expounded by conservative eugenisists. But eugenisists in general desired to supersede natural selection and were loth to accept its remorseless casualty rate. Indeed, this is a cardinal point, for it goes some way towards explaining the attraction of eugenisics for progressives. Its promise lay in the rational control of man over the natural laws of evolution to which he was hitherto subjected. New liberals such as L. T. Hobhouse and J. A. Hobson had welcomed this rationalization as confirming the supremacy of the human mind and defining the path of social progress.⁴¹ Eugenisics, after all, was not merely a counter-balance to the halting of selection caused by newly accepted modes of social aid, but could speed up the processes of selection in order to attain desired ethico-social goals. And if there was no agreement over those goals, eugenisics as a science could still be harnessed to different ideological ends. Hence, with the filtration of the co-operative version of social Darwinism into current socio-political theories, eugenisics could be employed to serve the conception of an altruistic and social man. This was the view of J. A. Thompson:

...survival and success are also to those types in which the individual has been more or less subordinated to the welfare of the species. Part of their fitness is in being capable of self-sacrifice... Thus we cannot accept the caricature of Nature as in a state of universal Hobbesian warfare... Especially among the finer forms of life do we find... less and less frequently an intensification of competition,... more and more frequently something subtler, some parental sacrifice, some co-operative device, some experiment in sociality.⁴²

With the increasing penetration of ideas concerning the social nature of man and concerning the distribution of eugenic worth among all social sectors, the common attempt to correlate fitness with class membership and a 'natural nobility'⁴³ was challenged. Saleeby warned that 'directly the eugenisist begins to talk in terms of *social* classes (as Mr Galton has never done), he is skating on thin ice'.⁴⁴ The lack of a connexion between

⁴¹ See Freedon, *The new liberalism*, pp. 73, 89-91, 185-6.

⁴² Thomson, 'Eugenisics and war', pp. 7-8.

⁴³ F. C. S. Schiller, 'Eugenisics and politics', *Hibbert Journal*, xii (1913-14), 244, 249.

⁴⁴ Saleeby, *Parenthood and race culture*, p. 118. What Galton had intended was again a moot point. Unlike Saleeby some pointed out that Galton had wanted to build up a sentiment of caste among the naturally gifted and to create class consciousness within each social group (J. A. Field, 'The progress of eugenisics', *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, xxvi (1911-12), 11).

social rank and degeneration was stressed and later reinforced by scientists. In fact, some eugenisists went so far as to argue that the poor might be eugenically superior, because 'among the poor struggling crowds of labouring masses . . . the weakest are rigorously weeded out in the battle of life'.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the case for a progressive eugenics cannot rest solely on the issue of class, and this for the simple reason that a number of liberals and socialists themselves valued the intrinsic worth of some classes more than others. Bertrand Russell's radicalism did not prevent him from assuming that the intellectual average of the professional classes was somewhat higher than that of most other classes. This claim was given scientific dressing by R. A. Fisher, referring to the slightly wider term 'middle class', who were characterized 'by all the qualities which make for successful citizenship' – enterprise, prudence, character and intellect. Fisher's concern for the future of this class derived from his observation that the two biologically independent variables of qualities making for social and economic success and qualities making for low fertility were positively correlated. Though Fisher himself was no progressive, his observation was accepted by Huxley.⁴⁶ The preference for a certain kind of person and for a certain class became well-nigh indistinguishable.

We enter now the realm of elements common to progressives and to eugenists of all persuasions. The most salient among these was the idea of social responsibility, usually linked to the concepts of community or race⁴⁷ – in the sense of the supreme human entity to which allegiance was owed. For whereas the notion of equality was a meeting ground between some eugenists and some progressives – a possible but not necessary connection – the interest and solidarity of the social body was the ultimate appeal for all eugenists, socialists, social reformers and new liberals. For the conservative Montague Crackanorpe, a barrister and essayist who was president of the Eugenics Education Society from 1909 to 1911, the study of eugenics produced in Burkeian fashion 'a sense of the solidarity of our race, of the debt we owe to it in the past, and of the duty we owe to it in the future'.⁴⁸ A committee on poor law reform

⁴⁵ See, for example, S. Herbert, 'The discovery of the fittest', *Westminster Review*, CLXXV (1911), 39–41, 43; Carr-Saunders, 'Eugenics in the light of population trends', p. 14; 'Social biology and population improvement', *ibid.*; J. A. Hobson, *Free-thought in the social sciences* (London, 1926), pp. 214–15.

⁴⁶ B. Russell, *Marriage and morals* (London, 1929), pp. 261–2; R. A. Fisher, 'Family allowances', *Eugenics Review*, XXIV (1932), 90; Huxley, 'The vital importance of eugenics', 328–9. In a note to a review Huxley had written a few years earlier about L. Darwin's *The need for eugenic reform*, the editor of the *Sociological Review* had taken exception to Huxley's tendency to accept conventional criteria of success in life too much at their face value ('The case for eugenics', p. 279).

⁴⁷ It must be emphasized that 'race' was not primarily used in the now common sense of biologically exclusive determinants, but applied, as G. Watson has shown, to a 'community of cultures' ('Race and the socialists', *Encounter*, November 1976, p. 16).

⁴⁸ M. Crackanorpe, 'Eugenics as a social force', *Nineteenth Century*, LXIII (1908), 966. See also A. White, 'Eugenics and national efficiency', *Eugenics Review*, I (1909), 109.

of the Eugenics Education Society claimed in 1910 that 'the fundamental problem in social reform is... how to make stocks responsible to the community'.⁴⁹ This was coupled with a rejection of doctrinaire individualism for, from the eugenic point of view, as Saleeby remarked, 'each individual [is]... merely the temporary host of the continuous line of germ-cells which constitute the race'. Hence he concluded that the interests of the individual and of the race were one – both because the individual, too, was concerned with the future of his progeny and because the methods of negative eugenics – limiting the propagation of the unfit – would secure the greatest happiness, liberty and self-development for those to whom they were applied, such as the feeble-minded.⁵⁰ In similar fashion, Herbert wrote: '... eugenic teachings are... essentially communistic in spirit. It is the common interest of each social unit with the whole, which the Eugenist wishes to evoke as the central motive power in society. And it is just here, in the most vital part of its programme, that the eugenic ideal shows complete identity with that of the Socialist'.⁵¹

A practical ramification of the hope of eugenicists of all creeds to subordinate human behaviour to social considerations was their treatment of marriage. This was only a logical conclusion to the progression of socialist and social-liberal thought. The gradual assumption by the community of responsibility for the well-being of its members – be it for humanitarian reasons or from the perspective of social self-interest – had initiated a series of incursions into the sphere of family life, previously considered sacrosanct. Compulsory education and the establishment of state and municipal responsibility for the nourishment of children had deprived parents of the right to be sole arbiters of their children's fate. Now the reformer's gaze alighted upon the quantitative and qualitative control of procreation. Laski maintained that to regard marriage as a private affair was anti-social, for 'the time is surely coming in our history when society will look upon the production of a weakling as a crime against itself'.⁵² This observation added an interesting note to the eugenic argument. Whereas prevailing concepts of poverty until the late nineteenth century had regarded pauperism as a crime arising out of defects of individual character, this judgement was now applied to irresponsible propagation of the species.⁵³ Laski, however, did not go to the extreme of suggesting direct public intervention in the selection of partners. Indeed, very few British eugenicists did (Shaw as usual acting the Devil's advocate on this issue⁵⁴), for that was 'a conception of the

⁴⁹ 'Report of the committee on Poor Law reform', *Eugenics Review*, II (1910), 170.

⁵⁰ C. W. Saleeby, *Heredity* (London, 1905), p. 26; *Parenthood and race culture*, pp. 12, 203.

⁵¹ Herbert, 'Eugenics and socialism', p. 123. ⁵² Laski, 'The scope of eugenics', p. 34.

⁵³ C. W. Armstrong, 'The right to maim', *Eugenics Review*, supplement no. 1, XVI (1924-5); Webb, 'Eugenics and the Poor Law', p. 240.

⁵⁴ G. Bernard Shaw, written communication to symposium on 'Eugenics: its definition, scope and aims', *Sociological Papers* (London, 1905), pp. 74-5.

eugenic ideal which can rightly be left to such professional jesters as Mr Chesterton'.⁵⁵ Views similar to those of Laski were held by Russell, who reiterated what many birth-control supporters were realizing, namely, that parenthood was now voluntary and that the reproductive function was hence distinguishable from that of sexual union. For Russell, this entailed refraining from social intervention or moral ruling on matters of love without reproduction. This, he thought, would enable social control to be applied exclusively to the question that really concerned the community: '...the procreation of children should be a matter far more carefully regulated by moral considerations than it is at present'.⁵⁶ Socialists, in fact, could recognize their own innermost thoughts coming from the conservative Dean Inge: '...a community which makes itself responsible for the education and maintenance of all who are born within it must claim and exercise some control over both the quality and quantity of the new human material for which it will have to provide'.⁵⁷

The link between socialism, social reform and eugenics was thus obviously forged on the plane of state intervention as well as of social solidarity. Webb and H. G. Wells were outspoken on this theme. In Webb's impassioned cry: 'No consistent eugenicist can be a "Laissez Faire" individualist unless he throws up the game in despair. He must interfere, interfere, interfere!'⁵⁸ And Wells, though rejecting, as did Laski, state breeding and compulsory pairing, wrote:

The State is justified in saying, before you may add children to the community for the community to educate and in part to support, you must be above a certain minimum of personal efficiency...and a certain minimum of physical development, and free of any transmissible disease...Failing these simple qualifications, if you and some person conspire [i.e. propagation as a crime] and add to the population of the State, we will, for the sake of humanity, take over the innocent victim of your passions, but we shall insist that you are under a debt to the State of a peculiarly urgent sort, and one you will certainly pay, even if it is necessary to use restraint to get the payment out of you...⁵⁹

These ostensibly utopian threats were echoed by conservative eugenicists as well. L. Darwin illustrates the typical divide on this question. In 1916 he thought that 'State and charitable aid to the poor as a class will often be harmful as regards racial qualities' in the fields of social reform. In 1926, introducing the policy statement of the Eugenics Society, he drew especial attention to the proposal that 'the State should be regarded as having the right to exercise a limited amount of pressure in order to promote family limitation'.⁶⁰ This, as the policy statement itself ex-

⁵⁵ Laski, 'The scope of eugenics', p. 34.

⁵⁶ Russell, *Marriage and morals*, p. 270.

⁵⁷ Dean Inge, 'The population question', *Eugenics Review*, supplement no. 1, xvi (1924-5).

⁵⁸ Webb, 'Eugenics and the Poor Law', p. 237.

⁵⁹ H. G. Wells, *A modern utopia* (London, 1905), pp. 183-4.

⁶⁰ Darwin, 'Quality not quantity', p. 308; 'The eugenics policy of the Society', *Eugenics Review*, xviii (1926), 92.

plained, would mean limitation of aid or actual segregation. Here, again, individualistic leanings denied the state the role of positive promoter of welfare but granted it the negative role of guardian of racial, national or social interest: the regulation of the 'less fit'. In other words, though the utilization of the state to attain social goals was not ruled out, it was perceived more in its traditional role of implementer of social control. An explanation of the resistance to eugenic state intervention was forwarded by Russell:

What stands in the way is democracy. The ideas of eugenics are based on the assumption that men are unequal, while democracy is based on the assumption that they are equal. It is, therefore, politically very difficult to carry out eugenic ideas in a democratic community when those ideas take the form, not of suggesting that there is a minority of inferior people such as imbeciles, but of admitting that there is a minority of superior people.

And yet it was generally granted by eugenists that private initiative was inadequate and that 'any measures of eugenic control applicable to the population as a whole are beyond the powers of voluntary associations. . .'.⁶¹

The convergence of eugenics and socialism cum social reform is evident in some key articles of either faith. This is what initially made eugenics so attractive to the new liberals. Hobhouse, who later had occasion to attack eugenics, was nevertheless very ambivalent about the relationship of the biological and the sociological. In 1904 he conceded that 'the bare conception of a conscious selection as a way in which educated society would deal with stock is infinitely higher than that of natural selection with which biologists have confronted every proposal of sociology'. Elsewhere he accorded eugenics a limited role within the larger framework of social legislation, a role mainly restricted to negative eugenics.⁶² Hobhouse's colleague, Hobson, probably the most important of the new liberal theorists, returned repeatedly to eugenics throughout his writings. At the turn of the century, the restriction of marriage to the fit was interpreted by him as a manifestation of 'the social will expressing itself either by public opinion or through an act of parliament' and was indeed 'as much a natural force as any other'. A few years later he was openly advocating the prevention of 'anti-social propagation'. By 1909 he was reminding his readers of the importance of environment, side by side with the control of parenthood by the state, and could write, apparently oblivious of the contradiction, both that 'the child is not everything. Each generation must lead its own life' and 'the end of all politics is the parentage of the future'. In 1911, in contra-

⁶¹ Russell, *Marriage and morals*, pp. 262-3; R. Austin Freeman, 'Segregation of the fit', p. 209.

⁶² L. T. Hobhouse in discussion during symposium on eugenics, *Sociological Papers*, p. 63; 'The value and limitations of eugenics', *Sociological Review*, IV (1911), 281-302. Reprinted as ch. III of Hobhouse, *Social evolution and political theory*.

distinction to Hobhouse, he presented the 'modern science of eugenics' as stimulating thought among those 'who are beginning to recognize that industrial and political reforms are not the last and only word in human progress' – a rather startling observation by such a committed social reformer. By 1926, while admitting the value of scientific eugenics, he had launched an attack on racial, 'Nordic', eugenics, with its inegalitarianism and imperialistic leanings. With his usual perceptiveness, Hobson had picked up the early warning signals long before many of his compatriots. Yet he remained basically sympathetic and in 1932 once again commended eugenics for intending to remove questions of stock from the sphere of private individual enterprise. In theory, he remarked, eugenics should be 'the first of the productive arts to come under social planning'.⁶³

One may, in short, locate three related ideas as common to the mentality of eugenicists and reformers: the evolution of human rationality, orientation towards the future, and their concomitant – planning. It was, as Hobson put it, 'Nature, in her later form of Reason', that should be 'sustaining this harmony of vital interests between the individual and the race'.⁶⁴ Reason and planning were the logical consequence of the Darwinian understanding of man and his place *vis-à-vis* the universe. With his attributes of mind and intelligence, man could control his environment and shape his destiny. One of the rare occasions on which eugenics actually occupied the national political stage was during the debates on the Mental Deficiency Bill in 1912–13. The Bill proposed, among others, compulsory detention of the mentally deficient consequent to a court decision and the presentation of a medical certificate. It aroused considerable opposition in parliament from Josiah Wedgwood, who attacked the 'horrible Eugenic Society' for its flouting of individual liberty.⁶⁵ The liberal press was in part worried about the wide and vague definition of a defective. But no less significant was the support rendered to the Bill by other liberal newspapers. Control and compulsion were seen to infringe upon fewer rights than freedom; a rational and scientific social reconstruction now preceded individual liberty. The final outcome of this debate was an Act that narrowed the definition of a defective and made it palatable even to such critics as Hobhouse.⁶⁶ New liberals would have regarded the following statement by F. C. S. Schiller – Oxford don and philosopher – as indicative of their mood:

⁶³ J. A. Hobson, 'Mr Kidd's "Social Evolution"', *American Journal of Sociology*, 1 (1895), 309; *The social problem* (London, 1901), pp. 214–17; 'Eugenics as an art of social progress', *South Place Magazine*, xiv (1909), 168–70; 'Race-regeneration', *Manchester Guardian*, 10 Oct. 1911; *Free-thought in the social sciences*, pp. 200–21; *The recording angel* (London, 1932), pp. 71–3.

⁶⁴ J. A. Hobson, 'The cant of decadence', *Nation*, 14 May 1910.

⁶⁵ *Hansard*, 5th ser., xxxviii, 1468–9, 1474 (17 May 1912).

⁶⁶ For a more detailed discussion, see Freeden, *The new liberalism*, pp. 190–3; G. R. Searle, *Eugenics and politics in Britain 1900–1914* (Leyden, 1976), pp. 106–11; K. Jones, *Mental health and social policy 1845–1959* (London, 1960), pp. 61–72.

...the difference between our present society and a rationally organized and eugenical society is, not that in the former the individual is free and in the latter controlled, but that our present organization is so largely random, aimless, inconsistent, and self-frustrating... while the latter would be *planned*, and would enable him to rise insensibly above the lurid past and to reach a harmonious development in a perfected society.⁶⁷

It is interesting to note that when the issue of mental deficiency arose again after the war, the argument, though much muted, proceeded on almost identical lines. The question was the certification of mental defectives through disease or accident, rather than those from birth. The government had introduced a bill in 1926 which extended mental defectiveness to include vaguely a condition 'induced after birth by disease, injury or other cause'. This prompted the Labour M.P. Rhys Davies to move for its rejection. It was feared that habitual criminals could be certified under its terms; indeed, as Davies wryly remarked, 'the whole of the present Tory Government might be put in an asylum at any time'.⁶⁸ In 1927, however, Davies supported a new version of the Bill which deleted 'other cause' and restricted the secondary amentia cases within its scope to the age of eighteen. But what had excited such discussion before the war encountered only minor opposition in the House - Wedgwood once again expressing his concern and that, too, in a lower key - and the press was not drawn into any debate at all. In fact, the parliamentary reporting in the liberal newspapers was favourable to the Bill while gently mocking Wedgwood's eccentricity.⁶⁹ In this field the conception of community responsibility superseding all other considerations, which had been established before the war, had become an acceptable and reasonable norm.

Still, compulsion was as a rule limited to the case of defectives, for in other instances eugenists preferred persuasion and recognized the need for balancing the claims of the race with those of individual freedom. It is important to appreciate that the determinism endemic in eugenics was countered by the factors of rational choice and of purposive manipulation of the environment. The absoluteness of the germ-plasm was, after all, to be harnessed to the human end of the production of as many people as possible with desirable qualities. The difference between the eugenist and the social reformer lay rather in the former's acceptance of fixed components of human nature, an acceptance that, of course, has affinities with the conservative outlook. But in his reliance on social policy to achieve social ends, the eugenist varied little from the full-fledged social reformer. Any variations discernible were of degree

⁶⁷ F. C. S. Schiller, review of M. Ginsberg, *Studies in sociology*, in *Eugenics Review*, xxv (1933), 42.

⁶⁸ Mental Deficiency Bill, 1926 [16 & 17 Geo. 5] [H.L.]; *Hansard*, 5th ser., cc, 966-9 (29 Nov. 1926).

⁶⁹ Mental Deficiency Act, 1927 [17 & 18 Geo. 5]; *Hansard*, 5th ser., cciii, 2333-9 (18 Mar. 1927); see, for example, *Daily News*, *Westminster Gazette* and *Daily Chronicle* for 19 Mar. 1927.

rather than kind, variations which also set apart the avowed socialist from the new liberal. These revolved round the scope and magnitude of, and faith in, proposed reforms. Boundless optimism versus guarded caution and self-imposed limitation were the poles between which the reformist mentality travelled. But reformist mentality it was.

Orientation towards the future is also indicative of the growing sense of social responsibility evinced by reformers of various schools. Conservation of the racial qualities of the nation is not merely some sophisticated elaboration of the instinct of self-preservation. It embodies in part the altruism of the social reformer because, as even conservative eugenisists were quick to point out, self-sacrifice for the sake of future generations was involved – the foregoing of present gratifications and unrestricted liberty.⁷⁰ Secondly, not a few eugenisists harboured a utopian streak and some went so far as to adopt the literary device of conjuring up a future society as a means through which to elucidate their views. Galton's clumsily named 'Kantsaywhere', William McDougall's 'Eugenia', Wells' forays into the future, and of course frequent references to Plato's Republic, are but some examples. Obviously, utopian does not necessarily imply socialist, but a shared preference for elaborate and often unrealistic blueprints exists. The hallmark of a utopian is that – unless his utopia is purely a methodological exercise in criticizing the present – he himself sees it as attainable and is only labelled utopian by his adversaries. The eugenic utopia, as also the socialist commonwealth, seemed within human reach.⁷¹ Yet it is precisely on the question of the future that the divide between social reformer and conservative eugenisist re-emerged. The responsibility towards the future was frequently coupled with indifference towards the present, notwithstanding Inge's claim that the present and the future counted for the same and should not be sacrificed for each other.⁷² Not many of the eugenisists, when confronted with the future incarnate – children – supported extensive legislation for their benefit. Vague statements such as Havelock Ellis's that 'we are the keepers of our children, of the race . . .' and that it was 'within our grasp to mould them'⁷³ referred in the main to their conception, after which the more extreme eugenisist no doubt assumed that quality would hold its own. This is once again the central nature-versus-nurture issue, with progressive eugenisists professing concern over the bringing up of children and over their health, safety and education as well.

⁷⁰ M. Crackanthorpe, 'The friends and foes of eugenics', *Fortnightly Review*, xcii (1912), 746; Darwin, 'Quality not quantity', p. 298; Armstrong, 'The right to maim'.

⁷¹ Saleeby, *Parenthood and race culture*, p. 149.

⁷² Inge, 'Some moral aspects of eugenics', p. 27.

⁷³ H. Ellis, *The problem of race-regeneration* (London, 1911), p. 50; 'Eugenics and St Valentine', p. 781.

III

It is important to emphasize that the First World War did not basically alter the nature of eugenic thinking. Most ideas and attitudes concerning eugenics were developed before the war, as indeed many key approaches to social policy in general. But the often impractical theoretical perspectives focused after the war on a few concrete social issues (the one exception before the war having been the Mental Deficiency Act). In the 1920s, even more in the early 1930s, a twofold movement was discernible. Within the mainstream of eugenics itself – the Eugenics Society – there was a perceptible shift towards the outlook that the hitherto minority of progressive eugenicists had espoused. This was perhaps most pertinently expressed by Blacker in his distinction between liberal and authoritarian eugenics.⁷⁴ Concurrently, ideas that were fundamentally eugenic and that related to population quality and heredity were entertained by progressive groups not directly associated with the eugenics movement. A focal point of this convergence was the issue of the birth-rate and its control. Eugenists and progressives addressed each other on these questions and gratefully rendered mutual support in an effort to gain further respectability and national recognition for their causes.

The post-war period witnessed a confrontation between two schools of thought on the subject of population. On the one hand were the neo-Malthusians with their perennial fear that population would outstrip the means of subsistence. On the other were those who pointed, Cassandra-like, to the figures confirming an increasing decline in the birth-rate which appeared to threaten the very existence of the nation. This latter view was slow to catch on despite the growing statistical evidence. During the war, Havelock Ellis repeatedly appealed to restrict the birth-rate because, as a commentator on his work wrote, the governing classes were inducing the workers to multiply so as to provide ‘a plentiful supply of cannon food upon the one hand and of submissive wage-labour on the other’. Hence Ellis saw a falling birth-rate as the means to avert war. This he linked with eugenics, for ‘birth-control yet remains the only instrument by means of which . . . eugenic selection can be rendered practicable’. Ellis believed that Malthusianism, evolution, humanitarianism and medicine all pointed in the direction of the necessity and, indeed, inevitability of birth control. Contraception, which was slowly spreading down from the upper to the lower classes, would serve a eugenic purpose if it reached those strata who contain ‘the largest proportion of incapable elements’. It did not reach them now, and this, thought Ellis, constituted a challenge to be met by the usual

⁷⁴ C. P. Blacker, *Eugenics in retrospect and prospect*, the Galton lecture 1945 (London, 1950), p. 9.

eugenic combination of propaganda and inducements and, failing those, compulsory sterilization and segregation.⁷⁵

In effect, as Ellis observed himself, the advocacy of birth control as a solution only created a new problem for eugenists: 'Neo-Malthusian methods may even be dysgenic rather than eugenic, for they tend to be adopted by the superior stocks, while the inferior stocks, ignorant and reckless, are left to propagate freely.'⁷⁶ Hence the opposition between neo-Malthusians and their adversaries was often revealed to be spurious when it came to eugenic issues. The former were concerned with restricting the growth of the masses; the latter with encouraging first and foremost the better stocks. Together, they constituted the complementary measures of negative and positive eugenics. These stances appeared again and again in literature on population. In 1916 the National Birth-Rate Commission drew attention to the declining birth-rate. Many of its members, such as Hobson, argued against the neo-Malthusians that there was not too much population and considered as a possible solution the restriction of the birth-rate among the low-skilled and casual labourers, together with the granting of security of income to encourage it among 'efficient' stock.⁷⁷ This elicited the response from the *Nation* that social reforms to ease the financial situation of such stock were a doubtful inducement 'in face of the conspicuous fact that it is precisely the best-to-do, best-housed, best-educated, and most secure classes of the population that carry farthest the restriction in the size of the family'.⁷⁸

The attitude of the *Nation* is, in fact, a case in point. In the post-war period, when still under the editorship of H. W. Massingham, it triumphantly announced the collapse of Malthusian theory. Malthus, claimed the *Nation*, had postulated a correlation between an increased standard of comfort and an increasing number of children. Today the opposite was true. The 'educated, professional, and skilled artisan classes', by limiting the number of their offspring, were 'deliberately destroying the stock which is most likely to produce citizens of physical excellence and intellectual vigour and ambition'. In 1923 the *Nation* accused birth-control agitators of a conservative bias, by deflecting social thought away from questions of environmental improvement. Birth control was now seen to be in the interest of capitalists, who were tired of subsidizing the consuming masses through taxation – a modern

⁷⁵ 'Thinking for the future', *Nation*, 23 Dec. 1916; H. Ellis, 'War and the birth-rate', *Nation*, 25 Sept. 1915; H. Ellis, 'Birth-control and eugenics', *Eugenics Review*, ix (1917), 34, 38–41.

⁷⁶ Ellis, 'Birth-control and eugenics', p. 34.

⁷⁷ *The declining birth-rate: Its causes and effects*. Being the Report of and the chief evidence taken by the National Birth-Rate Commission, instituted, with official recognition, by the National Council of Public Morals – for the promotion of race regeneration – spiritual, moral and physical (London, 1916), pp. 282–98. Among others, original members of the inquiry included Inge, Saleeby, Hobson and Hobhouse (who was unable to attend).

⁷⁸ 'The falling birth-rate', *Nation*, 24 June 1916.

version of Speenhamland. Education and housing, rather, would operate to check the population.⁷⁹ While ostensibly diametrically opposed to Ellis's argument – that capitalists wanted more workers – there was some common ground. Many environmentalists hoped to decrease the birth-rate among the poor by improving their living conditions, because they considered the poor unable at present to supply adequate conditions for their children. Some held that only socialism could relieve the economic pressure which stimulated the lowest classes to 'reckless propagation'. As one socialist sympathizer so quaintly put it: 'when people have nothing else to think about, their minds are full of sex'.⁸⁰ Eugenists also hoped to decrease the birth-rate, but by direct control over the ability of the poor to procreate. The question was really: did birth control constitute an asset for the masses or the means to its exploitation? The spokesmen of the masses themselves disagreed violently on this matter.

In April 1923 the *Nation* came under J. M. Keynes's control. Despite Harrod's assertion that 'Keynes made it a rule never to interfere with the editorial policy',⁸¹ the shift on the population question is unmistakable. Keynes was a neo-Malthusian and engaged later in the year in a controversy over population trends with W. H. Beveridge.⁸² It was consequently the *New Statesman* that took up the anti-Malthusian position in an article by its editor, Clifford Sharp, who, in an extraordinary statement, denounced birth control as 'one of the most dangerous movements that has ever threatened civilization'. He attacked Keynes's 'Malthusian moonshine', which claimed a connexion between overpopulation and unemployment, and supported Beveridge's description of a declining population.⁸³ The crucial aspect is that the only area of agreement among the discussants was over the importance of eugenics. For it was eugenics that frequently bridged the gap between the various sides on the birth-rate question. The now neo-Malthusian *Nation* repeated the claim that contraception among the poor was essential to prevent dysgenic tendencies.⁸⁴ At the same time Beveridge, from the opposite end, was worried by birth control as practised by the 'responsible sectors' and wrote a few years later: 'As to quality – more important to encourage birth of good than to discourage birth of ordinary persons.'⁸⁵ Sharp extended this concern to include not only

⁷⁹ 'Malthus up to date', *Nation*, 12 June 1920; 'The demand for birth control', *Nation*, 17 Mar. 1923.

⁸⁰ H. Sturt, *Socialism and character* (London, 1912), p. 89.

⁸¹ R. F. Harrod, *The life of John Maynard Keynes* (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 396.

⁸² See J. Harris, *William Beveridge: a biography* (Oxford, 1977), pp. 341–2; Harrod, *Keynes*, p. 397.

⁸³ 'Malthusian moonshine', *New Statesman*, 22 Sept. 1923.

⁸⁴ 'The problems of birth-control', *Nation*, 6 June 1925.

⁸⁵ Harris, *Beveridge*, p. 342; Beveridge papers, London School of Economics, III, 19, MS notes on 'The population problem today. B. The special problem'.

those 'who ought to be encouraged to bear children' but to prevent deterioration of the white races.⁸⁶ He was clearly infected by the Webbian type of socialism with its apparently incongruous fascination with race and class. The eugenic question underlying all debate was hence over which end of the social scale was one to worry more, not whether the population was increasing or decreasing or should do either. The issue was the fundamental one of differential fertility, still generally believed to be on the increase.

At about the same time another group joined the debate, again from a slightly different angle. This was the family endowment movement, whose central figure was Eleanor Rathbone, supported by Eva Hubback, Mary Stocks and others. Here again is an example of the social reformist affinity with eugenics. The Family Endowment Council (later 'Society') was linked on the one hand with the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, which pressed for political and social equality for women and was, on the other hand, connected with advanced liberal circles centred round E. D. Simon and the liberal summer school movement.⁸⁷ Family endowments had developed from the pre-war interest in motherhood, a theme that was also prominent in the eugenicist outlook. For Saleeby this was a central issue: 'Any system of eugenics... any proposal for social reform... which fails to reckon with motherhood... is foredoomed to failure...' In language that a contemporary described as having the 'touch of the prophet's fine frenzy' Saleeby waxed lyrical over 'the safeguarding and the ennoblement of motherhood as the proximate end of all political action, the end through which the ultimate ends, the production and recognition of human worth, can alone be attained', and added the not imperceptive observation that 'at present the most important profession in the world is almost entirely carried on by unskilled labor'.⁸⁸ The connexion between eugenicist and progressive was, however, in their insistence on freedom of choice and economic independence for women. It was economic independence as a counterweight to the existing social inequality, and the consequent freedom from considerations of financial gain through marriage, which would restore the model of nineteenth-century laissez-faire social interaction, with its assumed total equality: 'For eugenic mating one of the primary conditions is perfect freedom of choice of the contracting parties... It hardly needs saying that these conditions would be fulfilled under a Socialist scheme.'⁸⁹ Short of this freedom through equalization, the 'endowment of motherhood' as advocated by Fabians also made eugenic

⁸⁶ 'Malthusian moonshine', *New Statesman*, 22 Sept. 1923.

⁸⁷ See M. D. Stocks, *Eleanor Rathbone* (London, 1949), pp. 84-99; D. Hopkinson, *Family inheritance: a life of Eva Hubback* (London, 1954), p. 134.

⁸⁸ Saleeby, *Parenthood and race culture*, pp. 167, 194, 173; Field, 'The progress of eugenics', p. 47.

⁸⁹ Herbert, 'Eugenics and socialism', p. 120; Hobson, *The recording angel*, p. 74.

sense, though on that subject, again, views were divided. Opponents of state-aid to mothers argued that 'the thoughts of the physical gratification resulting from the immediate expenditure of a maternity grant might affect the fertility of the utterly degraded', and a conservative eugenicist went so far as to attack the 'endowment of motherhood' schemes by trenchantly remarking: 'Mr Webb states that he regards the bearing of a healthy child as a public service for which the state should pay. The eugenicist will be more inclined to regard the abstaining from bearing a child when no sufficient means exist for its support as a public service.'⁹⁰ Supporters of 'endowment of motherhood' retorted that the poorest classes were already breeding as fast as they could and that improving one's position in life led to more prudence. They demanded that parenthood be made economically easy and called for efforts at post-war reconstruction to be directed also at relieving the financial stresses of raising families. Indeed, it is illuminating, though not unexpected, to find Sidney Webb concerned about the differential birth-rate and seeking encouragement for parents displaying the traditional middle-class virtues of thrift, foresight, prudence and self-control.⁹¹

The Family Endowment Council continued on similar lines. During the 1920s Eleanor Rathbone repeatedly emphasized the appeal family allowances should have for eugenicists. As a measure of positive eugenics they would encourage parents who were child lovers but could not afford children. This would, she asserted – citing Beveridge and McDougall – be the best security against racial decay. In her well-known *The disinherited family* she also claimed for family allowances, paid directly to the mother, the opposite effect among the lower strata. Money would bring self-respect, continence and contraception. In 1924 she lectured to the Eugenics Society on the direct maintenance of women and children as part of a 'living wage', i.e. a national minimum. Both then and later she concurred with the Society's policy of graded allowances and even considered stopping them after the third or fourth child.⁹² The Society itself adopted the non-redistributive principle of benefit per child directly proportional to the scale of earnings of the parents, to promote the fertility of 'superior types'. But it later preferred 'graded equalization pools' which would 'equalize standards of living between parents and non-parents doing equivalent work' to exemption from income tax, and

⁹⁰ L. Darwin, *The need for eugenic reform* (London, 1926), p. 419; E. W. MacBride, review of books, *Eugenics Review*, XII (1920), p. 219.

⁹¹ H. D. Harben, *The endowment of motherhood*, Fabian tract no. 149 (London, 1910), p. 20. See also evidence of Mary Stocks to National Birth-Rate Commission, *Problems of population and parenthood* (London, 1920), p. 235; S. Gotto, 'The eugenic principle in social reconstruction', *Eugenics Review*, IX (1917), 194–5; S. Webb, *The decline in the birth rate*, Fabian tract no. 131 (London, 1907), p. 18.

⁹² E. F. Rathbone, *The ethics and economics of family endowment* (London, 1927), pp. 112–13; *The disinherited family* (London, 1924), pp. 241–2; 'Family endowment in its bearing on the question of population', *Eugenics Review*, XVI (1924), 270–3.

flatly rejected state payments.⁹³ However, a common approach existed to 'influencing the birth-rate and guiding its flow, without violating the privacies or interfering with the liberties of individual citizens'.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, Eva Hubback, Rathbone's collaborator and a member of the Eugenics Society and later of its council, demonstrated again the flexibility of the eugenic argument for family allowances by claiming first that they would lower the birth-rate of the poor and – when the menace of underpopulation had suddenly captured widespread attention in the 1930s – that they would prevent race suicide.⁹⁵

All the while the Eugenics Society itself had been moving into areas that concerned progressive social reformers – family allowances, family planning and population research – while trying to emphasize that it was sympathetic towards the working classes, associated with social reform, and not necessarily biased in favour of conservatism.⁹⁶ In one field it even succeeded in swinging public opinion towards its (somewhat modified) views. This was on the subject of sterilization of the unfit. The Society took up in earnest the issue of voluntary sterilization in 1929. In that year the Wood report on mental deficiency had drawn attention to the high fertility of what it termed the social problem group.⁹⁷ It recommended that institutional treatment for mental defectives be regarded as a flowing lake rather than a stagnant pool, but it opposed sterilization. Consequently, the Eugenics Society established a Committee for Legalising Eugenic Sterilisation in 1930.⁹⁸ Voluntary sterilization (except in the case of low-grade defectives, when the consent of the parent or guardian and of the Board of Control – established under the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act – was suggested) was recommended as supplementary to segregation, mainly for those leaving the 'lake'. A Labour M.P., Major A. G. Church – a member of the Committee – introduced a bill on these lines in 1931. Significantly, the motion – though dismissed – was supported by many Labour and Liberal M.P.s, including D. Maclean, E. D. Simon, E. Rathbone and C. P. Trevelyan. The split among progressives was reminiscent of their ambiguous attitude to birth control – a motion backing it having, for example, been introduced in 1926 by one Labour

⁹³ 'An outline of a practical eugenic policy', *Eugenics Review*, xviii (1926), 98; 'Aims and objects of the Eugenics Society', *Eugenics Review*, xxvi (1934), 135; Fisher, 'Family allowances', p. 89.

⁹⁴ Rathbone, 'Family endowment', p. 275.

⁹⁵ Hopkinson, *Family inheritance*, pp. 108, 135. For the underpopulation argument in the 1930s see E. Charles, *The menace of under-population* (London, 1936); C. P. Blacker, *Eugenics: Galton and after* (London, 1952), pp. 147–8.

⁹⁶ See the retrospective remarks in the *Eugenics Review*, xxxi (1940), 203–5.

⁹⁷ Report of the joint committee of the board of education and the board of control, 1929. Cf. C. P. Blacker, *Voluntary sterilization*, reprinted from the *Eugenics Review* (London, 1962), p. 12; Jones, *Mental health and social policy*, pp. 80–7.

⁹⁸ For a full list of members see Blacker, *ibid.* p. 11. They included Carr-Saunders, Fisher, Hubback and Huxley.

M.P. and opposed by another.⁹⁹ Even an avowed anti-eugenicist like Lancelot Hogben supported the 1931 Bill, as did the *New Statesman* while commenting:

... the legitimate claims of the eugenicist standpoint have been vastly weakened in this country by gross over-statement motivated by class bias. Though exponents and supporters of the eugenicist movement like Major Darwin and Dean Inge have done everything that could well have been done to alienate the sympathy of the working class leaders in this country, the legitimate claims of eugenics are not inherently incompatible with the outlook of the collectivist movement.¹⁰⁰

In 1934 a departmental committee on sterilization which had been appointed by the minister of health, Sir Hilton Young, reported (the Brock report) and recommended voluntary sterilization on lines very similar to those of the Eugenics Society. By now the reaction was almost universally favourable. Conservative M.P.s welcomed the idea of eugenic sterilization but the liberal press, too, supported its recommendations. The *Manchester Guardian* thought the report 'admirably balanced and as admirably cautious' and accepted the voluntary sterilization that 'the eugenicists soundly urge'. The proposed measures, it believed, 'will inflict no damage on any liberty of the individual'. The *News Chronicle* thought the Brock Committee had presented the problem 'with great moderation and good sense'. There was a case for experimenting 'for the obvious good of the community'.¹⁰¹ These echoes of the liberal reaction to the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act are notable in view of the growing alarm with which German legislation on sterilization was regarded. British eugenics was clearly seen in a different light and the Eugenics Society itself went out of its way to condemn the Nazi approach. Following an initially favourable reaction to the Nazi government's plans concerning eugenics and sterilization,¹⁰² the *Eugenics Review*, and especially C. P. Blacker, stressed 'the essential differences between the aims of the eugenic movements of Germany and of this country', in particular as regards

⁹⁹ See Eugenics Society pamphlet, *Committee for legalising eugenic sterilization* (London, 1930); *Hansard*, 5th ser., CCLV, 1249-58 (21 July 1931); *Hansard*, 5th ser., CCXCI, 849-56 (9 Feb. 1926).

¹⁰⁰ 'Sterilisation of defectives', *New Statesman and Nation*, 25 July 1931. Hogben's wife, Enid Charles, the author of the above-mentioned *The menace of under-population* (previously entitled *The twilight of parenthood*), though herself an anti-eugenicist, also admitted that the encouragement or discouragement of individual stocks who are valuable or retrograde was an essential feature of any project of planned ecology (p. 127).

¹⁰¹ Report of the departmental committee on sterilisation, 1934, Cmd. 4485. For details see Jones, *Mental health and social policy*, pp. 87-90, and Blacker, *Voluntary sterilization*, pp. 15-16. Two of its members were R. A. Fisher and the conservative eugenicist A. F. Tredgold; *Hansard*, 5th ser., CCLXXXVI, 1179-86 (28 Feb. 1934); CCXCI, 1824-8 (3 July 1934); 'The sterilisation report', *Manchester Guardian*, 19 Jan. 1934; 'The unfit', *News Chronicle*, 19 Jan. 1934.

¹⁰² *Eugenics Review*, xxv (1933), 76-7, though immediate exception was taken to the anti-Jewish intention of the Nazi eugenicists.

compulsory sterilization.¹⁰³ Hence the earlier recognition accorded by the new liberals to the principle that 'compulsion means simply a larger freedom' was rescinded. The recommendations of the Brock report, however, came to nothing due to lack of governmental interest and the growing disrepute that, nevertheless, Nazi eugenics was bringing upon the field.

IV

It remains to be seen how eugenicists themselves regarded the connexion between eugenics and socialism. There exists a familiar argument associating some versions of socialism with race-thinking or conservative eugenics. Even in Britain the Webbs would not be absolved from this charge, as a perfunctory glance at Beatrice's diaries will indicate. A somewhat more interesting case is that of Karl Pearson, who occupied the first chair of eugenics at the University of London. He started out in the 1880s as a Malthusian socialist, but saw the community primarily as an enforcement agency providing the means of social control over propagation.¹⁰⁴ By the time Pearson had become Britain's leading practising eugenicist, there remained little room in his paternal, statist attitude for individuals. National eugenics now reigned supreme in his conception; human sympathy – surely the cornerstone of ethical socialism – he saw as so exaggerated as to endanger race survival by suspending selection. This was the stock-in-trade argument of the Social-Darwinism-as-struggle school. If this was socialism at all, it was a regimented socialism, subservient to a racial definition of national welfare and morality and devoid of humanity.¹⁰⁵

The socialism singled out in this article was almost always of the ethical, humanitarian kind. Havelock Ellis presented eugenics as essential to the success of that socialism. It was 'the only method by which Socialism can be enabled to continue on its present path'.¹⁰⁶ One of the interesting spokesmen of this reform eugenics, Herbert Brewer, was at pains to point out 'to the equalitarian that eugenic policy is not antagonistic to social reform and lessening of economic differences'. Moreover, improving the health and efficiency of the population meant making social reform itself more promising. But Brewer certainly had a socialist viewpoint and one of his recommendations even drew praise from such a reluctant eugenicist – but enthusiastic socialist – as J. B. S.

¹⁰³ C. P. Blacker, 'Eugenics in Germany', *Eugenics Review*, xxv (1933), 158–9. See also Blacker, *Eugenics in retrospect and prospect*, pp. 9–12, and *Eugenics: Galton and after*, pp. 138–46, and the socialist H. Brewer on the importance of voluntary as against compulsory sterilization (*Eugenics Review*, xxvi (1934), 85 – letter to the editor).

¹⁰⁴ K. Pearson, *The moral basis of socialism* (London, 1887), p. 21; cf. B. Kidd, *The science of power* (London, 1918), pp. 80–2.

¹⁰⁵ K. Pearson, *The chances of death and other studies in evolution*, 1 (London, 1897), 246, 250; *The scope and importance to the state of the science of national eugenics* (London, 1907), pp. 25, 41; *The groundwork of eugenics* (London, 1909), p. 21.

¹⁰⁶ Ellis, *The task of social hygiene*, p. 402.

Haldane. This was the proposal to socialize the germ-plasm, to apply artificial insemination for eugenic purposes: '... the establishment of the right of every individual that is born to the inheritance of the finest hereditary endowment that anywhere exists'. This was 'biological socialism, in the truest sense of the word'.¹⁰⁷ Even Julian Huxley commended this plan as heralding evolutionary improvement instead of mere tinkering, and subsumed it under the aim of substituting social salvation for individual salvation and enabling self-expression and personal satisfaction to be achieved in serving society.¹⁰⁸ For Brewer, it was all part of a concept of society that was anchored to service rather than to profit. Even the fact of human inequality could hence be interpreted as a guarantee of human amelioration, for positive eugenics was not to be limited to a minority but spread out so that the mass of humanity might rise to the stage gained by any one of its members. Universalizing the genetic qualities of highly developed people would multiply immensely the resources of any society:

... biological inequality means not only the possibility of biological advance. It means also a fundamental requirement of a human society which values and conserves real individuality in its members. Just as a body is better and more efficient for not being composed either of all brain cells, or all bone cells, or all muscle cells, so it is with the community. Democracy above all needs diversity and freedom to express diversity in every possible way.¹⁰⁹

J. S. Mill's appreciation of eccentricity was joined here with the organic conception of society, a synthesis already successfully undertaken by the new liberals. In effect, the liberal maxim of variety which Mill developed was given a new lease of life by a number of eugenicists. As Huxley asserted, '... in these days when the worship of the State is imposing a mass-production ideal of human nature... eugenics as a whole must certainly make the encouragement of diversity one of its main principles'. It was, he elaborated, of the utmost importance for the material and spiritual progress of civilization that extreme gifted types (Mill's 'eccentrics') should be supplied with niches by the social system.¹¹⁰

Opponents of eugenics like Chesterton accused socialism of creating an atmosphere that favoured intervention and was conducive to eugenic experiments unethical and inhuman by nature. Anti-socialist eugenicists saw nothing in that ideology favourable to the improvement of the race, if indeed it did not encourage the propagation of the inferior.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ H. Brewer, *Eugenics and politics* (London, n.d. [1940]), pp. 7, 12; J. B. S. Haldane, *Heredity and politics* (London, 1938), pp. 123-4.

¹⁰⁸ Huxley, 'Eugenics and society', pp. 29-30.

¹⁰⁹ Brewer, *Eugenics and politics*, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ Huxley, 'Eugenics and society', p. 28. See also A. C. Pigou, 'Galton lecture', *Eugenics Review*, xv (1923), 306.

¹¹¹ G. K. Chesterton, *Eugenics and other evils* (London, 1922), pp. 7, 146, 165; Crackanthorpe, 'Eugenics as a social force', p. 971; R. Austin Freeman, 'The sub-man', *Eugenics Review*, xv (1923), 383.

Progressives could nevertheless state that both socialism and eugenics were complementary parts of humanism. If, as Eden Paul claimed, socialists could supply the perfect social environment, only bad inheritance would account for the existence of 'inefficient and anti-social members of the community'. The practice of eugenics would then be essential because of the reciprocal notion of obligation between individual and community. In return for guaranteeing subsistence to all – i.e. a minimum wage and the right to work – the state would insist on making 'the ability to earn the Minimum Wage a precondition of the right to become a parent. . . on Restrictive Eugenist principles, a national minimum of social efficiency will be the indispensable prerequisite to the right to parenthood'. One is obviously tempted to ask where lies the humanism of this vision, for efficiency and humanity usually made strange bedfellows. Paul believed it lay in the demand that 'those who will suffer or cause suffering shall not be born'.¹¹² And, indeed, Brewer as well remarked years later, in similar vein, that 'it is unfair to any child to be born and reared by persons who cannot help being cruel to it through their own weaknesses'.¹¹³ This, more than anything else, was the humanitarian argument that supported sterilization.

The odd thing about the nevertheless predominant 'strange opposition'¹¹⁴ between eugenists and socialists was perhaps not so much that eugenists were not socialists, but that, in the astute observation of Dean Inge, not more socialists were eugenists.¹¹⁵ As state interventionism in the cause of social reform became a fact of life, eugenists were far more eager to market their ideas as progressive than were the progressive circles to take them too seriously. But the lack of interest seems to have been a question of priorities, rather than of principle. For the moral of this story is not that eugenics can be legitimized with ease even in its worst excesses, nor that its salient anti-liberal and often fascist leanings can be obfuscated. Rather, it has been to illustrate the inappropriateness of approaching ideologies, or segments of social thinking, in black-and-white dichotomous fashion. British eugenics certainly is such a case. For many, it was a new and worthwhile experiment in the field of social reform – a field which in the first half of this century invited and encouraged innovations in ideas and practice. For a few, its aims appeared to be socialist ones and, as I have tried to argue, many of its fundamental precepts were shared with socialism. But above all, many enlightened progressives accorded it respectability, even in the face of persistent attempts to discredit it entirely or to associate it with undiluted racialism, chauvinism, imperialism, fascism or conservative individualism. They dallied with it at one time or another, they spoke of it favourably, they

¹¹² Paul, *Socialism and eugenics*, pp. 11, 13, 15, 17.

¹¹³ Brewer, *Eugenics and politics*, p. 10.

¹¹⁴ Herbert, 'Eugenics and socialism', p. 116.

¹¹⁵ W. R. Inge, 'Eugenics', *Edinburgh Review*, CCXXXVI (1922), 47.

accepted invitations to speak at the Eugenics Society, they even became members of that body. How else can one explain that Keynes was the treasurer of the Cambridge Eugenics Society before the First World War and a member of the Eugenics Society's council upon his death? How else can one explain that the central annual event of the Eugenics Society, the Galton Lecture, was given by progressives such as Huxley, Keynes and Beveridge? Keynes remarked at the 1946 Galton lecture: 'Galton [was] the founder of the most important, significant and, I would add, *genuine* branch of sociology which exists, namely eugenics.'¹¹⁶ Herbert Samuel, one of the leaders of the Liberal party and close to new liberal circles, wrote in 1937, while Nazism was rampant, about the 'new science of Eugenics': 'As the means are discovered by which the physical qualities of the human race may be improved generation by generation, to make use of those means will rank as a duty. . . . To put debased money into circulation is an offence, but to put degenerate men and women into circulation is an offence far graver.'¹¹⁷ Richard Titmuss, though he always stressed the greater importance of environment and of social improvement, was an active member of the Eugenics Society for many years and occasionally addressed it. He justified eugenic conclusions in the light of turn-of-the-century knowledge and drew attention to findings concerning dysgenic trends.¹¹⁸ Graham Wallas in his *The great society* and G. Lowes Dickinson in his *Justice and liberty* recommended eugenic measures.¹¹⁹

In recent years eugenics has become increasingly the domain of geneticists and less of social scientists, social philosophers or politicians. The biological breakthroughs promised us by scientists, coupled with renewed interest by laymen in questions of heredity and human quality – a natural development as the atrocities of Nazism recede into the past – will no doubt raise again many of the themes touched upon here. That these themes can be pursued by the type of thinker considered representative of western social democracies, I hope to have demonstrated in this article.

¹¹⁶ J. M. Keynes, quoted in *Eugenics Review*, xxxviii (1946–7), 68.

¹¹⁷ H. Samuel, *Belief and action* (London, 1937), pp. 149–50.

¹¹⁸ R. M. Titmuss, *Poverty and population* (London, 1938), pp. 44–6; 'The social environment and eugenics', *Eugenics Review*, xxxvi (1944), 56–7.

¹¹⁹ G. Wallas, *The great society* (London, 1914), p. 59; G. Lowes Dickinson, *Justice and liberty* (London, 1908), pp. 39, 46, 137.