

FRANCIS GALTON'S EUGENICS AS A MEANS TO A NEW WORLD: AN ETHICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The gene a human being is born with has a strong influence in its being. However, a human being is not only a product of its gene but also of its environmental influence which he can even use to surpass limitations and break boundaries. The quest for a better man, a better society has led to many theories, Eugenics being one of them. This theory advocates for a better society by what is called selective breeding as the best means to improve the human race. Eugenicists worldwide believed that they could perfect human beings and eliminate social ills through genetics and hereditary. The central question in this study, therefore, is; is man determined by his genetical makeup? Is man not able to surpass limits of his gene? Could societal ills truly be avoided by having a few people breed? How can we determine these super genes suitable for breeding if there is any? Does man or body of organizations have the right to end ones generation because their traits are undesirable in the society? Social and behavioural changes, are they scientifically or culturally determined? This study uses the expository and analytical method to expose eugenics and examine its implications in the society. This study discovers that eugenics is heavily biased, and a bias based theory cannot really give rise to a greater or better society. This study advocates for a peaceful society where every member is given an equal chance to show what he can bring to the table, effectively launching the society to a greater height.

Keywords: Eugenics, new world, ethical

Introduction

Humans have focused on understanding themselves, and trying to take charge of every aspect of their life ever since gaining higher reasoning processes. It is possible that the study of human biology began with the evolution of humans. Much of human biology in the past was concerned with the issue of race. From the Age of Exploration, different ethnic groups came into contact with each other most frequently, and it was during this time that man began to develop the notion of race.

Scientifically, the human person is made up of gene, DNA, chromosomes, nucleus, cell, tissue, organs and systems. The genes are inherited, and are product of nature. However, it is disappointing to see that a person is determined by his genes which are inherited; products of nature. Some people are being written off because of whom their parents are (the easiest way to tell one's genetic traits), people are treated as less human because of their genetical makeup. Private witnessing showed a person who was a victim of such genetical bullying; considering the height, which was caused by the genes. The person was made to feel as though there's nothing he could offer because he looked small. He was also disrespected and disregarded because of it that affected him sometimes. Why would people treat their fellow human in such a way just because of a genetical trait? In the 20th century, more than 60,000 people were sterilized in the US, because of this belief in the Eugenics theory. Many countries adopted eugenic policies, intended to improve the quality of their populations' genetic stock. Such programs included both positive measures, such as encouraging individuals deemed particularly "fit" to reproduce, and negative measures, such as marriage prohibitions and forced sterilization of people deemed "unfit" for reproduction. Those deemed "unfit to reproduce" often included people with mental or physical disabilities, people who scored in the low ranges on different IQ tests, criminals and "deviants", the poor, mentally ill, blind, deaf, developmentally disabled, promiscuous women, homosexuals, members of disfavored minority groups and racial groups such as the Roma and Jews in Nazi Germany. They are seen as "degenerate" or "unfit", and this led to segregation, institutionalization, sterilization, and even mass murder mostly seen in the Nazi Germany which was what brought the downfall of the eugenics movement. Although it is indirectly practiced in our world today and was directed as new eugenics, i.e human genetic

engineering, it now possesses tools to reshape its own hereditary capacities, perhaps even to realize the dream of eugenicists that human beings might take charge of their own evolution.

Francis Galton, a British explorer and natural scientist, who was the first person to coin the word "eugenics" in 1883 was influenced by Charles Darwin theory of natural selection and through it, he advocated for a more suitable system which is based on "selective breeding" as the best means to improve the human race. Eugenics is the study of or belief in the possibility of improving the qualities of the human species or a human population, especially by such means as discouraging reproduction by people presumed to have inheritable undesirable traits or encouraging reproduction by people presumed to have inheritable desirable traits. It is the science of the hereditary improvement of the human race by selective breeding. Historically, eugenicists have attempted to alter human gene pools by excluding people and groups judged to be inferior or promoting those judged to be superior. Galton defined eugenics as "the study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally." Galton claimed that health and disease, as well as social and intellectual characteristics, were based upon heredity and the concept of race view.¹ The goal of eugenics was "to improve the natural, physical, mental, and temperamental qualities of the human family." Regrettably, this sentiment manifested itself in a widespread effort to prevent individuals who were considered to be "unfit" from having children. Eugenics researchers believed that by studying large human families in which a certain undesirable trait appeared, they could demonstrate a genetic pattern of inheritance for the trait, and such findings would justify policies aimed at removing the related genes from the population. Unfortunately, such policies often included involuntary sterilization or institutionalization.²

In contemporary usage, the term eugenics is closely associated with scientific racism. Modern bioethicists who advocate new eugenics characterize it as a way of enhancing individual traits, regardless of group membership. The new eugenicists describe the old eugenics as unscientific and coercive, concerned with the improvement of the race. The new eugenics proposes to create better opportunities for children through individual human enhancement and undesirable trait elimination, rather than to improve the species. We all know that the gene a human being is born with has a strong influence in its being. However, a human being is not only a product of its gene, but also of its environmental influence which he can even use to surpass limitations and break boundaries.

In the light of these, one could possibly argue that the above listed processes are not helpful for the purpose to which they were made. But what we want to know is the implications of Francis Galton's Eugenics. Problems of human genetic engineering should not be confused with the ethical problems of the 20th century eugenics movements. However, it is still problematic because it challenges the idea of human equality and opens up new forms of discrimination and stigmatization for those who cannot afford the technology. Gallon's theories of eugenics have been highly controversial and have been widely criticized for their implications for human rights and social justice.

The philosophical appraisal of Gallon's ideas reveals important questions about human nature, social justice, and the role of science in society. The legacy of eugenics demonstrates the importance of ethical reflection in scientific research and underscores the need for caution when applying scientific knowledge to complex social issues. However the turns and twists seen in eugenics, forms the background of this research.

Clarification of Terms

Bioethics

Bioethics can be defined as a branch of applied ethics that studies the philosophical, social, and legal issues arising in medicine and the life sciences. It is chiefly concerned with human life and well-

being, though it sometimes also treats ethical questions relating to the nonhuman biological environment.³ In a more personal view, bioethics means ethics in biology i.e an ethics that could take care of our obligations to nature.

Eugenics

Eugenics can be defined as the study of or belief in the possibility of improving the qualities of the human species or a human population, especially by such means as discouraging reproduction by people presumed to have inheritable undesirable traits (negative eugenics) or encouraging reproduction by people presumed to have inheritable desirable traits (positive eugenics).⁴ On a personal opinion, eugenics is a means of improving human race through allowing those with desired traits to produce offsprings and deprive the production of offsprings by those with undesired traits.

Genetics

Genetics is defined as "the scientific study of genes and heredity, of how certain qualities or traits are passed from parents to offspring as a result of changes in DNA(deoxyribonucleic acid) sequence".⁵ Genetics is seen as the study of how certain traits are passed down to offsprings from generation to generation.

Sterilization

Sterilization refers to any process that removes, kills, or deactivates all forms of life (particularly microorganisms such as fungi, bacteria, spores, and unicellular eukaryotic organisms) and other biological agents such as prions present in or on a specific surface, object, or fluid. Sterilization can be achieved through various means, including heat, chemicals, irradiation, high pressure, and filtration. Sterilization is distinct from disinfection, sanitization, and pasteurization, in that those methods reduce rather than eliminate all forms of life and biological agents present.⁶ Sterilization, as regards to human, is defined as "a surgery to make a person or animal unable to produce offspring".

Segregation

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, segregation is the separation of groups of people with differing characteristics, often taken to connote a condition of inequality.⁷ Segregation is the official practice of keeping people apart, usually people of different sexes, races, or religions.

Francis Galton's Eugenics

The word "eugenics" was coined in 1883 by the English scientist Francis Galton, a cousin to Charles Darwin and a pioneer in the mathematical treatment of biological inheritance. Galton took the word from a Greek root word meaning " good in birth " or " noble in heredity " He intended the term to denote the " science " of improving human stock by giving the " more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing over the less suitable ".⁸

The idea of eugenics dated back at least to Plato, and discussion of actually achieving human biological melioration had been boosted by the Enlightenment. In one of Plato's best-known literary works, *The Republic*, he wrote about creating a superior society by procreating high- class people together and discouraging coupling between the lower classes. He also suggested a variety of mating rules to help create an optimal society. For instance, men should only have relations with a woman when arranged by their ruler, and incestuous relationships between parents and children were forbidden—but not between brother and sister. While Plato's ideas may be considered a form of ancient eugenics, he received little credit from Galton. Nevertheless, Darwin's theory of evolution taught that species did change as a result of natural selection, and it is well known that through artificial selection farmers and flower fanciers could obtain permanent breeds of animals and plants

strong in particular characters. Galton thus supposed that the human race could be similarly improved through eugenics, human beings could take charge of their own evolution.

Galton suggested that “if a twentieth part of the cost and pains were spent in measures for the improvement of the human race that is spent on the improvement of the breed of horses and cattle, what a galaxy of genius might we not create!”.⁹ Gallon’s grand idea was quite simple: “by selecting men and women of rare and similar talent, and mating them together, generation after generation, an extraordinarily gifted race might be developed.”¹⁰

The idea of human biological improvement was slow to gather public support, but after the turn of the twentieth century, eugenics movements emerged in many countries. Eugenacists everywhere shared Galton's understanding that people might be improved in two complementary ways - which is by getting rid of the "undesirables" and by multiplying the "desirables". For Gallon, there are two types of eugenics which is the positive and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics aimed at encouraging the physically and mentally superior members of the population to choose partners with similar traits, and negative eugenics, the discouragement of reproduction by those with hereditary traits perceived as poor. Negative eugenic policies in the past have ranged from paying those deemed to have bad genes to voluntarily undergo sterilization, to attempts at segregation to compulsory sterilization and even genocide. Positive eugenic policies have typically taken the form of awards or bonuses for "fit" parents who have another child. Positive eugenics has seemed to be a more acceptable form of eugenics than negative eugenics by many.

Early supporters of eugenics believed people inherited mental illness, criminal tendencies and even poverty, and that these conditions could be bred out of the gene pool. Those deemed "unfit to reproduce" often included people with mental or physical disabilities, people who scored in the low ranges on different IQ tests, criminals and "deviants", and members of disfavoured minority groups.

How positive or negative ends were to be achieved depended heavily on which theory of human biology people brought to the eugenics movement. Many eugenacists, particularly in the United States, Britain, and Germany, believed that human beings were determined almost entirely by their germ plasm, which was passed from one generation to the next, and overwhelming environmental influences in shaping human development. Their belief was reinforced by the rediscovery, in 1900, of Mendel's theory that the biological makeup of organisms was determined by certain "factors," which were later identified with genes and were held to account for a wide array of human traits , both physical and behavioral , "good" as well as "bad".

By the 1920s, eugenics had become a global movement. There was popular elite and governmental support for eugenics in Germany, the United States, Great Britain, Italy, Mexico, Canada and other countries. Statisticians, economists, anthropologists, sociologists, social reformers, geneticists, public health officials and members of the general public supported eugenics through a variety of academic and popular literature.

The most well-known application of eugenics occurred in Nazi Germany, with them in the lead up to World War II and the Holocaust. And this was what led to the end of the eugenics movement, even though there are some kind of eugenics being practiced by us now which is called the "new eugenics", that is the use of genetic engineering. Therefore, the advances in human genetics boosted the new field of genetic counseling, which provided prospective parents with advice about what their risk might be of bearing a child with a genetic disorder. Eugenics dramatically fell out of favour in the aftermath of the Second World War. The Nazis had used eugenics to support the persecution of Jewish people and other minorities, which culminated in the concentration camps and genocide of

the Holocaust. Other countries, horrified at where eugenics had led to, abandoned their selective breeding programmes.

The Nazis Eugenics and Euthanasia

Euthanasia in its literal sense means a good death, peaceful death and honourable death. In some part of the world, euthanasia is called assisted suicide. Euthanasia is otherwise known as mercy killing or painless killing. Euthanasia can be active or passive, active in the sense that it is seen as an act of commission with the intention of hastening the death of a human being who is terminally ill with the motive of relieving the person from great suffering, passive euthanasia is an act of omission which entails the discontinuing or not using extra ordinary life sustaining measures to prolong life. Euthanasia is of three types which is the voluntary, involuntary and non-voluntary euthanasia. Voluntary euthanasia states that the mercy killing is carried out at the request of the patient. Involuntary euthanasia the patient does not give his consent but capable of doing so. Could this not be termed murder? In non-voluntary, the patient cannot understand the choice to take between life and death even though he/she haven't given his/her consent but their family have given their consent. The practice of euthanasia has been controversial throughout history. Supporters of euthanasia argue that it is a humane way to relieve the pain and suffering of terminally ill patients, while opponents argue that it is morally wrong to take an innocent life, regardless of the circumstances.

The first time euthanasia was introduced is during the Second World War by the Nazis when Adolf Hitler led this euthanasia to the killing of children and old men and to terminate the Jewish race whom they regarded as the “undesired.” This is their form of practicing eugenics. The Nazis subjected the unfortunate inhabitants of these institutions to an extreme form of eugenics, that of euthanasia, which means that euthanasia can be seen as an extreme form of eugenics i.e for involuntary. For the regime, this proved the ultimate means of racial purification. The movement from eugenics to euthanasia was not a sudden or rash one. It was the next “logical” step for Nazi bureaucrats. For the Nazis this was “killing two birds with one stone”; after euthanasia, the patient would be both sterile (because he/she would be dead) and no longer a “burden” for the government. Even more disturbing was the fact that it was the next “logical” progression for the scientific community as well. For the Nazis, euthanasia provided the answer to their perceived problem of current handicapped and incurably ill citizens of the nation being institutionalized and thus supported by the state. While eugenics measures prevented the so-called “undesirable” element from having children, thus perpetuating undesired outcomes of a Jewish population or children with birth defects, it did not resolve the impending need for financial resources and medical space that the war would create. For the Nazis, this was unacceptable and a better solution needed to be found; that solution was euthanasia. Euthanasia solved both “problems” for the Nazis. It meant they would no longer need to pay for supporting the individual who had been deemed “unworthy of life”; it also meant that they would not be able to procreate offspring, because they would be dead. Also, with the understanding that war was imminent, the extermination of these individuals meant for the Nazis that more money would be available for the war effort and that more hospitals and staff would be open for care of wounded soldiers.

Therefore, instead of forced sterilization as other countries are practising, the Nazis rather euthanize those deemed “unfit” and this was what led to the practice of eugenist with so many eugenicists calling off the movement because this was not the eugenics they have in mind.

A Philosophical Appraisal of Francis Galton’s Eugenics

Eugenics is a controversial concept that involves the science of improving the human gene pool through selective breeding and genetic enhancement to eliminate traits that are deemed undesirable. Eugenics has been used in the past to justify forced sterilization, racial segregation, and other

discriminatory practices, which have had devastating social and psychological implications on affected individuals and communities. Today, advances in science and technology have made the prospect of genetic modification and selective breeding more feasible, which raises many ethical implications for society. The Philosophical appraisal of eugenics involves examining the ethical and moral implications of the practice, as well as its potential benefits and drawbacks. There are several philosophical theories and principles that are relevant to this discussion, including utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics, and human rights.

Utilitarianism Approach

Utilitarianism is a moral theory that emphasizes the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In the context of eugenics, utilitarians may argue that genetic engineering and selective breeding can lead to improved health outcomes and better overall well-being for the entire human population. However, critics of eugenics may argue that the potential harm caused by genetic manipulation, such as the risk of unintended consequences or discrimination against certain groups, may outweigh the potential benefits. Unintended consequences of genetic modification could lead to unforeseen mutations or genetic disorders in future generations. Selective breeding could lead to the loss of certain genetic traits that are deemed undesirable but may have other benefits. The implementation of eugenics policies could lead to social division and tension, particularly if some groups of people are excluded or discriminated against based on their genetic makeup.

Deontological approach

Deontology, on the other hand, emphasizes moral duty and the importance of respecting individual rights and autonomy. In this framework, eugenics may be seen as a violation of individual rights, as it requires some people to be deprived of their reproductive autonomy or potentially subjected to unfair discrimination. Proponents of eugenics may counter this argument by arguing that the potential benefits to society as a whole justify the infringement on individual rights.

Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics focuses on the character and moral virtues of individuals, rather than specific actions or outcomes. From a virtue ethics perspective, eugenics may be seen as morally wrong because it involves treating certain individuals as means to an end rather than respecting their inherent dignity and worth as human beings.

Finally, human rights are a central concern of many philosophical approaches to eugenics. Human rights include but not limited to the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, the right to reproductive autonomy and the right to be free from discrimination. Critics of eugenics may argue that the practice of eugenics violates these fundamental human rights by subjecting certain individuals to involuntary sterilization or other forms of discrimination based on their genetic makeup.

On a personal view, eugenics can lead to genetic elitism because, their aim which is to produce a genetically superior population could lead to a society where only selected group of people are considered valuable or worthy of existence and this could be dangerous. The reason is that it could create a dangerous social hierarchy, where people with certain genetic traits are considered better than others.

Another point is that eugenics can lead to the devaluation of human diversity. The genetic diversity of human beings is what makes our species unique and important. Eugenics seeks to eliminate this

diversity by selecting certain traits and discarding others. This could lead to a society that devalues the richness of human diversity and reduces it to a set of pre-determined characteristics.

Eugenics can also lead to psychological harm on affected individuals who are deemed genetically inferior. Eugenics could lead to stigmatization, discrimination, and social ostracism of people with genetic differences, leading to serious psychological harm.

Eugenics can contribute to a reductionist view of human life. Eugenics reduces the complexity of human life to its genetic makeup alone, without considering the social, economic, and cultural factors that shape human existence. This reductionist view can have serious implications on how we view and treat each other as human beings. Therefore, the effects of eugenics policies can have long-lasting effects on future generations, particularly in the case of genetic modification. These effects could shape the genetic makeup of entire populations and have serious implications for human evolution and the nature of human life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, eugenics raises numerous ethical issues and has a dark history of discrimination and harm. As we continue to navigate the advancements in science and technology, we must consider the ethical implications of eugenics and ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. We must recognize that the genetic diversity and complexity of human life are what make us unique and valuable and that we should work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

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