

Change of Frontier that Eugenics brought to Humanity

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Abstract

This paper explores the global rise and ethical consequences of the eugenics movement, examining how scientific efforts to improve genetic traits crossed moral boundaries and redefined societal "frontiers." Beginning with Francis Galton's ideas influenced by Darwinian theory, eugenics gained traction in the early 20th century, particularly in the United States and Nazi Germany. The paper further examines how forced sterilization, racial policies, and genocidal programs were used as means of achieving genetic purity, paying special attention to religious resistance, in this case, Pope Pius XI and the Catholic Church. Presenting case studies such as the California sterilization laws and Nazi medical experiments to help support and explore in-depth of how eugenics encouraged and redefined the ethical boundaries of science, law, and human rights. The paper demonstrates how the ideal of a perfect society has led to irreversible crimes against human rights and can be regarded as a permanent reminder of the threats posed by ideology over ethics.

Introduction: Eugenics and the Ethical Frontier

Eugenics has been a belief ever since Darwin brought up the idea of evolution. Francis Galton, Darwin's cousin, introduced the concept of eugenics to society, influenced by the idea of evolution; however, he never knew how much this experimental belief would alter the standards of the ethical frontier. The eugenics movement, which aimed to improve the genetic quality of a population, gained support in

several countries, including Germany, the U.S., China, Japan, and Korea, among others. This belief was that this approach would yield the desired traits to enhance overall society. While the intentions behind eugenics, aiming to promote desirable characteristics, were a positive idea, the methods countries employed to achieve this goal had many negative aspects, leading people to wonder whether this crossed the ethical line. So, what is the ethical line? Well, the ethical line, or the ethical frontier, refers to humans testing in uncharted

territories, where it really brings up the question of whether it's against one's morals or not. In simple words, it's an abstract frontier that determines if something is morally right or wrong. Eugenics has been a controversial topic moving from the positive to the negative side of the ethical border ever since it was introduced, and the ideology of achieving it has hindered the standards for the ethical frontier ever since.

Origins and Ideology of Eugenics

Eugenics is a social and political movement that started in the late 19th century, which promotes the enhancement of human genetic makeup through selective breeding and sterilization. The term was coined by British scientist Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin and a follower of the theory of evolution. Galton's idea of eugenics was based on the belief that an individual's intelligence was passed through genetics and could be inherited by future generations. Eugenics was popular in a number of countries, especially in Europe, where it was controversial because of its inhumane procedures in the early 20th century. Several prominent scientists, intellectuals, and politicians supported the movement, viewing it as a means to improve the overall health and well-being of society. Nevertheless, eugenics was also linked to racism, nationalism, and other forms of discrimination since most of the eugenicists held the view that some ethnic and social groups are genetically inferior to others. The eugenics ideas and practices justified forced sterilization, restrictions of immigration, and other measures to curb the growth of populations that people regarded as undesirable

and unethical or morally wrong, but on the other hand, a good idea.

Religious Opposition to Eugenics

Sterilization was a highly debated topic in the 1930s, and not everyone supported the idea. An example is the Catholic Church, which issued a firm opposition to the practice, especially when it was being practiced by the Hitler regime in Germany. Pope Pius was quoted as saying that "Magistrates have no direct power over the bodies of their subjects... they can never directly harm or tamper with the integrity of the body, either for reasons of eugenics, or any other reasons." This statement clearly illustrates the Pope's stance against the idea of eugenics, which presumes a person's identity solely based on their genetic information and disregards their individual rights and autonomy. The Pope's statement also highlights the injustice of judges taking away the sexual identity of individuals for the purpose of eugenics, which was a significant issue during that time. His argument lies with many people, as during this era, the Pope was endowed with considerable authority, and most of what he said was considered infallible by his followers. The Catholic Church would be another angle to look at eugenics in religion. The Catholic Church, just like the Pope, opposed the concept of eugenics since it, "unnaturally separates the twofold purpose of the marital act, it is contrary to the nature of man and woman and their loving union, and it exceeds the control that a person exercises over his or her generative powers." In a nutshell, the Catholic Church was not practicing eugenics because of its inhuman practices of forced

breeding and control of the bodies of other people. Such opinions are especially noteworthy, considering that many individuals during that period subscribed to the idea of the superiority of certain races, sexes, and family lineages, due to the extent to which such beliefs were given credence. It demonstrated that the churches could not ethically test on humans.

Nazi Germany and the Extremes of Eugenics

In contrast to religious resistance, this is not the case with the United States. They knew that eugenics was inhumane, but they proceeded to sterilize a particular group of people, thus depriving them of their sexual capabilities in favor of the alleged good of society. It is a fact that the US and Germany tried to cross the ethical frontier of eugenics in such an inhumane way that it shows just how vital the ethical frontier is and how it should not be crossed.

Spreading across the globe, the idea of eugenics became a more widely accepted notion in the 20th century. More than 20,000 sterilizations took place in California alone, between 1909 and 1979, aimed at preventing the birth of children by mentally ill people. In 1927, the US Supreme Court ruled that sterilization was constitutional, and at the time, 33 states had authorized it. But the unfairness of these practices was later exposed. In Puerto Rico, Governor Rafael Menendez Ramos implemented sterilization as a means to combat poverty and preserve the "pure" Aryan race. In 1976, the Government Accountability Office found that 25-50 percent of Native Americans had been sterilized improperly or without their

consent in 1970-1975. Doctors were also reported to be carrying out forced sterilizations to women aged below 15 years. Such unfair and immoral actions raised the question of whether this had gone too far.

Eventually, after thousands of involuntary sterilizations, the U.S in 1942 realized that reproduction was a fundamental right that every person was supposed to have. Eugenics remains a subject that is highly debatable in the U.S on whether it is morally good or bad. And because of this ambivalence of the country, eugenics continues to be tested even today in miniature forms.

Nazi Germany and the Extremes of Eugenics

The most horrible moment in the history of eugenics took place in 1939. Hitler's implementation of eugenics was driven by his clearly hateful beliefs that Jews and Romani were inferior races and aimed to create a "perfect" society through their extermination. This ideology was clearly stated in his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, where he advocated for genocide to preserve the "pure" (270 Hitler) German gene pool and said that, "Never in this world can the Jew become master of any people except a bastardized people" (270 Hitler). Trying to justify his way of genocide and to show that he has the greatest hatred for the Jews and the Romani.

The horrific nature of Hitler's eugenics crossed numerous ethical boundaries and was achieved through brutal and inhumane means. It is estimated that approximately 6 million Jews and 5 million Romani were murdered during the

Holocaust, all in the name of Hitler's misguided pursuit of a so-called perfect society. But then, towards the end of the 1930s, Hitler turned against the Rheinlandbastarde, Germans of African descent, and deprived them of citizenship rights as well. He viewed them as a threat to the pure Aryan bloodline and called their mothers "whores" who were part of a French plot to corrupt German heritage.

This racial segregation was further entrenched in the Nuremberg Laws of 1938, which outlawed interracial marriages. In 1933, the Nazis also passed the Law to Protect Genetically Diseased Offspring, which aimed to prevent the propagation of hereditary illness by sterilization. More than 400,000 individuals were sterilized in the period. The medical experiments that were conducted in the concentration camps, such as Auschwitz, involved testing the reproductive capabilities of the prisoners by subjecting their genitalia to X-ray radiation burns. This represented a dark chapter in history, where the Nazis pushed the boundaries of the ethical line and committed unspeakable acts in the name of creating a "perfect society."

Conclusion: Lessons from a Dark Chapter

The eugenics movement was a complex and contentious topic that has been a subject of discussion and debate for the last century. Although the movement was motivated by the need to enhance the genetic purity of a given population, the processes through which the objective above was to be realized were, in most cases, unethical, inhumane, and unfair. One of the loudest critics of the eugenics movement

was the Catholic Church and Pope Pius XI; meanwhile, in the United States, sterilizations and other measures to curb the expansion of the populations deemed undesirable were being practiced.

Such policies overlooked the personal rights and free will of the affected individuals and instead emphasized the genetic aspect only; this resulted in massive discrimination and unfairness. The unfairness of these activities was later revealed, highlighting the need to avoid compromising ethics in our pursuit of a better society. The eugenics movement is a warning story that we should remember the risks of trying to play with genetics to achieve the desired, supposedly ideal society. It highlights the importance of considering the ethical implications of our actions and the need to adhere to the principles of individual rights and autonomy. People should never forget this historical concept and ensure that it is never misused. The eugenics movement was a black stain on human history that showed the consequences of these mystifying ideas if they were propagated. It has always been a concept of moral argument, a concept that transformed our perception of what we thought was morally right and wrong.

Annotated Bibliography

1. Clipping from the Daily Herald. (1933, December 24). Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/38980966/the-daily-herald/>

This article is a primary source, a document

that was not passed on by a secondary publisher, which is a newspaper published by the Daily Herald in the 1930s, discussing the pope's perspective on the German sterilization policy led by Hitler. One of the primary reasons I chose this article is its credibility as a primary source. The website's content proves that none of the information was censored or manipulated by the secondary publisher, suggesting that it contains more accurate information compared to other secondary resources. The author of the source presents the pope's proposal from his speech without providing any contextual information.

2. Casti connubii (December 31, 1930): Pius XI. (1930, December 30). Retrieved February 7, 2023, from https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html

This is a primary source document that describes the general stance of the pope during the time period mentioned in the Daily News paper, which is also a primary source that discusses how he generalizes the terms eugenics and sterilization. Indeed, he foresees how the theory itself states that some superior humans have the right to erase certain human beings who are not exceptional enough in their degree of heredity/race.

3. Mein Kampf - Great War. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://greatwar.nl/books/meinkampf/meinkampf.pdf>

This autobiography, written by Hitler, meaning a primary source, was a book written about Hitler's ideas and how he turned into an anti-semitic person. I decided to use this book since it showed another perspective in history and showed Hitler's genuine emotions towards Jews and the Romani. I also chose this book since it showed that Hitler was not going to let anything get in his way of keeping the German blood "pure," whether that meant implementing eugenics or genocide. This helped develop my argument because it showed the negative aspects of eugenics and how dangerous it can be in the wrong hands.

Secondary Sources

4. Eugenics: Definition, movement & meaning - history - history. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://www.history.com/topics/european-history/eugenics>

The article that is listed above was published in the source of History.com. Indeed, it summarizes the brief general history of eugenics, from its inception of ideas inspired by Francis Galton to its current evaluation. Also, the article doesn't list any specific information about the individuals who wrote it. However, the credibility of the article cannot be denied, as History.com is a website where only experts on that specific subject are allowed to publish articles. It also has a very reliable reputation; it was discussed as "the most respected history encyclopedia" on another

website. The author in the text generally describes the history of eugenics without offering an intuitive opinion perspective, which also qualifies the information from the source.

5. Eugenics internationally. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/tree/5233cd195c2ec500000000a4#:~:text=The%20eugenics%20movement%20gained%20widespread,Kingdom%2C%20and%20the%20United%20States>

The website is a secondary source that shows the history of eugenics in general in a timeline format. Thus, the part where I used to research was the branch that describes the enacted law of sterilization that the Nazis published in 1933. The following part discusses how the law was confirmed by the court and how many people were sterilized during the time period because of their hereditary disorder. I chose this website in order to gain statistical information on approximately how many people were sterilized during this period.

6. The origins of eugenics. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/origins-eugenics>

This secondary source provided the foundational information on how the concept of eugenics originated. It was the foundation of my paper and helped me start and write my introduction. It

illustrated Francis Galton's thought process in developing the concept of eugenics and its connection to another idea, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. This proved the long-term effect of this small idea formed and showed how it eventually turned out to be the cause of genocide in WW2.

7. Eugenics: Its origin and development (1883 - present). Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://www.genome.gov/about-genomics/educational-resources/timelines/eugenics#:~:text=Discussions%20of%20eugenics%20began%20in,end%20of%20World%20War%20I>

I chose this website to expand my knowledge about eugenics initially. It wasn't one of those texts that would be jam-packed with information; instead, it was more of an idea of where eugenics originated and how it spread across the world. This was implemented into my writing as I discussed how eugenics originated and how it spread to other regions.

8. KD;, O. R. An analysis of the church's teaching on sterilization. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/1270059/#:~:text=The%20church%20disapproves%20direct%20sterilization,his%20or%20her%20generative%20faculties>

This secondary source was chosen by me due to the fact that it provided me with another religious view on eugenics. While I

had the Pope's words on eugenics, I felt that having another highly powerful religious stance would enhance the idea of the paragraph. Having the Catholic Church's ideas about eugenics really strengthened the notion that eugenics crossed the ethical line and that it was morally incorrect. It was a good perspective shown at the time.

9. Michal. (2017, June 22). The Holocaust: The National WWII Museum: New Orleans. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/holocaust>

I chose this topic to gather specific statistics about WW2 in order to dramatize the effects that WW2 had and how eugenics contributed to it. It highlighted the detrimental impact and made readers realize that eugenics had indeed crossed the ethical frontier.

10. Stern, A. M. (2005, July). Sterilized in the name of Public Health: Race, immigration, and reproductive control in modern California. Retrieved February 7, 2023, from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1449330/>

The reason I picked this article was because of my paragraph about eugenics in America. It provided so much information and statistics about it that, after learning more about the basic ideas of eugenics, I went straight to this article to expand my knowledge about how seriously these countries took eugenics. It enhanced my

paper by showing clear-cut evidence and multiple dates for reference, which helped me support my arguments.