

## Philosophy of Eugenics: gains and losses

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Eugenics represents one of the most captivating projects of improving humankind, and as a scientific branch has its own history, philosophic foundations, culture-historical prerequisites and motives. If in the early stages of history it was considered as the basis for supporting physical and moral health within family, then, later, it was recognized as the scientifically proven concept, which defines the perspectives of practical and social regulations of preventing various deviations: physical, mental and moral imperfections of people. The article reviews conceptual positions of Eugenics, criticizing its weak sides and pointing towards all possible perspectives, which are relevant due to the progress in medical genetics, sociobiology, biopolitics and evolutionary epistemology.

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The constant process of scientific development that we are witnessing today affects problems that are so complex that they cannot be resolved by relying exclusively on a single branch of knowledge. All of this stimulates the development of philosophical thought in the search of new approaches and methods to solve the widest possible range of problems or which are suitable to an entire system of knowledge. There are philosophical problems that can be called classical or "eternal". This is not because they cannot be resolved, but because they are constantly being debated. Such problems arise when trying to understand the nature and essence of man.

The general problem of man is itself multifaceted. Furthermore, the current state of natural science, biological sciences in particular, often raises the issues of man to such a high philosophical level of analysis that they entail the use of the entire philosophical apparatus to explain the various natural characteristics in man. On the other hand, the philosophical approach to biological problems as a whole, and the philosophical view of some aspects of natural sciences as applied to man, help overcome the purely methodological difficulties that inevitably arise when modern biologist (anthropologist, geneticist, physicians, etc.) deal with problems directly related to understanding the evolutionary nature of man.

Biological science has long recognized reality as being only that which is observable and subject to verification. However, with the advent of the theory of evolution, some fundamental characteristics of evolutionary concepts have been applied to the physical, mental and moral qualities of man. It has given rise to the development of ideas, concepts and entire disciplines that have turned out to be rather attractive to researchers.

Endowing all things with meaning, and much of the observable with truth and value, is the path of the philosopher. The biologist does not search for meaning. He asks himself: how does a historically formed feature of a species promote the conservation of the species? According to Sir Francis Galton<sup>1</sup>, the discipline of eugenics studies the effects of what can improve or worsen the physical and mental qualities of future generations; it has become associated by many as a science that can

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Galton (1822-1911) – British scientist, anthropologist and psychologist. Known as the creator of diffusion differential psychology – the doctrine of individual and psychological differences between people. In his Works: "Inheritance: Talent and Character", "Hereditary genius: an inquiry into its laws and consequences", he applied some fundamental provisions of Darwin's theory of evolution. Specifically, he raised the question of the role of hereditary factors in the development of personality. He coined the term 'eugenics' (from the Greek. Eugenes, "purebred") and founded the same named studies. Major works: Hereditary genius. L. 1869; English men of science, their nature and nurture. L. 1874; Inquiries into human faculty and its development. L. 1883.

be used to formulate practical rules for the social regulations of these qualities, relying only on the evolutionarily formed characteristics of a species.

In order to understand and correctly evaluate the conditions for perfecting human nature performed by eugenics, one needs to consider the scientific and theoretical preconditions of the idea, the period and the cultural-historical background of its origin. The philosophical base that expands and changes the original purposes and objectives of the founders of the concept needs to be established. This clarification is necessary for several reasons. First, by considering the period when the ideas of eugenics arose, we remove the "moment of criticism". This means that we do not criticize the founder of eugenics for any new and changed meanings (or perverted meanings), which the concept received afterwards, but did not have initially. We will also not ascribe to eugenics the singularly positive results that other thinkers (and other epochs) ascribed to it. In other words, we do not look for historical and theoretical parallels where they do not and could not exist. Secondly, by considering the philosophical foundations of the concept, the motives of the creators of eugenics, and the premises of the theory, we can better understand the overall concepts and values that gave rise to eugenics as a basis for further scientific knowledge.

Thus, distinguishing a particular conceptual task from the general meaning contained in its ideas, distinguishing the important and valuable in it, separating the essential from the secondary or questionable, we arrive at the answer to the question. What has been gained and lost in eugenics over the entire period of its rise and fall? At the same time, we will nevertheless keep in mind the possibility that the idea of is capable of having a life that is independent from the intentions and goals of its founders.

It is worth paying attention to the fact that the history of science provides many examples where the subsequent operation and development of an idea changed or completely transformed the original meaning held and developed by its creators. This is true not only of eugenics. In the history of science, there are many examples where original positions eventually received completely

different interpretations. Most basic philosophical positions provide such examples. Examples include the idea of atomic matter, the concept of fire put forth by Heraclitus, different concepts of the sources and origins of life on Earth, etc. Today, no one takes the notion of fire as literally as Heraclitus did. Nobody believes that universal life originated from an egg or world tree, etc. Nevertheless, the epistemological value of these kinds of ideas, concepts and philosophical positions exceed their original meaning. They have obtained a universal, culturally historical significance, illustrating the stages of development of philosophical thought and putting the same classic, timeless questions before a new generation of thinkers, scientists and philosophers.

Another paradigm of the vicissitudes of scientific ideas is provided by examples of the private and practical goals (or anything else, for that matter, that is pragmatic) and common ways of reaching them. I speak of those instances when the simplest and purely human motives provide valuable services to scientific knowledge, giving impetus for the creation of outstanding theories. So, let me tell you a story. Some time ago, it occurred to J. Kepler to verify how accurately merchants measure the volume of wine barrels. By posing a concrete and pragmatic task, he obtained a mathematical solution to the problem and produced a universal method for determining volume delineated by curves in space. Barrels were only one particular case application for the universal application of his theory. In memory of how the discovery was made and in gratitude to the object of his research, Kepler titled his book something completely unexpected and comical, *Nova stereometria doliorum vinariorum* (New Stereometry of Wine Barrels)!

As for the development of certain ideas, it is important to note that individual facts (or the particular problems faced by individual researchers of these facts), can also have a significant impact on the emergence of new scientific concepts and theories. The "internal logic of facts" often depicts the field where the new scientific theory developed; cultural and historical background create a philosophical background and define the hidden motivations for future scientific theory.

Furthermore, the most important factor in the development of scientific concepts or theories is the choice of the proper method of study. Most often, the formulation of the method is based on the objectives or goals of the research. For specific sciences, those which base their theoretical postulates on empirically based results for example, principles define the conditions of the experiment. Only in the last stage are the results of these experiments analyzed. Selection of the method of analysis qualifies as a specific research method. Selecting the method is more difficult when the object of study is more speculative. Here, philosophical methodology plays a large role. Its main approach or principle essentially postulates – in our research we will proceed from the characteristics of the object studied, as well as attract the methods that are most adequate to the subject of our study. When evaluating the results obtained by eugenics, we proceed from the above principles. In short, we will continually refine the subject area of eugenics and thereby try to clarify the philosophical components of the concept considered.

On the other hand, we also try to define the theoretical boundaries of eugenics and historically based postulates necessary for its philosophical basis and development for future scientific theoretical research.

When examining the history of the birth of eugenics, it is not difficult to see that entire era of the XIX century was strongly influenced by everything that provided scientific and technical progress. The ideals of science and rationalism, dealings with the problems of science in general, were encouraged and promoted in the scientific community. They were based on models of scientific knowledge provided by scholars and thinkers of the XVIII century and on the global, universal and humanistic views that these scientist proclaimed.

The idea that: "The purpose of science is the welfare of mankind, the multiplication of all that is useful for people" (G. Leibniz), was the main philosophical and ideological background (the context) of scientific creativity. Focusing on welfare and usefulness was a strong incentive and the main stimulus for the research of many scientists,

particularly in the natural sciences. Finally, materialism became widespread and a new understanding became popular and increasingly used as a basis to explain the nature of man.

Considering these objective facts as prerequisites for eugenics, recall that F. Galton, an aristocrat by birth and a cousin of Charles Darwin, was one of the first who studied the works of that great evolutionist. Furthermore, the scientific interests of Galton dealt with the search for the causes of psychological differences that he found when studying human personality. He began by studying the genealogy of illustrious aristocratic English families and accepted the general ideas of evolution. He began to look for patterns in the heredity of talent, intellectual giftedness and physical perfection. These were the best qualities of human nature and the result of a long process of selection.

Reasoning by analogy, Galton came to believe that, just as new breeds are produced by interbreeding the best animal producers, one can act for the benefit of all humanity by purposefully choosing family pairs.

However, since the center of his interests were representatives of the aristocracy, he considered that the "special breeding conditions" of eminent men of the aristocracy resulted in "the best from the best of families." Based on this voluntary and-conscious choice, a family couple would give birth to healthy, beautiful and talented children for the benefit and wellbeing of all humanity.

In essence, Galton thought globally. He lamented the fact that due to congenital defects, our civilized human breed is much weaker than that of any other species of animals, both wild and domesticated. He was convinced of the fact that if we dedicated one twentieth of the efforts and resources on the improvement of the human race that we spent on improving the breed of horses and cattle, we would create a universal genius ("The inheritance of abilities and moral qualities," 1865). This was the zeal of his personal aspirations.

Note that Charles Darwin in his work "The Origin of Man" (1871) wrote: "Now, thanks to the admirable works of the master Galton, we know that genius . . . is usually inherited". Another

er great evolutionist, Herbert Spencer, expressed a diametrically opposite point of view, as if anticipating the specific provisions of eugenics, which would soon be formulated as a coherent concept. He wrote: "Fostering the good-for-nothing at the expense of the good is an extreme cruelty. It is a deliberate storing up of miseries for future generations. There is no greater curse to posterity than that of bequeathing them an increasing population of imbeciles." (G. Spencer "Principles Of Sociology", 1881.) This point of view suggests that the concept, or more precisely the very idea of inheriting the best traits with any degree of reasonable efficiency, was questionable. It was exactly there that it was attacked and criticized.

In the process of the perfection of human nature, only the best members of the species were invited, while the fate of other categories of people (if it is at all permissible to apply such a differentiating approach when referring to people) and the share of their participation in the evolutionary process was not mentioned.

In connection with this, we note that the general tendency of people towards self-perfection, which occurs (presumably) together with improvements in society, was on the minds of many scientists and thinkers. So, independent of Galton, who first used the term "eugenics" in 1883, far from England – in Russian – doctor V. M. Florina came up with the same idea. Even before, in 1866, Galton published a work entitled "Improvement and degeneration of the human race", where he put forth the idea that the human *path to improving* the "breed" was gradually becoming more perfect, when considering qualities such as intelligence, talent and beauty.

Meanwhile, Max Nordau (1849-1923), a doctor and a follower of the teachings of C. Lombroso, published a famous work called "degenerate." He examined degeneration<sup>2</sup> as the consequence of a natural process of development, as a stage in the developmental outlook and worldview of modern intellectuals. All responsibility for this state of spirit and mind lay on the so-called heroes of our

<sup>2</sup> The term "degeneration" was coined by Morel, who first studied this concept; it was then developed by C. Lombroso. Lombroso considered "degeneration" as a psycho-physiological state of a person.

time – Friedrich Nietzsche, Tolstoy, P. Verlaine, Wilde and others. "The general character of many phenomena of our time, emphasized Nordau, and it degenerates into what is now commonly called, an end of the world mood" [1, c.23].

As can be seen, some writers and artists would have been common criminals, since they put into the minds of people ideas that were destructive, and they were anthropologically related. Or, it can be seen as a personality for which creativity is the only acceptable (and relatively safe for others) expression of their unhealthy inclinations. Nevertheless, it was precisely this kind of mindset that gave impetus to the ideas that later became widespread. The idea that genius was the highest manifestation of creative talent. It was in the XIX century, with this decadent mentality as a background, that the first questions were posed about the nature of genius.

Interest in genius as a specific phenomenon was fueled by those who saw genius as the ability to express sickness, and those who saw in the progressive perfection of genius a process of evolution that specifically linked genius to the structure of the brain.

Omitting the criticism of the work of Max Nordau, I would ask: what is there in common between the ideas examined by eugenics and the decadence that came directly from those thinkers and scholars who wrote and spoke about degeneration, such as Nordau did? Apparently, it is not just that the author of the "theory of degeneration" was examining a particular illness or morbid tendency of those who are usually called intellectuals. We see that Nordau considers this illness as a general tendency of degeneration of precisely those whom society recognizes as the best among its representatives. These are highly gifted and talented individuals whom 'eugenics' views as elites – the ideal and socially valuable object in the selection of specific traits responsible for the improvement of future generations.

Thus, even relying on the only study cited here, we nevertheless have to admit that the sphere of scientific interests of all those who study human nature, inevitably (and quite naturally) includes the "worst" representatives of the human race. Therefore, the romantic and humanistic aspirations of

all those who would like a single way to solve the problem of improving and bettering the breed (humans), sooner or later face the problem that not even the founder of eugenics was able to fully comprehend. One thing is clear: the inherently humane concepts of eugenics, aimed at improving nature through selection and breeding of races of the particularly mentally gifted and physically strong people ran into serious problems. These problems affect the conditions and mechanisms to remove all the harmful imperfections (including imperfect social behavior, manifested in the form of various vices, crimes and deviations from the norm).

Finally, the philosophy of eugenics would not be complete without reference to the role and importance of physical perfection or strength. The analogue of this physically perfect man appears to be the physically healthy person. This means that the next problem that researchers confronted was defining the criteria for health.

The justifications and conclusions of these criteria would be performed by eugenics through the selection of attributes (including hidden ones), which would indicate that the person selected for procreation is quite promising from the standpoint of his strength. Eugenics understood strength to include not just physical health and stamina, but also, and primarily, the so-called power of the spirit. The presence of this quality usually indicates not only a good education (which from the start meant aristocratic England), but is seen as the result of a long process of natural selection and heredity. According to Galton, representatives of aristocratic families seemed to have inherited beauty and intelligence.

It is worth remembering that even in the original version, which defines the subject area of eugenics, it was noted that this discipline aims to study appropriate social controls, capable of improving or worsening both the physical and mental qualities of future generations. In other words, the primary task of eugenics was still not choosing the best pairs, but of "culling-out" the worst. The primary problem was the influence, of more precisely, the problem of determining which specific factors, natural and social, influenced heredity. Here, it is important to note the positive value of eugenics as an independent scientific concept.

The fact is that, it was eugenics that first drew attention to the role of the environment in improving (or worsening) both the physical and the mental qualities. Furthermore, it is important not to disregard those conditions which formulated the postulates and principles of eugenics, it was oriented towards the future. This also important for understanding the meanings and values of eugenics. Its ultimate target was future generations of people, people more perfect than now, and the creation of conditions made possible because of the implementation of this program, which the founders of eugenics had outlined themselves.

This broad program was to be implemented with the development of the theoretical apparatus of eugenics. It provided a consistent and phased deployment of the entire field of scientific research and practical activities: from theory to practice, from the propagation of ideas to the regulations of the state and activities of practical value.

Thus, it was assumed that the development of eugenics would be implemented in three phases:

- 1) scientific development of the basic provisions of eugenics, which required lengthy and comprehensive research; identifying the range of issues and advancement of postulates and principles for the specific actions in the field of social regulation of human evolution.

- 2) government legislation of a practical nature and publication of relevant laws;

- 3) during last stage, such laws would lose their meaning, since all people are aware of the need for rules on eugenics.

Obviously, the social management of human evolution in this form seems to be a variation on utopia, since it is grounded on idealizations, which are not only baseless, but cannot be considered as possible and real occurrences. Take, for example, assumptions from representatives of eugenics that all people will consciously and without compulsion follow the principles of selecting the best among them (the most talented, beautiful and healthy), or the confidence of eugenics that all of humanity can be lead to general obedience in such purely a personal and intimate area like relations between the sexes.

It is not just theoretically weak; it is a doubtful thesis. The more doubtful, the clearer that evo-

lution is formulated as a natural component of the natural needs of the people to reproduce offspring. Sometimes this need is even categorized as an instinct (socially and individually adaptable). However, even the most feeble attempt to bring complex and multilateral relations between the sexes to a single (unique) scheme is absurd and doomed to failure. Particularly when you consider that by creating a social environment, humanity inadvertently softened the harshness of natural selection.

It should also be recognized that some of the provisions of eugenics, even in the purest original form, were vulnerable to criticism and were often subject to interpretations which distorted its original meaning. I mean that, above all, the most vulnerable part in the definition of the subject of eugenics, was the meaning which included social control. It was precisely a presumed permissibility of controls over the qualities conditioned on natural characteristics or qualities arising from national characteristics of people, such as individuality, that encroaches on so-called freedom of choice, which man possesses and which should be regarded as a major achievement of culture and civilization. Therefore, it should be noted that within the concept itself lies the possibility of its interpretation.

Of course, this in no way reduces the value of certain provisions of eugenics to the development of scientific knowledge, if it were not for the interpretations, which as history has shown, were such that the main results of eugenics were leveled, thereby discrediting its original humanistic purpose and denying it the right to be called science.

Therefore, considering the basic conceptual provisions of eugenics, we conclude that as soon as eugenics begins to expand its borders or to promote its poorly reasoned position, such as the idea of the superiority of the strong over the weak, the sick and the healthy, etc., on which ideologies and some recent political activities were based, from that moment, it loses its appeal to science. It gets involved in the sphere of ideological battles and as such loses applicability.

Nevertheless, it is striking that there are references to the provisions and revisions of eugenics when dealing with interest in those old problems whose understanding is seen under a new light due

to the emergence of new directions of scientific research. This includes those disciplines that have taken similar approaches to understanding human nature, examining the essence and nature of man at a fundamental level. Above all this includes those characteristics of the evolutionary process and all those conditions, which we now know due to the emergence of modern fields of knowledge, such as medical genetics, evolutionary epistemology, sociobiology, biopolitics, biophilosophy etc.

Nevertheless, there are a number of issues raised by eugenics and related problems of social management evolution which remain unresolved. For example, what is the nature of heredity that eugenics seeks to change? In what ways and how successfully can one intervene in the mechanism of heredity? What are the objectives pursued by eugenics, creating the best representatives of the human race?

One of the methods that philosophers have chosen to search for answers to their questions is to try to clarify what others thought, said, and wrote about the issues under investigation. The advantage of this method is that it includes a historical approach to the problem and thus allows for comparative analysis of the results of the study. This method also includes what is viewed as the temporary, momentary aspects (diachronic section), and the purely structural aspects (synchronic cut) of the problem. In other words, it suggests considering the problem in its entirety, *sub specie aeternitatis* (astern)<sup>3</sup>, not paying attention to the historical context of socially constructed views and private (i.e. politicized) views on these questions.

Under such conditions, much of what is now viewed as a false method for scientific research, or at least causes sharp criticism from modern scholars, would be quite correct and even a necessary strategy for scientific research. Therefore, it is worthwhile to again stress that the wonderful justification for eugenics was the sincere desire of its founders for the intellectual and moral improvement of the human species. The fundamental principle of the theory of evolution (which in this era only gathering strength) was the theoretical conceptual framework of eugenics. It became a

<sup>3</sup> «From the point of view of eternity» – lar.

good base for further research along those lines. Particularly when the theory of heredity became a way for genetics to study the hereditary characteristics of mankind, and its principles viewed at a fundamentally genetic level.

Returning to the characteristics of the conceptual positions of eugenics and defining its place in science, it should be emphasized from the outset that there is no (and there could not be) single, well-established or generally accepted understanding of the challenges that confront eugenics. Nor did the scientific community have an unambiguous assessment of it. First, because of its weak theoretical apparatus (many continue to insist that eugenics was never a science in the classical sense, a well-grounded and theoretically equipped discipline).

Second, the weak point of eugenics was that, paradoxically, it formulated its problems using a formula that was not only ahead of its time, but also at the level of knowledge of the era. Eugenics was not able to solve these problems at the fundamental level that it claimed. These factors explain why eugenics is remembered after more than 100 years and is again beginning to be mentioned when basic science recognizes the need to answer those *classical questions* that were *already formulated* in the bowels of eugenics.

Meanwhile, some of the ideas of eugenics, as is known, remain relevant for the intellectual elite and among the public.

In the late XIX- early XX century, when eugenics first appeared, it was initially viewed as a proven foundation for maintaining the physical and moral health of the family. Then, it was viewed as a concept creating a scientifically based perspective for the prevention of physical deformities, mental re-

tardation, or morally imperfect people, and finally, as a theory with the ability to reduce crime in society. Social recognition of eugenics had referred specifically to these prospects and, ultimately, was associated with a belief in the constant growth of the human intellect and boundless prospects of science, and a humanistic orientation towards improvement of the human race.

Social value was endowed with human qualities such as high intelligence, good physical development and biological adaptability. Therefore, eugenics, as envisioned by its founders, had to develop within the boundaries corresponding to these specific characteristics. However, neither Galton nor his immediate followers (Pearson Laboratory) had yet guessed at the existence of laws of heredity, which were established much later. Therefore, the basic scientific method of eugenics was a simple selection of the best specific characters and pairings that were closest to these criteria.

Curiously, echoes of the postulates of eugenics continue to hang in the air; however, it is in a different, modified form. The premise that the aristocracy was a necessary manifestation of the best natural qualities of man receded into the background and seems to have been replaced by principles of social success. Social success (career, fame, money) is considered the main criterion for a successful person, and all the components of this principle (career, fame, money) confer significance and social value, similar to health, intelligence and ability to adapt, which eugenics had insisted on. Perhaps soon researchers-enthusiasts will pay attention to these changes in values and priorities, put forward a new concept that is capable of synthesizing the research results of various disciplines, and explain the terms of social success.

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