

Chapter 6

Picking Losers for Sterilization:

Eugenics as Demographic Central Planning

I think we must face the fact that behind the sovereignty of the philosopher king stands the quest for power. The beautiful portrait of the sovereign is a self-portrait.

Popper *Open Society*

6.1 Introduction: Eugenics as Central Planning

In this chapter we situate eugenics policy within the economics debate over central planning vs. market alternatives. After a substantial period of neglect, the involvement of post-Classical economics in the eugenics movement is now becoming clear (Chapter 4 above, Cot 2003, Dimand 2003, Leonard 2003b). Post-Classical economists supported sterilization and race-based immigration restrictions, practices that have become a source of embarrassment to their successors in professional roles.¹

We find the neglect of the role of social scientists in the eugenics movement has been unfortunate for two reasons. First, there is a historical issue. We are led to misunderstand the relationship between Classical and post-Classical economics if we do not realize that early eugenics thinkers (W. R. Greg and Francis Galton) attacked the Classical economists' presuppositions of human homogeneity (Chapter 4). We also fail to appreciate that F. Y. Edgeworth's attack on the early utilitarianism of Mill and Spencer was influenced by eugenic suppositions (Chapter 8). Second, once we appreciate the strong incentives to obtain specific answers in eugenic "science", we may question the community's conclusions.

¹The embarrassment may explain the silence of the commentators. A JSTOR search of the official history of the American Economic Association by A. W. Coats fails to locate the word "eugenics." Irving Fisher's collected works were supported by the American Economic Association with the proviso that the AEA funding not be acknowledged. (Cot 2003, Dimand 2003). On a personal note, a panel organized by the authors at the Allied Social Science Association's 2004 Annual meeting, was approved with the suggestion that "eugenics" be removed from the session title.

We will argue in what follows that eugenics was a program that entailed wide ranging intervention by the state, intervention purportedly designed to obtain the appropriate “quality” of the population. As such, it was a demographic form of central planning. We usually think of central planning as it relates to material things, setting prices and outputs of goods and services. And we know that *this* form of planning was vigorously opposed within the economics community, notably by Ludwig von Mises and F. A. Hayek. We begin this chapter by asking the natural follow-up question: were the opponents of material forms of central planning also opposed to planning for the quality of human beings? ²

At first glance, the opposition to eugenics as demographic planning seems to have had little to do with the opposition to central planning in economics. The intellectual case against eugenics was largely contained in a non-economist’s work, the first volume of Karl Popper’s attack on Plato’s doctrine, *Open Society and Its Enemies*.³ But economics was not always separate from the philosophy of science and the history of ideas. Popper tells us, in fact, that Hayek’s “interest and support” were instrumental to the publication

²Initially, it puzzled us that there seemed to be no credible intellectual opposition to eugenic arguments either before or after the Holocaust.

³“Inherent in Plato’s programme there is a certain approach towards politics which, I believe, is most dangerous, Its analysis is of great practical importance from the point of view of rational social engineering. The Platonic approach I have in mind can be described as that of *Utopian engineering*, as opposed to another kind of social engineering which I consider as the only rational one, and which may be described by the name of *piecemeal engineering*.” (Popper 1962 1:157)

of *Open Society*.⁴ He explicitly linked his argument to Hayek's work: "what I call 'Utopian engineering' corresponds largely, I believe, to what Hayek would call 'centralized' or 'collectivist' planning." (Popper 1962 1:285).⁵ The opposition to eugenics among the anti-central planners is further evident when we read in archives that the American edition of *Open Society* was published by Princeton University Press through the efforts of the great historian of economics and trade theorist, Jacob Viner.⁶

Splendidly effective as a polemic, Popper's *Open Society* did not have to confront eugenics seriously in the midst of the horrors of the Holocaust. It contains no discussion of the work of Galton or Pearson. Instead, Popper needed only to point to the racial

⁴"I am deeply indebted to Professor F. A. von Hayek. Without his interest and support the book would not have been published." Popper (1962,1: x). This is from the "Acknowledgements" in the first edition. The point was not lost on Popper's critics. "So those who approve of limited or 'piece-meal' planning are suspicious of radical planning, which they regard as the 'road to serfdom.' It is to von Hayek, whose phrase I have just used, that Popper says he is 'deeply indebted.' And Popper bitterly criticizes the 'radical planning' of Plato's *Republic*." Greene (1953, p. 47). Popper (1974, p. 95) adds details.

⁵In later editions, Popper pointed out that *Open Society* was written before *Road to Serfdom* and Hayek's papers on scientism that clarified Hayek's attitudes: "Readers of Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) may feel puzzled by this note; for Hayek's attitude in this book is so explicit that no room is left for the somewhat vague comments of my note." (Popper 1962 1: 285-86)

⁶Quoting from Shearmur (2003): "There is some correspondence between Viner and Popper. Viner seems to have been responsible for placing the American rights of *Open Society* with Princeton (Popper was unable to get a U.S. publisher). In that connection, he sent Popper a list of points about the book, via Princeton; it was not in the file under Viner, though there is just a chance that it might be held under Princeton U.P." It is worthy of note that Jacob Viner shares responsible for re-introducing the Pareto criterion into English language economics (Robbins 1981). In Chapter 10, we argue that the Pareto principle would prevent the start of eugenic planning.

politics of the Hitler era (Carlson 2001 contains an overview) and to observe that eugenic theorizing begins with Plato.⁷

One feature which distinguishes the debate over demographic planning from that over central planning more generally construed, is that Popper questioned the *motives* of the proponents of eugenics. Here is one of his many attacks on Plato:

I think we must face the fact that behind the sovereignty of the philosopher king stands the quest for power. The beautiful portrait of the sovereign is a self-portrait (1962, 1:155)⁸

In response to Popper, the most systematical defense of Plato insisted that the discussion remain at the level of logic and analysis, rather than motives or “imputations”.⁹ We

⁷“The one great figure in ancient eugenics is really Plato, who alone can be said to have perceived the spiritual significance and potentialities of the crude methods of social selection which were practised in the Greek world.” Schiller (1914, p. 63) The texts cited by Schiller and Paul Shorey were known to Charles Darwin. In Chapter 7, we review his discussion of the Greek proponents of human breeding in *Descent of Man*

⁸“He suggests that what Plato recommended is what might have been expected from a politically thwarted member of a ‘laconising’ aristocratic family. He even suggests that the prescription of philosopher-kings was intended to point to Plato himself as the Fuehrer by whom society could be saved; the ‘Republic’ was not only Plato’s ‘Das Kapital’, it was also his ‘Mein Kampf.’ I think myself that there are limits within which the interpretation of alogical motives should be kept and that Dr. Popper is inclined to overstep them. But it would be silly to pretend that interpretation can dispense with such imputations. If a thinker uses bad arguments or uses no arguments at all, if his exposition is obscure, his analogies false and his illustrations bad, the interpreter must offer some explanation for these defects. The official commentators have always done so, though the alogical motives which they have chosen to impute have tended to be respectable, if not noble, motives. So it is legitimate for Dr. Popper to pit against these reverent imputations his own more scathing diagnoses, so long as he can show that they give a better explanation of the logical failings in the dialogues.” Ryle (1947, p. 169).

⁹The burden of Popper’s attack (1962, pp. 242-4) involves Plato’s interpretation of the mysterious nuptial number, *Republic* 546B. Popper finds Plato contradicts himself here: “The crucial statement on which I base my interpretation is (A) that the guardians work by ‘*calculation aided by perception*’. ... Regarding (A), it should be clear to every careful reader of Plato that such a reference to perception is intended to express a criticism of the method in question.” (243). [Shorey translates what Popper italicized as ‘*reasoning combined with sensation*.’] Here is an alternative account quoted in the full-scale

question whether one can neatly dichotomize the “science” from the incentives of the scientists. We shall argue that eugenics overly tempts the researcher to separate himself from the “herd.” There can be no veil of ignorance which clouds the identity of expert and subject when the expert begins with the supposition that he is superior to some or all of the subjects. From the violation of reciprocity between expert and the expert’s subjects, additional temptations follow. We shall see that this very case was made in the 19th century by those in the utilitarian tradition, George Grote and then John Stuart Mill.

6.2 Incentives and Eugenic “Science”

We focus here on the incentives facing eugenicists, as opposed to their motives. This allows us to presume those who favored eugenics were no better (nor worse) than those who opposed it. Such motivational homogeneity is in line with our human homogeneity story that runs throughout this book. But even if everyone has the same motivation, different incentives will generate different behavior.

Defense of Plato (Levinson 1953, p. 616): “It thus appears that Brumbaugh agrees with Popper in taking Plato’s genetic program as Pythagorean in origin and serious in intent; Brumbaugh also takes Plato’s announcement of the number through the speech of the Muses as an indication that Plato had an operationally significant number of communicate. But here the resemblance ends. Brumbaugh finds Plato’s genetics inspired by a sober and scientific spirit of research capable of recognizing its own limitations and honest enough to qualify its results when these conflicted with knowledge derived from other sources. ... In fine, Brumbaugh sees in these inquiries not what Popper sees, the replacement of the philosopher’s function by that of the shaman-breeder, but rather the attempt within the limits of human possibility to integrate a theory of value -- philosophy -- with a program for its realization through the rational control of every possible agency of human betterment.” There is no disagreement about the purpose of the genetics: “Plato was inspired by Pythagorean and Hippocratic science with the hope of finding reliable principles according to which the higher human types required for preserving his ideal city could be bred.” (616)

In contrast to our focus on incentives here, little attention was paid during the central planning debates to the incentives facing planners (Levy 1990). The von Mises-Hayek criticism of central planning made the case in terms of the difficulty of aggregating information.¹⁰ Economists did not question why there was so much “scientific” support for planning among would-be planners even as the planned economies disintegrated. Nor did they ask why scholars of the stature of von Mises and Hayek could not obtain paid employment as teachers in American universities. Both were supported by business-funded foundations (Vaughn 1994, pp. 62-64).

The eugenic question which “Socrates” asks in Plato’s *Republic* – why is it that “we” breed animals but “we” do not breed people? – offers the expert different rewards for different answers.¹¹ One answer, that it is desirable and possible to remake people, offers the expert satisfaction for creatively exercising his craft as well as power and plenty. The other answer, that it is neither desirable nor possible to remake the subjects, offers the theorist only satisfaction.

¹⁰Farrant (2004) establishes that Frank Knight understood perfectly well that the substantial problem with central planning, as it was then proposed, was the monopoly politics. This created the temptation to the planner to print for private interest (see Levy 1990). Farrant also shows that Knight viewed this consideration as outside the purview of economics. The one systematic discussion of the motivation of planners centered around Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom*. See Farrant et al. (2004).

¹¹“The race of the guardians must be kept pure,’ says Plato (in defence of infanticide), when developing the racist argument that we breed animals with great care while neglecting our own race, an argument which has been repeated ever since.” Popper (1962, 1:51). The parenthetical remark drew the criticism.

The asymmetric incentives resulting from different answers to the eugenic question are a result of a violation of equality of standing – between the expert and the subject.¹² As noted in Chapter 1 above, such analytical egalitarianism was a presupposition of Classical economics.¹³ Two developments in eugenic “science” changed the incentives regarding the answer to the eugenics question. The first was that it apparently became possible to identify “the unfit” (using methods described in Chapter 5 above). Economists sometimes characterize proposals for the government direction of investment as an attempt to “pick winners.” *Ex post*, picking winning investments is easy; the trick is doing it *ex ante*. The “unfit” were groups of demographic “losers” whom would-be eugenic central planners proposed to identify *ex ante* as targets for sterilization or immigration restrictions. The purported ability to identify these targets changed demographic central planning from a vague possibility to a straightforward application of laws directed at such “losers”.

The subtitle of Elof Carlson’s book, *The Unfit, is A History of a Bad Idea*. We see the purported identification of “the unfit” as an idea that changed the incentives open to

¹²The unhappiness of the subject at being treated like animals is much on “Socrates’s” mind in Plato’s telling: “‘This,’ said I: ‘it seems likely that our rulers will have to make considerable use of falsehoods and deception for the benefit of their subjects. We said, I believe, that the use of that sort of thing was in the category of medicine.’ ‘And that was right,’ he [Glaucón] said. ‘In our marriages, then, and the procreation of children, it seems there will be no slight need of this kind of ‘right.’” *Republic* 459d. For reasons which will be made clear below, we use Paul Shorey’s 1930 translation.

¹³Specialists (Popper 1962 1: 88, 216, 328) noted that Popper revived the interpretation of Plato presented by John Stuart Mill’s friend, George Grote, who found the later Platonic dialogues disturbing. We examine Grote’s account of Plato’s method in section xxx below.

theorists answering Plato's very old question about breeding. Galton used the "unfit" as evidence of inherited criminality. In the early 20th century, post-Classical economists and sociologists seized upon the now purportedly identified "unfit" to propose sterilization laws. This history makes for sobering reading, as economists and their colleagues in sociology, statistics and biology, thrust themselves forward as race purifiers. We conclude with a rare contemporary assessment of just what "junk" their evidence was.

When the eugenic practices of the Hitler era became common knowledge, the incentives to make eugenic claims changed again, and now in the opposite direction. The involvement of post-Classical economists in eugenics simply vanished from the secondary literature at mid-century (Chapter 5 above, Cot 2003, Dimand 2003, Leonard 2003b). As eugenic proposals vanished from the literature, the memory of such discussions was also erased. We have, in fact, been asked whether WWII constitutes a "firewall" against the return of such ideas.¹⁴ We return to this question in our conclusion, below.

6.3 "We" Breed Animals so Why Not People?

Perhaps the most effective way to locate both sides of the debate over eugenics in the scholarly literature is to conduct two literature searches using JSTOR. The first search, for texts containing the three words, "eugenics Plato Galton," finds the first phase of the debate. Here, Plato is discussed as forerunner to Galton's eugenic theories. The

¹⁴Deirdre McCloskey put the question to us at a Conference on Race and Liberalism in Economics, organized by David Colander at Middlebury College in 2001. For the papers that emerged from the conference, see Colander 2004.

search for texts containing the three words, “eugenics Plato Popper,” finds the second phase of the debate, in which Plato is now discussed as forerunner to Hitler’s eugenic practice. The search for “eugenics Plato Galton Popper” turns up nothing.

To see why the debate has this structure, consider the following passage from Paul Shorey’s once-standard translation of Plato’s *Republic* 459 where “Socrates” recounts a conversation with Plato’s brother, “Glaucón” about the desirability of breeding “indiscriminately”, or “from the best”. We quote from the Loeb edition in which the reader is instructed by Shorey on both Greek and eugenics:

“Obviously, then, we must arrange marriages, sacramental so far as may be. And the most sacred marriages would be those that were most beneficial.” “By all means.” “How, then, would the greatest benefit result? Tell me this, Glaucón. I see that you have in your house hunting-dogs and a number of pedigree cocks. Have you ever considered something about their unions and procreations? “What?” he said. “In the first place,” I said, “among these themselves, although they are a select breed, do not some prove better than the rest?” “They do.” “Do you then breed from all indiscriminately, or are you careful to breed from the best?” [Shorey notes: This commonplace of stirpiculture or eugenics, as it is now called, begins with Theognia 184, and has thus far got no further.] “From the best.” ... “... And if they are not thus bred, you expect, do you note, that your birds’ breed and hounds will greatly degenerate?” “I do,” he said. “And what of horses and other animals?” I said; “is it otherwise with them?” “It would be strange if it were,” said he. “Gracious,” said I, “dear friend, how imperative, then, is our need of the highest skill in our rulers, if the principle holds also for mankind.” ... “It follows from our former admissions,” I said, “that the best men must cohabit with the best women in as many cases as possible and the worst with the worst in the fewest, and that the offspring of the one must be reared and that of the other not, if the flock [Shorey notes “ἄν below merely marks the second consideration, harmony, the first being eugenics.”] is to be as perfect as possible.¹⁵

¹⁵Here is Shorey in 1903: “As implied in the *Meno* and *Euthydemus*, and stated in the *Republic*, he is to teach virtue and inculcate right opinion. And that his teaching may be effective and the seed fall in

To testify as to whether Shorey's command of the "commonplace" of eugenics is adequate to explain Plato for the Greekless world of the 1930s, consider ~~also~~ a 16 March 1908 letter from Francis Galton (then aged 86) to Karl Pearson about a planned exhibit on eugenics:

MY DEAR KARL PEARSON, In reply to your card asking me for something to exhibit at the U.C. soirée, I have thought of an effective, yet somewhat absurd thing. But I have failed to get it. It is a *Punch* cartoon, published I fancy in the early '70s, of a weedy nobleman addressing his prize bull:

Nobleman-- By Jove, you are a fine fellow!

Bull -- So you would have been, my Lord, if they had taken as much pains about your ancestors, as you did about mine.

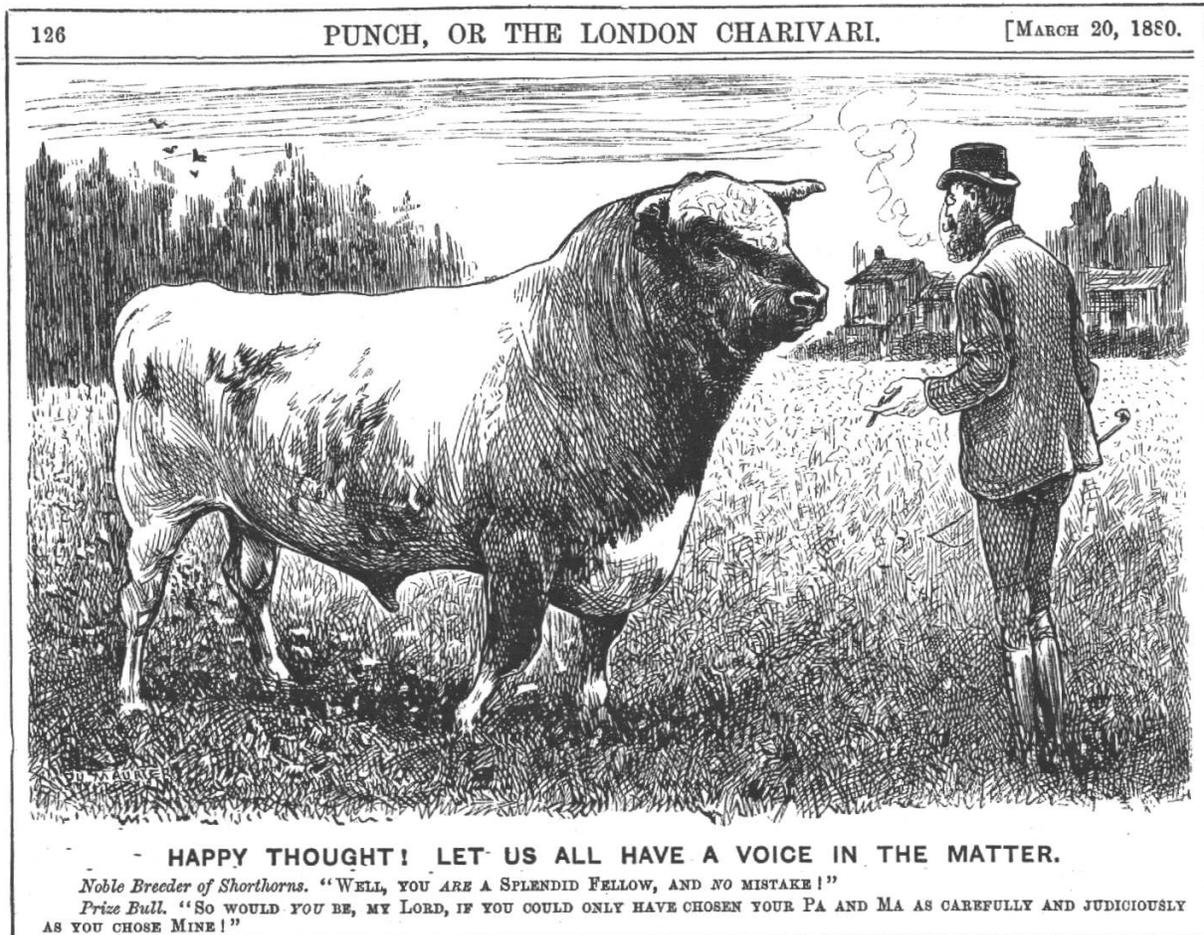
I wrote to *Punch* to make inquires, but they have not succeeded in identifying the picture. It would have been a capital thing to frame and to let lie among other exhibits. I should have been much disposed towards utilising it in some way farther on my own account. I cannot think of anything else suitable. Your Tables of the Coefficients of Hereditary Resemblance ought to be shown somewhere. (Pearson 1936, 3: 335)

good ground, he is, like the rulers of the *Republic* and the *Laws*, to control marriages and the propagation of the race--especially with a view to harmonizing and blending the oppositions of the energetic and sedate temperaments." Shorey (1903, p. 62).

Between then and 1933 he has found a word to describe the practice Plato recommends: "As implied in the *Meno* and *Euthydemus* and stated in the *Republic*, he is to teach virtue and inculcate right opinion. And that his teaching may be effective and the seed fall in good ground, he is, like the rulers of the *Republic* and the *Laws*, to control marriages and the propagation of the race--especially with a view to blending by both eugenics and education the oppositions of the energetic and sedate temperaments." Shorey (1933, p. 314).

Shorey's interpretation of Plato's doctrine as *of course* eugenic, and the translation which follows from this interpretation, raises the obvious question of why Popper did not avoid the controversy over *his* amateur translation instead of using Shorey's. No one who gave three Sather Lectures as Shorey did would be exposed to the abuse which was heaped upon Popper. Indeed, in response to Levinson, Popper (1962 1:328-332) defends his translations by appeal to Shorey's. Popper (1974, p. 94) tells us, with evident regret, that in wartime New Zealand, he did not have access to the Loeb editions. Popper here identifies his interpretation as differing from Shorey's only in sign.

A year later Galton reported that he located the cartoon, with the help of a Miss Burnand – “half-sister of the caricaturist”.



It was drawn by *Punch's* principal caricature artist of the 1880s, De Maurier, and appeared in *Punch* on 20 March 1880. (Pearson 1936, 3:375). The cartoon, with the dialogue that Galton mis-remembered, is reproduced next. We return to the mis-remembering in our conclusion. The Platonic question -- “Why do ‘we’ breed animals but

not people?" -- flatters the "scientist's" vanity, supposing eugenicists are a species apart from the subjects they hope to breed.¹⁶

6.4 Galton and "The Unfit"

Thanks to Carlson's 2001 *The Unfit* we now know the importance of "degenerate families" in the debates over eugenics. The Jukes family and the "Tribe of Ishmael" are the most famous of the colorful families of "degenerates" which served as "facts" in the calculations over the potential benefit of "negative" eugenics.¹⁷ Carlson tells us how these "degenerates" were identified and how the hereditary nature of their criminality was asserted. "Degenerate" families were located by visiting prison after prison, and then reporting the maximal family criminality.

¹⁶"Now we can understand why Plato drops his first hint that a more than ordinary excellence is need in his rulers in the same place where he first claims that the principles of animal breeding must be applied to the race of men. ... it thus prepares us for the demand that they ought to be philosophers." Popper (1962, 1:150)

¹⁷The "Jukes family" is a Library of Congress subject classification. Christian (2003) reports on the recent unmasking of the "Jukes" and the demonstration of how the eugenic conclusions were drawn from these "data."

One of the “degenerate” families -- the Jukes -- figured into Galton’s *Human Faculty*.¹⁸ The Jukes passage is a page and a half so we quote only extracts. He begins with the claim that criminal behavior is inherited:

It is, however, easy to show that the criminal nature tends to be inherited; while, on the other hand, it is impossible that women who spend a large portion of the best years of their life in prison can contribute many children to the population. The true state of the case appears to be that the criminal population receives steady accessions from those who, without having strongly-marked criminal natures, do nevertheless belong to a type of humanity that is exceedingly ill suited to play a respectable role in our modern civilisation, though it is well suited to flourish under half-savage conditions, being naturally both healthy and prolific. These persons are apt to go to the bad; their daughters consort with criminals and become the parents of criminals. (Galton 1907, pp. 43-4)

The Jukes provide “an extraordinary example” of this:

An extraordinary example of this is afforded by the history of the infamous Jukes family in America, whose pedigree has been made out, with extraordinary care, during no less than seven generations, and is the subject of an elaborate memoir ... It includes no less than 540 individuals of Jukes blood, of whom a frightful number degraded into criminality, pauperism, or disease. (Galton 1907, pp. 43-4)

The genetic success of such families needs to be explained:

Now the ancestor of all this mischief, who was born about the year 1730, is described as having been a jolly companionable man, a hunter, and a fisher, averse to steady labour, but working hard and idling by turns, and who had

¹⁸Although the first paragraph of *The Unfit* discusses Galton’s coinage of “eugenics” and the next two pages of the chapter contain handsome reproductions of the title pages of *Human Faculty* (2001, p. 10) and *Essays in Eugenics* (2001, p. 11), Carlson does not discuss the importance of the Jukes in Galton’s *Human Faculty*. Carlson rightly stresses Galton’s support for “positive eugenics” (234, 244-45). Carlson’s view that Galton was not all that capable -- “He also made some significant, but not brilliant, contributions to many fields” (144) -- may have led him to overlook the possibility that Galton could both defend positive eugenics and point to information that could be used to justify negative eugenics. We have found this a characteristic of Galton. (See Chapter 4 and Appendix 1). Stigler (1986 & 1999) gives details on Galton’s contributions.

numerous illegitimate children, whose issue has not been traced. He was, in fact, a somewhat good specimen of a half-savage without any seriously criminal instincts. The girls were apparently attractive, marrying early and sometimes not badly; but the gipsy-like character of the race was unsuited to success in a civilised country. So the descendants went to the bad, and such hereditary moral weaknesses as they may have had, rose to the surface and worked their mischief without check. (1907, p. 44)

There was no suggestion in Galton that the problem of hereditary criminality can be solved by sterilizing criminals. For other commentators, the answer was self-evident. Irving Fisher put the case plainly in his 1909 *National Vitality*:

From the one man who founded the “Juke” family came 1,200 descendants in seventy-five years; out of these, 310 were professional paupers, who spent an aggregate of two thousand three hundred years in poorhouses, 50 were prostitutes, 7 murderers, 60 habitual thieves, and 130 common criminals. Dugdale has estimated that the “Juke” family was an economic loss to the State, measured in terms of potential usefulness wasted, costs of prosecution, expenses of maintenance in jail, hospital, and asylums, and of private loss through thefts and robberies of \$1,300,000 in seventy-five years, or over \$1,000 for each member of the family. ... Had the original criminals in the “Juke” family and the “Tribe of Ismael” been sterilized under some law like that of Indiana, this country would not only have been spared a widely disseminated criminal, epileptic, and immoral strain, but would have saved hundreds of thousands of dollars paid out for criminal suits ... (1909, p. 675)

Fisher then (1909, pp. 675-76) proceeds to discuss the *benefits* to society from families such as the Hohenzollern family and the Darwin family. The Darwin family includes Francis Galton, whose eugenic work is cited by Fisher.

The existence of such “degenerate families” soon became grist for various mills among economists. Here is Frank Fetter’s 1916 “explanation” of the consequences of immigration:

It led to the fateful introduction of slavery from Africa, and it encouraged much defective immigration from Europe, the heritage of which survives in many defective and vicious strains of humanity, some of them notorious, such as the Jukes, the Kallikak family, and the Tribe of Ishmael. (1916, pp. 368-69)

That the possibility of identifying “degenerate families” enabled eugenicists to take a step beyond Plato is also clear from the study of eugenics in the Danish experience. The great Danish geneticist, Wilhelm Johannsen, strenuously objected to Platonic utopian eugenics (Hansen 1993, p. 23).¹⁹ But at least in the case of readily identified degenerate families, “negative eugenics” was another matter.²⁰

¹⁹“In his book ... (Heredity in historical and experimental light), published in 1917, Johannsen devoted a full chapter, forty pages, to the subject of eugenics. In the historical introduction, he mentioned Plato and his utopian eugenics, and he did not hide his distaste for the idea of ‘human stockbreeding plans with systematic controls, fraudulently organized marriage lottery, abortion and exposure as eugenic measures--dreamers and fanatics from the prohibition and eugenics movements of our own period can see themselves as in a mirror.’” Hansen (1993, p. 23)

²⁰“This was what he called positive eugenics. He was more inclined to accept negative eugenics, where the procreation of individuals with strongly flawed genotypes was inhibited. But he emphasized that it would be very difficult and complicated to carry this out in a responsible fashion. He certainly did not approve of “the haphazard surgical sterilization methods” applied in the United States.” Hansen (1993, p. 25) “In Johannsen’s writings of eugenics in the 1920s, he hardly appears as a zealot for the cause. He toned down his criticism of the biometrical school ... He still rejected what he called positive eugenics but found negative eugenics accepted, when it was applied with caution. The same attitude is apparent in his contributions to the negotiations of the commission on castration and sterilization.” (25-26)

The role of degenerate families evidently helped shape the debate among

“moderate” eugenicists in Denmark:

Steincke and most of the Danish followers of eugenics can be regarded as moderate or “reform” eugenicists, since they openly stated that they disapproved of the more violent eugenics propaganda and of the early American practical of sterilization, particularly as it was done in California. But when we take a closer look at their views --the belief in horror stories about the “Jukes” and the “Kallikaks,” the acceptance of the dangers of differential reproduction, and their uncritical hereditarianism--they do not appear particularly moderate. (Hansen 1993, p. 29)

6.5 Galton and Plato

We suggested above that there was a divide in the debate over eugenics is visible before and after WWII. Before WWII, Galton is regarded as taking a step beyond Plato; after WWII, eugenic science is dismissed. Here, we provide some examples of the earlier assessments which credit Galton with moving eugenics beyond Plato.

Science was in its second volume when it published a review of the first edition of Galton’s *Human Faculty* in 1883. The issue of eugenics occupies the bulk of the first paragraph:

Mr. Galton means to introduce to our notice new aspects of the study of human character. He wishes to make this study more exact and scientific by founding it upon detailed investigations of facts previously neglected; and he proposes to offer the results as useful for a future science or art of eugenics, which shall teach the human race how to breed so that its best stock shall be preserved and improved, and its worst stock gradually eliminated. (1883, p. 80)

The second paragraph credits Galton with taking a step beyond Plato:

That Mr. Galton's researches will be of much immediate use to young people about to marry, no truthful reviewer can promise; but to the psychologist, at least, they are in their present condition both attractive and useful; and, for the rest, it is much for Mr. Galton merely to have suggested, more definitely than Plato was able to do, that they ought to be, and some day may be, a real art of eugenics, which may be of practical importance for mankind. (1883, p. 80).

Close to 40 years later, Leonard Darwin advocated demographic controls in *Science*. He dismissed changing circumstances ("improvement of environment") as a reform measure:

Do we not blush to talk of peace on earth and good-will towards men whilst remembering what has happened during the last seven years? And, in view of all this, have we any right to assume that improvement of environment will do more for mankind during the next two thousand years than it has done since the days of Plato? Reformers who look only to surroundings should consider well the foundations on which their projects are based before pointing the finger of scorn at the believers in heredity. Eugenics has been called a dismal science, but it should rather be described as an untried policy. (Darwin 1921, p. 315)

In 1939, on the eve of WWII, *Science* published S. J. Holmes' Presidential address before the American Eugenics Society, "The Opposition to Eugenics". Here, Professor Holmes (1939, p. 352) confronted the fact that there was growing opposition to eugenics. To explain this, he reminded his listeners that eugenic policy became feasible only recently:

In seeking for the reasons for the opposition to eugenics it is important to bear in mind that the idea of improving the inborn qualities of man is, for the great mass of humanity, of relatively recent origin. To be sure, race improvement through selective breeding had been advocated by Theognis, Plato, Campanella and a few other lonely voices, but their doctrines were regarded more in the light of curiosities of philosophical speculation than as feasible measures for practical application. It was only after the doctrine of evolution came to be finally accepted in the scientific world that eugenics was brought clearly before the reading public as a subject to be seriously reckoned with. (1939, p. 352).

Holmes recognized that eugenics depends upon the doctrine of the “natural inequality of man” (1939, p. 352). He then asked who might oppose eugenics on the basis of egalitarian presuppositions. In response to his own query, Holmes pointed to some social reformers (such as Edwin Markham), who presupposed equality. He also singled out Libertarians (such as Clarence Darrow) who opposed interference with marriage choices (Holmes 1939, p. 354). He mentioned Catholics such as G. K. Chesterton as well (354).²¹ And then he included J. S. Mill, who claimed that the appeal to natural inequality is the height of vulgarity (355). A poet, a libertarian lawyer, a Catholic literary figure, and a dead Classical economist. As noted at the outset of this Chapter, early opposition to eugenic “science” was remarkably thin.²²

²¹On Chesterton and eugenics, see McPhail 2004.

²²Eggen (1926, p. 104) notes the infrequent opposition before proceeding with his criticism: “There seem to be few adequate criticisms of the eugenicist’s standpoint. Here and there a lone environmentalist raises his voice in heresy, but definite presentations of the controversy, examining the arguments on both sides, are lamentably few or even non-existent.” Eggen confronts the evidence of the Jukes’ directly. “For Estabrook to assume (and Dugdale before him) that, because *idleness* (shades of the

Moving to the other side of the divide, we find Edward Sisson's 1939 Presidential address to the Pacific division of the American Philosophical Association, "Human Nature and the Present Crisis". Sisson raised the question of the survival of philosophy itself. In his judgment Plato becomes "one of the most dangerous items in the education of the western world":

Consequently in preparing for this discussion I have paid attention mostly to the opposition. I have earnestly reconsidered that original philosophical charter of fascism – a noble and austere doctrine indeed, but fascism – Plato's *Republic*, the beauty and surpassing genius of which has made it, I think, one of most dangerous items in the education of the western world. (Sisson 1940, p. 143)

Sisson then recommends Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* for its argument against Plato's vision of the masses (pp. 144-6). Whitman's *Democratic Vistas* began with an opening tribute to Mill's *On Liberty*, and it attacked Thomas

Faculty psychologists!) or something resembling it is to be found in successive generations of the Jukes family, that idleness is a Mendelian character inheritable through the germ-plasm, is as laughable an error as any to be found in all contemporary (pseudo) science. The same thing is true of all the eugenicist's 'characters': pauperism, harlotry, crime, insanity, blindness, syphilis, et cetera." (107)

Carlyle's *Shooting Niagara*.²³ We have also seen in Chapter 4 that Galton's work in the 1860s reads like *Shooting Niagara*.

Hitler era eugenic practice destroyed the basis for continued popular support of eugenics, and the debate thereafter became a debate over Plato.²⁴

6.6 Plato and Classical Economics

Despite their political differences, both Holmes and Sisson saw that Mill was an opponent of hierarchy and eugenics. Mill wrote extensively on Plato when he reviewed George Grote's history of Greek philosophy. Consequently, we examine Grote's discussion of the *Republic* in *Plato* (1865) and Mill's 1866 review.

Grote wrote *Plato* before eugenics had a name, but he clearly saw the eugenic teaching in the *Republic* was wrapped up in racial fictions:

What he seeks as lawgiver is, to keep the number of the Guardians nearly stationary, with no diminution and scarcely any increase: and to maintain the breed pure, so that the children born shall be as highly endowed by nature as possible. To these two objects the liberty of sexual intercourse is

²³“As the greatest lessons of Nature through the universe are perhaps the lessons of variety and freedom, the same present the greatest lessons also in New World politics and progress. If a man were ask'd, for instance, the distinctive points contrasting modern European and American political and other life with the old Asiatic cultus, as lingering-bequeath'd yet in China and Turkey, he might find the amount of them in John Stuart Mill's profound essay on Liberty in the future, where he demands two main constituents, or sub-strata, for a truly grand nationality—1st, a large variety of character—and 2d, full play for human nature to expand itself in numberless and even conflicting directions.” Whitman (1982, p. 1992). Whitman's attack on *Shooting Niagara* is sharper in the first version of *Democratic Vistas*, Whitman (1970). The document mentioned in Chapter 8, note 27 suggests an unexpected linkage between Carlyle and Whitman.

²⁴Sterilization continued in America, however, through the 1970s. It was not until 2002 that a governor of a state (Mark R. Warner, Virginia) apologized to the victims of eugenic practice.

made subservient. The breeding is regulated, like that of noble horses or dogs by an intelligent proprietor: ... (1865, 3:203)²⁵

He also recognized that the eugenic question tempts the theorist. He finds that Plato abandoned his own philosophical principles in the face of this temptation.

Grote notes, first, that the *Republic* attacks the Classical economists' idea of reciprocity. Instead of reciprocal relations based on equality of moral standing, Plato relies on "onerous duty":

It is clear that Plato --in thus laying down the principle of reciprocity, or interchange of services, as the ground-work of the social union-- recognises the antithesis, and at the same time the correlation, between obligation and right. The service which each man renders to supply the wants of others is in the nature of an onerous duty; the requital for which is furnished to him in the services rendered by others to supply his wants. (1865, 3:139)

We see therefore that Plato contradicts his own fundamental principle, when he denies the doing of justice to be an onerous duty, and when he maintains that it is itself happiness--giving to the just agent, whether other men account him just and do justice to him in return--or not. By this latter doctrine he sets aside that reciprocity of want and service, upon which he had affirmed the social union to rest. (1865, 3:139)

²⁵"Yet unless certain fundamental fictions can be accredited among his citizens, the scheme of his commonwealth must fail. They must be made to believe that they are all earthborn and all brethren; that the earth which they inhabit is also their mother: but that there is this difference among them--the Rulers have gold mingled with their constitution, the other Guardians have silver, the remaining citizens have brass or iron. This bold fiction must be planted as a fundamental dogma ..." (Grote 1865, 3:185) "What Plato here understands by marriage, is a special, solemn, consecrated, coupling for the occasion, with a view to breed for the public. ... The case resembles that of a breeding stud of horses and mares, to which Plato compares it: ..." (Grote 1865, 3:205)

Grote continues, adding that Plato attacks the proverbial wisdom to “do unto others as they would be done by”.²⁶

The fathers, whom he blames, gave advice in full conformity with his own principles of reciprocity--when they exhorted their sons to the practice of justice, not as self-inviting, but as an onerous service toward others, to be requited by corresponding services and goodwill from others towards them. (1865, 3:139-40)

Earlier, Grote had explained that the dialectic method consisted of a method of exchange where reciprocity is central. Yet to protect his eugenic thinking, Plato gives up the dialectic method:

Though Sokrates, and Plato so far forth as a follower of Sokrates, employed a colloquial method based on the fundamental assumption of the Protagorean formula – autonomy of each individual mind – whether they accepted the formula in terms, or not– yet we shall find Plato at the end of his career, in his Treatise De Legibus, constructing an imaginary city upon the attempted deliberate exclusion of this formula. We shall find him there monopolising all teaching and culture of his citizens ... when he constitutes himself as lawgiver, the measure of truth or falsehood for all his citizens--has at the same time discontinued his early commerce with the Sokratic Dialectics. (1865, 2:357-58)

Mill focused on this preferential treatment in his review of Grote's *Plato*:

It is singular that Plato himself did not fully profit by the principal lesson of his own teaching. This is one of the inconsistencies by which he is such a puzzle to posterity. No one can read many of the works of Plato, and doubt that he had positive opinions. But he does not bring his own opinions to the test which he applies to others. 'It depends on the actual

²⁶“Glaukon (as I have already observed) announces the doctrine against which Sokrates contends, not as a recent corruption broached by the Sophists, but as the generally received view of Justice: held by most persons, repeated by the poets from ancient times downwards, and embodied by fathers in lessons to their children: ...” (Grote 1865, 3:145). We discuss the significance of this proverb in detail in Chapter 11 below.

argumentative purpose which Plato has in hand, whether he chooses to multiply objections and give them effect, or to ignore them altogether.' 'The affirmative Sokrates only stands his ground because no negative Sokrates is allowed to attack him.' Or, what is worse, Plato applies the test, and disregards its indications; states clearly and strongly the objections to the opinion he favours, and goes on his way as if they did not exist. (Mill 1866, p. 412)

He agreed with Grote, that "There are thus, independently of minor discrepancies, two complete Platos in Plato--the Sokratist and the Dogmatist ..." (414-5).²⁷

Eugenics was one of the doctrines of the "dogmatic" Plato for which there was no "Socratic" challenge.

6.7 The Junk Science Judgment from 1931

We have noted that two economists, Hayek and Viner, played critical roles in questioning eugenics as central planning. We conclude by reviewing a rare attack on the "evidence" of "degenerate families" published by Lancelot Hogben²⁸ in an 1931 issue of *Economica*, the journal in which Popper's "Poverty of Historicism" later appeared.²⁹ In his article, Hogben made the case that the

²⁷"But as he advanced in life, and acquired a persuasion of knowledge of his own; when, to use a metaphor of Mr. Grote's, he ceased to be leader of opposition, and passed over to the ministerial benches, he came to think that the Sokratic cross-examination is a dangerous edge-tool. Already in the *Republic* we find him dwelling on the mischiefs of a purely negative state of mind ... he came to think that the doctrines which had the best ethical tendency should be taught, with little or no regard to whether they could be proved true, or even at the risk of their being false." (Mill 1866, pp. 414-5).

²⁸In 1930, Lancelot Hogben was appointed to the new research professorship of social biology at the London School of Economics.

²⁹Hogben (1998) criticized Lionel Robbins' non-mathematical economics. This is unfortunate, as Chapter 10 suggests they might have much to say to each other. Their shared view of Carlyle would have

“evidence” of degenerate families in eugenic studies was biased and unscientific, that it would not be “legally admissable”.

Hogben starts this section of his paper by posing the question as one between Galton and Watson (the environmentalist). While the legal system might ensure that the evaluation of evidence is impartial, Hogben claimed that there is great pressure to choose the evidence selectively in science:

In English law there is an estimable provision which forbids the public discussion of evidence until the case is closed. In science unhappily there is none. I have presented for your reflection some of the difficulties of biological inquiry into social problems. One of the greatest dangers is an undue haste prompted by enthusiasm for legislative applications of half-assimilated knowledge. The discussion of the genetic foundations of racial and occupational stratification in human society calls for discipline, for restraint and for detachment. Nothing could make the exercise of these wholesome virtues more difficult than to force the issues into the political arena in the present state of inquiry. The disposition to do so has already encumbered social biology with a vocabulary of terms which have no status in an ethically neutral science. ... Of these shortcoming anecdotalisms is the most prevalent. Every experimental biologist recognises the disastrous consequences of constructing evolutionary hypotheses on the testimony of the pigeon fancier and the stock breeder. Only an undue haste to establish conclusions which can be made the basis of legislation has arrested the development of social biology in its anecdotage. (1931, pp. 18-19)

The case in point is the degenerate family “evidence”. Hogben continues:

Two quotations will exempt me from the charge of overstating the danger to which I allude, when I speak of the anecdotal method. One problem which engages the attention of the social biologist is the contribution of heredity to feeble-mindedness. Goddard’s familial studies on this subject will be known to many of my audience. ... The method which

been a beginning, Hogben (1998, 20).

Goddard adopted to identify feeble-mindedness in the ancestors of his cases is thus stated in his own words:

“The ease with which it is sometimes possible to get satisfactory evidence on the fifth generation is illustrated in the Kallikak family. The field worker accosts an old farmer--‘Do you remember an old man Martin Kallikak (Jr.) who lived on the mountain edge yonder?’ ‘Do I? Well I guess. Nobody’d forget him. Simple, not quite right here (tapping his head), but inoffensive and kind. All the family was that. ... they would drink. Poverty was their best friend in this respect, or they would have been drunk all the time. ...”

At the conclusion of this recital Goddard asks, “Is there any doubt that Martin was feeble-minded?” I am tempted to imagine what the same old farmer would say to his crony. “Seemed a decent sort of fellow. Asked a lot of fool questions and wrote down the answers in a book. Simple, I’d say. Not quite right here.” (1931, pp. 19-20)

He then considers the “evidence” concerning the Jukes:

In his monograph *The Jukes in 1915*, Estabrook ventures to proffer only one definite statement concerning hereditary transmission in the Jukes family. It is that “there is an hereditary factor in licentiousness.” I have searched through his memoir for a single indication of the way in which he defines licentiousness and its allelomorphic opposite chastity. (1931, p. 20)

The attitude of the experimental biologist to those who accept as scientific evidence data which would not even be regarded as legally admissible is well expressed by Thomas Hunt Morgan, the leading geneticist of our time. “The numerous pedigrees,” ... “are open to the same criticism from a genetic point of view, for it is obvious that these groups of individuals have lived under demoralising social conditions ... It is not surprising that, once begun from whatever cause, the effects may be to a large extent communicated rather than inherited. ...” (1931, p. 21)

And finally, Hogben suggests we put the expert himself in Estabrook’s calculations:

I confess I am sceptical about the cogency of Dr. Estabrook’s arithmetic. How damaging a case against higher education could be made, if we included all the port consumed in the fellows’ common rooms during the

last century and a half. Other curious items are included in the two million dollar bill. *Inter alia* we note the following:

“Aggregate of children who died prematurely, cash cost \$50 each
child \$18,900
Number of lives sacrificed by murder (ten) valued
\$1,200 \$12,000
Capital in brothels \$60,000, compound interest twenty-six
years at 6 per cent \$18,000”

One is left to wonder why this felicitous blend of biological and economic science is not rounded off by adding to the financial loss incurred by the State on account of the Jukes family, the cost of printing Carnegie Institute Publication No. 240, together with Dr. Estabrook’s salary and that of his staff. (1931, pp. 21-22)

Presumably, the answer to Hogben’s rhetorical question is that from the point of view of the eugenic researcher, eugenic research is a benefit and not a cost. This is another way of making our point. Answers of one sort, but not of another, provide power and plenty.

If Hogben’s argument had an impact, it escaped Carlson (2001) even though Hogben’s lecture was introduced by none other than H. G. Wells, who called attention to the importance of “some peculiar strain of human being, known as the *Unfit* (and not otherwise defined)” (Wells 1931, p. 4).³⁰

6.8 Conclusion

³⁰We find a solitary paper in JSTOR with the search “Hogben eugenics Jukes”, MacKenzie (1975).

Eugenics is based on a presumption of inherited human heterogeneity. We have argued here that this eugenic presumption tempts the expert to presume he is in the favored group. This temptation, coupled with the fact that intellects and great as Pearson and Plato have apparently succumbed, is a major reason for our contention that only a hard doctrine of homogeneity is compatible with research and policy prescription by “experts”. We have been asked on more than one occasion – what if Plato were right about inherent differences among peoples? Alternatively put, what if Adam Smith were incorrect about the porter and the philosopher? In response to such questions, we have come to answer that the dangers of presuming difference or hierarchy are great enough to outweigh whatever failings that result from lack of empirical realism. We suggest that such an explicit recognition of reciprocity and homogeneity – in all dimensions, including the expert and the subject – erects a firewall against eugenic practice and theory directed by the expert-guided state.

Does the relationship between the expert – here, the scientist – and the subject include the requirement of reciprocity?³¹ In other words, is the expert to be treated as he treats the subject? The *Punch* cartoon was remembered by Galton as a simple illustration of eugenics; but perhaps it is something more. Perhaps the

³¹At least on an informal basis, this presumption guides experimental procedures in economics, and constrains the experimentalist from deceiving the subject. See Houser, et al. 2004.

caption “Let us all have a voice in the matter” questions whether there is such a justifiable divide between expert and the subjects.³² And several of the humorous objections of Hobgen seem to be suggestions that if we apply the experts’ standards of “unfit” to the experts themselves, they might not pass the examination.

Finally, if experts rely on different standards than their subjects, then perhaps we have an explanation for why the post-World War II literature maintains a rational silence on the involvement of the economists in the eugenics movement.

³²We thank Ira Gang for making this point when discussing our paper at the Eastern Economic Association in New York.