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Introduction

Throughout history, eugenics has been enshrouded in controversy. As an applied science that started out as a biosocial movement, eugenics advocates for the improvement of the genetic composition of the human population, though the concept can also be applied to other populations. As a social philosophy, eugenics advocates for the improvement of the human hereditary characteristics by promoting higher procreation of more desired traits and people and reducing the procreation of people with less desired traits. Eugenics gained its greatest popularity in early 20th century.

However, it was still being practiced in the late decades of the 19th century. In the early 20th century, eugenics was practiced under the euphemized name of interventions. These involved the classification of individuals as degenerates and unfit.

The individuals classified as such were the poor families, the mentally ill, homosexuals, promiscuous women, entire racial groups, the blind, deaf and those developmentally disabled. These individuals were earmarked for the 'interventions' and some were exterminated entirely; like 'unfit' racial groups. The interventions included compulsory sterilization, forced pregnancies, forced abortions and genocide. The premise for these interventions was a misguided notion that there undesirable traits were genetically passed on to the offspring. Overtime, evidence based research disproved the notion that undesirable characteristics like poverty, alcoholism and prostitution are heritable. The eugenic movement fell out after the Second World War after it was used as a premise to justify genocide by Nazi Germans.

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At present, modern eugenics is concerned with the prevention of the transmission of defective genes that are associated with noncommunicable diseases and other health conditions. Some attributes of the earlier eugenic movement are still in operation. However, individuals are afforded the freedom of choice. Due to advancements in technology, sterilization, birth control and abortions are still common place. More precisely, most of these procedures are legalized by various governments. Evidently, there has been a tremendous change in the methods, practice and outcomes in the eugenic practice of the contemporary society compared to the eugenics of the 20th century.

This research paper will delve into the differences inherent in the eugenic practice of the modern day society compared to that of the yester years. Firstly, the paper will examine the prevailing social circumstances in the late 19th century. To this end, the paper will examine how these factors influence the flourishing of the eugenic movement. While focusing in the eugenic practices of that time, the literary works of Francis Galton and Charles Davenport will be put to perspective. One paper that will be referenced includes, "Eugenics And Modern Biology: Critiques Of Eugenics, 1910-1945", by Garland E. Allen.

The paper analyses the development of the eugenic movement. It also offers a preview of the criticisms leveled against the movement in the early decades of the 20th century. The paper offers literary opinions of the work of Charles Davenport and Karl Pearson. In relation to the eugenics of today, a paper by professor DJ Galton dubbed "Eugenics: Some Lessons from the Past" will offer perspective on the differences between the eugenic practices

of the past vis-à-vis those of the today. Finally, the paper will conclude with my opinion and concluding remarks on the subject. Acknowledgement of borrowed sources of information will be done using the MLA style.

Discussion

Prevailing social circumstances

As espoused earlier, eugenics was meant to improve the human population by controlled breeding to increase the occurrence of desirable heritable characteristics. Of most concern to the scientist were social conditions and personality traits like feeble mindedness, intelligence, pauperism, alcoholism, criminality and mental disorders like manic depressive insanity and schizophrenia. It is to be said that most scientists at the time that these traits were genetically encoded (Allen 2). The scientists were also concerned that by the rapid rate at which these traits were increasing in the modern industrial society. It was also prevailing that individuals who had these traits were procreating more than those individuals with good characteristics. Their worry was that over time, the society would be swamped with bad people resulting in the retrogression and deterioration of the society. It was on this premise that the movement of eugenics started and thrived. According to the scientists, the remedy to prevent the retrogression and deterioration of the society due to the increase of low grade people was controlled breeding. Using scientific methods, eugenics would augment the number of offspring born to high grade individuals with good characteristics. Through scientific methods, eugenics would also reduce the number of

offspring born to low grade individuals and families. This would keep the number of people with the undesirable characteristics in society in check.

The eugenic practice in the early 19th century

In the early 19th century, eugenics was hot on the lips of many scientists. Their suppositions had effect even in the administrative circles. For instance, twenty seven states in the United States adopted sterilization laws that barred certain classes of people from having children. These were the classes of people were those deemed to have the undesirable characteristics that proponents of eugenics did not want propagated. These classes of individuals included the insane, those suffering from epilepsy and the feeble minded. Some of the twenty seven states in America also added morally perverted individuals and habitual criminals to the list.

While most states did not enforce the sterilization roles, the State of California had sterilized over ten thousand individuals by 1935. In Europe, where another eugenic movement was catching pace, many countries adopted the sterilization laws (Turda & Paul 85). Countries like Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Switzerland and Germany adopted sterilization laws for the feeble minded, the epileptic and those insane. Regrettably, these statutes remained operational in Sweden until 1976. Between the time when the laws were adopted in 1935 to 1976, over sixty thousand adolescent Swedish women branded mentally defective and otherwise handicapped were sterilized.

The grossest form of eugenics performed by political leaders in Europe was during the Second World War. It featured mass genocide and infanticide.

Those individuals with the undesirable characteristics were rounded up and exterminated in detention camps (Dorr 69). These heinous acts of cleansing the human race were perpetrated by the Nazis. Some scientists have found ways of justifying these killings by citing the concepts of eugenics. However way you look at it, this was the misappropriation of a concept intended to be implemented otherwise by the then politicians. Critics have talked about the intrusion into the individual liberties and freedoms of choice by the adoption of sterilization roles.

Eugenics in present day society

Eugenics of the contemporary world is informed by technological advancements and evidence based research. They are a hundred times more powerful than the sterilization laws and abortions of the Yester world. They have mostly borrowed from the Human Genome Mapping Project (Lombardo 54). This project provided a wealth of information on new genetic markers. The new genetic markers from the project help identify the children, embryos and adults with probabilities of developing diseases and conditions like early dementia, cancer and diabetes. Such is the possibility that the genetic markers are being exploited to flag up different personality traits like tendencies for aggressive behavior, depression and obesity. The improvement of technology from the primordial methods used in the early 19th century has affected eugenics dramatically. For instance, eugenics has been employed in the production of ' designer babies.' This is the incorporation of two superior breakthroughs namely test-tube fertilization and genetic markers. Biotechnology companies are exploring the

commercial viability of designing future children. Through the use of touch screen sensors to scan DNA, such companies report the predispositions for various traits. The DNA code is then upgraded to produce a health embryo devoid of any malformations and undesirable traits. Though this is fictitious, it is getting closer to real practice.

Heredity is the path way used in the propagation of genes from the parents to offspring (Drake & Robert 19). Unfortunately, genes that could predispose one to severe inherited diseases are also transmitted to the progeny in a similar way. However, thanks to the eugenics of today, certain departments in the United Kingdom have been licensed to prevent the propagation of severe hereditary ailments such as cystic fibrosis and muscular dystrophy. This has paved the way for the discovery into the use of genetic markers to avoid the transmission of genes that predispose one to characteristics like alcoholism, neurosis, manic depressive disorders.

According to Galton (2011), another product of eugenics that has sent frightening shocks around the world is cloning (pp. 235). It allows for the use of one whole set of genes from an adult cell to produce a future child. The use of in-vitro fertilization helps manipulate and anticipate the characteristics of the expected offspring. Though the ethics of cloning have been widely discussed and the process itself banned by law in many countries, the prospect of cloning shows the inherent differences between the eugenics of the past and those of present day society. Other forms of eugenics in the present day society include abortions and birth control. They many not select between the characteristics of the offspring, but they select on the timing and number of offspring.

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In the 19th century, eugenics intruded into the freedoms and liberties of individuals. The forceful sterilization of those branded low grade was an atrocity. Today's methods of eugenics afford people a choice. Previously, legislation was used to perpetrate eugenics, for instance, sterilization. In the contemporary society, legislation is used to regulate the activities if eugenics. For instance, there are laws on abortion, cloning and other professional based regulations of in-vitro fertilization, egg storage, egg donation, gene enhancement and gene therapy. This contrasts negatively against the eugenics of early 19th century that was among other things unregulated.

Conclusion

The possibilities of eugenics are profoundly staggering. The prospect of having a society without individuals without extremely undesirable traits is utterly enticing. However, it is not in our place to decide upon who lives and who does not based in whether we like their personal traits. It is also debilitating to have severe diseases transmitted to one's offspring. Eugenics at present affords us the possibility of preventing these unfortunate events. For a process that was enshrouded in atrocity and inhumanity, its redemption affords mankind more options presently. However, the ethics of some of the techniques of contemporary eugenics are questionable an up for debate. While I believe eugenics should not be used to exterminate or deny a certain class of people their liberties and freedoms, it is encouraging that such people can exploit the concept of eugenics to better their offspring by preventing the transmission of some undesirable genes. However, the

sanctity of life should be respected enough to allow life to flourish however undesirable its attributes are.

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