

From Genocide to Neo-Eugenics

The constative issue of eugenics is one fraught with both peril and promise. Can the association with Hitler be put aside long enough to consider this issue without the onerous specter of the Holocaust and the efforts to create an Aryan race? If it can, then perhaps the traditional idea of eugenics must be reframed. We need a "Neo-Eugenics" that espouses pre-conception solutions, rather than post-conception ones.

Provided this Neo-Eugenics was the paradigm, then one must notice the fundamental difference between Nazi eugenics and Neo-Eugenics: Hitler wished to destroy those he deemed unworthy, who already were living human beings; Neo-Eugenics hopes to start from scratch, so that future generations will be smarter, healthier, more capable. Is there really that much wrong with wanting fewer stupid people in the world? Isn't ignorance the main reason for the ills of the world? If we are to head toward any type of utopian society, let it be one in which the grand majority is capable of functioning at a higher level. The fear that everyone will be beautiful, or clone-like is silly. Parents still want their children to look like them, and not everyone agrees on what beauty is. And further, if everyone is beautiful, then there won't be such a discrepancy in class. Looks will no longer be as material as it once was. How is this not a good thing, as well?

If the purpose of evolution is to improve a species, and the species has improved substantially enough to find a way to further improve the species at a higher rate of speed, then have we not reached the same goal, only in a shorter amount of time? Let us begin moving into the future with a better version of ourselves; a version that understands difficult concepts, philosophy, mathematics, the nature of the universe and our place in it. What is the horror in that?

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Obviously, the measurement of "innate hereditary tendencies" is not accomplished by asking an immigrant to quote baseball statistics (Kitcher, 507). In the case of intelligence tests, if we can encourage the evolution of higher IQ, then we will be smart enough to understand that intelligence is measured in many different ways, and individuals cannot be singled out as "less intelligent" because they are not as keen in math as they are in English, or in philosophy as they are in science. Renovating the human being begins with the fostering of intelligence in all its forms. Intelligence then insures understanding. Understanding can then maintain characteristics like compassion, discernment, and logic.

It is crucial that we are intelligent enough to know how to assess intelligence properly. In the case of *Buck vs. Bell*, the label of imbecile was applied to this family during an era when the scientific community's understanding of intelligence was still very much in its infancy. In modern day, we understand so much more. I think we are far more capable of making an accurate assessment of intelligence, and there are many other instances when imbecility is glaringly obvious and proven with methods that are empirically sound. In those cases, I would have to agree with Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes when he said, "Three generations of imbeciles are enough." Although Kitcher regarded this statement as "one of the most chilling lines in the history of Supreme Court decisions," if uttered in the right context, and with enough evidence, I regard the statement as discerning and astute (Kitcher, 508).

What have we noticed about the perpetuation of ignorance? Racism and discrimination issues aside, those who are not educated, for whatever reason, make stupid choices, believe implausible, puerile things, and then pass this on to their children, who repeat the process until our communities

are overrun with the desperate and the criminal, shackled with the savagery of violence and decay. I am not against the individual, I'm against any system that will not allow the individual to become educated, and any individual who is smart enough to know education is necessary and available, but will not pursue it. These are issues of economics and politics, not of Neo-Eugenics.

One fear with eugenics might be that while this process is getting a foot-hold, those who are in the current or previous generations, might be forgotten or left behind, somehow relegated to the fringes, or even abused in some way. This need not be the case if the thinkers involved in implementation are careful to include and enforce certain parameters, or exemptions. No law is perfect, no life situation—at least these days—is entirely rooted in equality. The axiom, "life isn't fair" comes to mind, but need not be the case, as we would be entering the era of eugenics with prescience.

What would we, as practitioners of human eugenics, aspire to? Eugenics, if used for developing the mind, along with positive, helpful traits, and not merely representations of physical beauty, is not Hitleresque. It is important to realize that we can often overlook the benefits of an idea due to its association with a perceived negative. Likewise, we can overlook the negatives if it serves us sufficiently. The cogent fact is, much of our current medical knowledge is based on the horrible experimentation of the doctors and scientists inside Hitler's Germany. Yet, we benefit from these discoveries, however repulsive their antecedents might be.

The accusation of "designing children" only to "discard them into a ruthlessly planned world that has lost its humanity" (Kitcher, 504) does not hold up under scrutiny. Why would we "discard" them? In darker examples of pseudo-eugenics, this discarding came *after* the person was born, not before. And if it is to come before, it will more than not be

because there is some defect that will make the life of the child miserable, his care prohibitively expensive. Sadly, most severely challenged individuals don't grow up to be Stephen Hawking.

Adapting to a disability, while admirable, should not be our goal in Neo-Eugenics. Why is it somehow more noble to be disabled, or mentally challenged? From a spiritual or character standpoint, we might care for these people, respect their rights—yet we are in no way obligated to *become* them. We might respect a person for playing the cards that are dealt, but that in no way indicates that all of us should aspire to having the same hand. If we can then eliminate most of that luck-of-the-draw aspect through Neo-Eugenics, then there will be no need for that sort of adaptation. The law of natural selection, then, would again be reserved for the strongest among us, and those persons would be our leaders, our innovators, our politicians, our doctors, our teachers. Those among us who would be slightly less brilliant, would still be involved, but on some other level. We would essentially be raising the bar, and that's a stick that desperately needs some elevation.

The disabled mantra, "Who are you to decide if I should live?" (Kitcher, 506) forgets they already do live, and will not be killed after the implementation of Neo-eugenics. It is the first step in an evolutionary process which, ironically, involves the sufficiently evolved human who recognizes ethics, but can usher in giant leaps of evolutionary progress by creating healthier humans with higher intelligence. My contention is that these genetic decisions be made based on the *health* of the zygote, not how pretty its face might be. The Nazi agenda of creating a pure Aryan race was based on erroneous belief it was possible, since there is no such thing as "pure" after eons of blending the human species. Thus, uppermost in the Neo-

Eugenics agenda would be evolution of what exists, not eradication of what doesn't.

Kitcher asks, "Where will they stop?" They will stop where we decide and mandate them to stop. That's the function of law, regulation, and a moral compass. While there will be those who step over this line, this would not be a new phenomenon. Other laws are broken on a regular basis, yet we don't discontinue lawmaking nor the effort to uphold the laws. There will always be a percentage of the population who break the rules. The point is, that we *have* the rules, and we educate ourselves on why those rules are important.

Indeed, if we have a society in which parents can choose to procreate the natural way, or through genetic manipulation, yet they know that their child will have to get by in a world of superior humans, why would they choose the natural way? What is so appealing about a roulette wheel of biology, that humans would take the chance if they didn't have to? A parent who has the option of insuring the health of their child, and doesn't, before some genetic nightmare kills it shortly after birth, is as guilty as religious zealots who won't accept medical intervention, but rather watches their child suffer and die for some "idea" they have about nature.

The worries about tampering, post-conception (Rifkin, 520), should lead us to solutions. We must accept that some people will abort fetuses for what we would consider inappropriate reasons, just as they do now. But with better selections and species improvement, there is a greater chance that those decisions will be less and less morally corrupt, as we become more and more advanced in mental, and spiritual development.

The larger portion of underlying animosity and passion in this matter, goes to the issue of abortion, which is more about where we believe life begins. Add the element of spirituality to the mix and it also becomes about the soul, and how it makes

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us real. How can we know when the collection of cells possesses a soul? Until we understand what defines "human" and "seed of human" the debate will rage on. Most humans know that eggs are the embryos of future chickens, yet we eat them. Perhaps because, on some intuitive level, we don't really believe they are chickens. We believe they are the stuff of life, but not yet life. Neo-Eugenics, however, is not about the taking of life, any more than eating an egg is.

Joel Hawes once said, "Aim at the sun, and you may not reach it; but your arrow will fly far higher than if aimed at an object on a level with yourself."

Works Cited

- Kitcher, Philip. "Inescapable Eugenics" *The Lives to Come*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1996.
- Rifkin, Jeremy "A Eugenic Civilization." *The Biotech Century*. New York: Penguin Putnam, 1998. ..