Genetic Aspects of Human Behavior:
Philosophical and Ethical Issues

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The phoenix of eugenic thinking has risen up out of the pyres of the 1930's and 1940's and its resurrection in our culture is nearly complete. Whether one toasts this regeneration of interest in the quality of each person's "natural" endowment ("Three cheers for behavioral genetics", writes Sandra Scarr) or dreads it, it is hard to deny that eugenic thinking is very much with us today.

Not since the time of Sir Francis Galton in the late 19th and early 20th century have there been so many prominent scientists who hold (and occasionally express) the view that successful people and their offspring do better in life because they have better genes; and that ethnic, racial, social class and gender differences in (e.g.) health, intelligence, criminality, and interpersonal sensitivity are best understood in genetic terms. (Freedman 1979, Herrnstein 1991, Jensen 1969, Scarr 1986, Wilson and Herrnstein 1985). Not since Galton's time has there been such a strong undercurrent of informed opinion in our culture willing to "essentialize", "substantialize" or "naturalize" human abilities, mental capacities, behavioral dispositions and life prospects (Buss 1989, 1991, Degler 1991, Gazzaniga 1993, Symons 1979, Wilson 1975); that is to say, willing to view almost everything (from shyness to the ability to learn language to the proneness to suffer from a particular physical or mental disease) as the product of a genetic inheritance, which can be analyzed alternatively at the level of the individual, the family, the social group, or the species. Not since Galton's time have so many intellectuals been open to the findings of behavioral genet-
ics and willing to accept the conclusion drawn by (e.g.) Bouchard et al. in their study of identical twins reared in different home environments (published in Science, 1990), that, "For almost every behavioral trait so far investigated, from reaction time to religiosity, an important fraction of the variation among people turns out to be associated with genetic variation". Not since Galton's time have the halls of science, medicine, industry and government been so alive with the voices of ethically minded eugenicists eager to make the world a better place through selective alterations in the genetic endowment of particular members of our species (see Duster 1990, Keveles and Hood 1992, Lewontin 1992).

Many people find these developments morally appealing. Eugenic thinking appeals to them because it brings to mind the image of a caring physician saving "defective" babies from Tay-Sachs disease or assisting some ethnic group in alleviating the suffering caused by some heritable disease to which that community is especially prone. Eugenic thinking excites their rational intuitions about the values of self-improvement, beneficence, protection of the vulnerable, justice and control, while linking progress to something else that is good, the growth of knowledge. It appeals to them because they hope that one day, in the not too distant future, advances in science and genetic engineering will provide everyone with the means to be well-born. They picture a future in which human beings have created the secular equivalent of a heaven on earth. They surmise the progressive evolution of our species and suppose a state of organic grace in which every-
one is free and equal, and happy, healthy and responsible, and in the top 1% of their class.

Other people find the recurrence of eugenic thinking morally obnoxious. They think that the idea that "people do well in life because they have better genes" is a self-serving ideology designed to divert the community from promoting equality in the distribution of relevant human "goods", wealth, property and education rather than genetic resources. They believe that successful individuals and groups are successful because they work long and hard at the things they do and because they have opportunities (financial resources, good coaching) to be successful. They are suspicious of scientific findings of genetically determined racial, ethnic or class differences in school performance, criminality, or in any other behavioral disposition or human ability. They view such "findings" as a loathsome expression of a dark desire to indict socially oppressed groups with the sin of inherent inferiority. In the context of a real world ripe with communal conflicts based on "ancient hatreds" they are made anxious by eugenic thinking. They remember the pyres of the 1930’s and 1940’s, and a time and a place when the utopian ideals of the government and its scientists, doctors, jurists and intellectuals were not so humanitarian and egalitarian. They view eugenic thinking as a scourge.

The aim of this essay is to understand these divergent moral intuitions about the implications of eugenic thinking by examining the qualities an action, policy, or practice must exhibit to make it right or good. It is not the aim of the essay
to enter into any of several controversies that have been pro-
voked by eugenic thinking or to draw strong conclusions about the
facts of nature and nurture or to seek some kind of "biosocial"
synthesis of opposite views (see Duster 1990, Gould 1981, Kevles
and Hood 1992, Nelkin and Tancredi 1992, Suzuki and Knudson,
1992, Lewontin 1992). It is not the aim of the essay to critique
various models and conceptualizations of "heritability" or "kin

It is not the aim of the essay to assess the evidence in
behavioral genetics and behavioral science for or against various
kinds of genetic and/or environmental explanations of "altruis-
tic" behavior, of gender differences, or of individual and group
differences in health, intelligence, character or criminality
(Bem 1993, Bowman and Murray 1990, Elia 1988, Herrnstein 1991,
Loehlin, Lindzey and Spuhler 1975, Maccoby 1974, Plomin 1986,
Rossi 1977, Scarr 1986, Wilson and Herrnstein 1985). It is not
the aim of the essay to explain why adopted children are treated
differently than blood kin or why identical twins do not have the
same fingerprints (Lewontin 1992) or why identical twins reared
together in the same home are less similar in their personalities
and behavioral dispositions than one might suppose (Plomin and
Daniels 1987) or why heritability estimates derived from studies
using an adoption design do not converge with heritability esti-
mates derived from studies using a twin design (Plomin, Chipuer
and Loehlin 1990).

It is not the aim of the essay to debate the cogency of
various naturalistic and non-naturalistic "resolutions" of the
mind-body problem (Adams 1987, Dennett 1991, McGinn 1991, Popper and Eccles 1977), or to explain or explain away the appearance and function of "consciousness", "intentionality" and "free will" in the material world (see Churchland 1986, Planagan 1992). It is not the aim of the essay to reconsider the problem of universals or the concept of innateness or to address the neo-Platonic implications ("all learning is reminiscence") of the increasingly popular idea that "on-line" mental structures are not so much constructed as selected from a complex array of pre-existing forms (Gazzaniga 1993, Piatelli-Palmarini 1989, Werker 1990).

The aim of the essay is quite otherwise. As Arthur Caplan has remarked in his earlier Encyclopedia of Bioethics contribution on "Genetic Aspects of Human Behavior: Philosophical and Ethical Issues", there is a major view in moral philosophy which argues that it is our beliefs about nature, including human nature, which set the standard for moral evaluation. Plato and Aristotle held this view when they asked whether monarchy or slavery or the institution of the family were in accord with human nature. Hobbes, Machievelli, Kant and Rousseau held this view. I hold this view as well. The challenge of eugenic thinking, like the challenge of moral philosophy itself, is that it raises provocative questions about the type of social order qua moral order that is most compatible with certain presumed or imagined facts about human nature, including our ability to choose to alter certain aspects of our essential nature. Should we exercise this ability, and if yes, how?

Eugenic Thinking: Galton's Moral Crusade
In 1865 Sir Francis Galton coined the expression "nature-nurture" in an essay entitled "Hereditary Talent and Character" published in MacMillan's Magazine. In 1883 he started using the word "eugenics", a Greek word meaning "well-born". By the turn of the last century the Greek word and the coined expression had become associated with an influential moral crusade whose aim was to increase the stock of basic human goods—intelligence, civility and health—through the application of scientific principles of plant and animal breeding to human beings.

In 1911, the year Galton died, a veritable who's who of enlightened ethically sensitive intellectuals, scientists and politicians—Charles Eliot, the President of Harvard University, Winston Churchill, Stanley and Beatrice Webb—could be counted among those who were convinced that the aims of the eugenicists were noble and true, and that through the intelligent application of scientific knowledge we could increase the value of our collective genetic inheritance and rid the population of diseased bodies, wicked souls, and dull minds.

Eugenic thinking conjoins three types of theories: a theory of organic nature, a theory of human nature, and a theory of moral duty. The theory of organic nature asserts that (a) the essence of an organism's nature (including its abilities, behavioral dispositions and life prospects) is material (based in its genes). The theory of human nature asserts that (b) since human beings are organisms, therefore individual and group similarities and differences in abilities, behavioral dispositions and life prospects can be understood in material (genetic) terms.
The theory of moral duty asserts that (c) human beings can and ought to manage their own care and progress by altering their material nature. At the heart of eugenic thinking is a perceived ethical obligation to nurture our nature (our genetic resources) and to construct a social and political environment that makes it possible to bend nature in the direction of human values and ideals.

In Galton’s time the only eugenic means to the moral end of promoting health, civility and intelligence was through the regulation of the reproductive process (via selective breeding and the crude all or nothing procedure of sterilization). In the United States, the forced sterilization of dull and criminal minds became legal in 1907 in the state of Indiana and many other states followed suit. While judicial "wisdom" later upheld the constitutionality of sterilization laws ("Three generations of imbeciles is enough!", ruled Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. in 1927 in his U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Buck vs. Bell*), the ethical underpinnings of the case in favor of forced sterilizations had already been articulated by a voice of even greater authority, that of Galton’s famous cousin, Sir Charles Darwin.

In *The Descent of Man* Darwin expressed his concerns about the future of the genetic capital of our species in the following terms. "We build asylums for the imbecile, the maimed and the sick, we institutionalize poor laws; and our medical men exert their utmost skill to save the life of everyone to the last moment. Thus the weak members of civilized societies propagate their kind. No one who has attended to the breeding of domesti-
cated animals will doubt that this must be highly injurious to
the race of man. Both sexes ought to refrain from marriage, if
they are in any marked degree inferior in body or mind, but such
hopes are Utopian and will never be partially realized until the
laws of inheritance are thoroughly known." (quoted in Degler
1991:41-42)

The implicit ethical logic of Darwin's argument seemed
especially appealing to Galton and other eugenicists of his time.
Indeed the underlying logic of the argument - third party ef-
fector, the social cost of unregulated individual choice, the
social benefits of expert regulation - has from time immemorial
seemed appealing to many ethicists and scientists. Twenty-five
hundred years ago, in The Republic, Plato, developed a rationale
for state regulation of marriage choices which had to do with the
social benefits that accrue from ensuring that individual's
maximize the fit between their biologically inherited behavioral
inclinations and their social inherited occupational responsibil-

Eugenics: The Idea of the "Primordial" in Everyday Thought

Any attempt to comprehend the "official" return of eugenic
thinking in the late 20th century must acknowledge the historical
and cross-cultural pervasiveness of the idea of the "primordial"
in everyday thought. The idea of the "primordial" is that
people who are similar, proximal, emotionally and morally bonded
to each other or related as (or "as if") members of the same
family are linked to each other by a common substance (e.g.,
"blood" and "bone"). It is the idea that what living things do
is an extension of what they are, which is material or substantive, at least to some extent. Some social scientists have argued that the idea of "shared substance" and the tendency to equate "code with substance" and "fellow feeling" with "shared substance" is a fundamental feature of the human mind (Fiske 1991).

Few of us are entirely free of this type of primordial or eugenic thinking in some aspect of our daily lives. Much of this thinking seems innocent or even beneficent, like breeding Greyhounds to run fast or Tibetan terriers to be loyal, screening fetuses for defects, searching for the gene responsible for some dreaded disease, maintaining official records on the ethnic or racial distribution of lactose malabsorption or sickle-cell anemia, or wondering which characteristics of our mate (beauty, intelligence, self-confidence, a dislike of pudding) are likely to be reproduced in our children. In each case we reveal an intellectual inclination to substantialize the nature of life and of living things.

Yet, while few of us are entirely free of eugenic thinking in everyday life, our eugenic reasoning rarely displays the marks of generality and consistency that we associate with a philosophy of life or an intellectual doctrine. In the United States, where human beings typically reproduce unregulated by any self-conscious system of eugenic control, it is commonplace to deliberately and systematically breed dogs, cows, horses, plants and almost anything that is alive, except human beings. In India, on the other hand, where marriages are typically arranged by older
(and as they believe "wiser") relatives, eugenic calculations are explicit and pervasive in the mating of human beings, while dogs, plants and cattle reproduce unregulated by any self-conscious system of eugenic control. In everyday life, both cultures are eugenic, but not consistently so, and the two cultures do not display a eugenic regard for the same types of living things.

Galton's eugenic doctrine conjoined a materialist theory of organic nature with a materialist theory of human nature with an interventionist theory of moral duty. Yet while there are significant elements of primordial thinking in everyday life relatively few people are consistently eugenic in their thinking about these matters. To canvas everyday thought is to discover shards of eugenic thinking that do not coalesce into an integrated pattern.

For example, some people think that animal nature is essentially material (genetic) but that there is in the essence of human nature something more, something non-natural or spiritual. Some people extend this dualistic thinking to non-human animals, to their "pets" or in the case of some strict "vegetarians" to any living creature that nurses its young. (In India, among strict vegetarians, any species that has gender is prohibited as food, because anything that has gender is thought to be a potential vehicle for an immortal reincarnating soul).

Some people think that human nature is essentially material (genetic) but they do not think that individual and group differences are part of human nature. Some people think that even if all similarities and differences between animals (human and non-
human) are essentially material (genetic) human beings should not
be so eager to bend nature to their will, and they dread the
Faustian consequences of "playing God".

Some people think "playing God" is okay, as long as the God
is a relatively minor deity with limited powers of control.
They do not mind ceding to individuals (or even relatives) the
right to influence marriage choices or the right to decide to
aborted a "defective" fetus, but they would not want to extend that
right to a bureaucracy or to the State. And they worry about
the limits of parental rights to mold the essential nature of an
offspring and to act as guardian for its "interests." It is one
thing (and "obviously good") to alter the genetic code of a child
so it will not be born with Down's syndrome. It is quite a
different thing (and not so obviously good) to genetically en-
gineer a child to be patriotic and pious or to re-design its
 genetic code so that the child lacks the capacity to experience
 "negative" emotions such as sorrow, anger and fear. In everyday
life, even those people who are totally at ease with the idea
that everything about human and non-human animals and their
behavior is material ("in the genes") may find themselves raising
questions about the proper limits of rational planning and sys-
tems of control for managing human fate.

Indeed few people in everyday life are undifferentiated in
their thinking about the particular aspects of human nature to
which eugenic doctrines might be applied. Height, skin color,
sickle cell anemia and lactose intolerance? Sure. Intelligence?
Well, maybe. Alcoholism, shyness and fear of heights? I don't
know. Morality, religious preference, musical interests, and a
distaste for puddings? Really? Is that what the scientists
say?

The Recurrence of Galton’s Dream

Despite the prevalence of "primordialist" thinking in every-
day life, Darwin’s logic and Galton’s movement experienced a set
back during the F.D.R. years. The waning of the official in-
fluence of eugenic reasoning in the United States in the social,
political and scientific context of the 1920’s, 1930’ and 1940’s
is a complex story that has been narrated by Degler (1991).
Suffice it to say that eugenic thinking temporarily lost its grip
on the official and popular imagination even before it became
associated with the evils of the Third Reich, the Nazi steriliza-
tion and extermination programs and experiments in the breeding
of an Aryan super-race.

I say "temporarily lost its grip on the imagination" because
soon after World War II there was a recurrence of a fascination
with the eugenic ideas advocated by Galton and Darwin. Indeed,
as we approach yet another turn of the centuries the National
Institute of Health and the Department of Energy of the United
States Government have committed nearly a billion dollars of
public funds to the "Genome Project" in a State sponsored effort
to seek scientific knowledge of the material essence of human
nature (Kelves and Hood 1992).

The influence of eugenic thinking may have waned during the
1930’s and 1940’s, only later to be associated with the horrors
of the National Socialist Regime. Nevertheless despite this lingering association and the bad press that comes with it, the world today is full of well-intended scientists, intellectuals and bureaucrats who have turned to the State as an instrument for the realization of their hopes, utopian or otherwise, to alleviate suffering and improve the human condition through scientific knowledge and technological innovations that will make it possible to have greater control over the process of reproduction.

This recent recurrence of a fascination with eugenic ideas has been stimulated, at least in part, by technological and scientific developments on various fronts. There have been major advances in the isolation and identification of genetic markers and in the screening of genetic defects and autosomal recessive disorders (cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia, Tay-Sachs disease). There has been progress in the cloning of human genes and the application of recombinant DNA. Indeed, it has now become commonplace in the popular press, including the New York Times, to headline research findings in biochemistry and to feature stories about the latest discovery of some "long-sought" gene that is the cause of some dreaded disease. The stories invariably conclude with a visionary litany: "scientists say that this discovery could lead to new therapies and even a cure."

There has also been an expansion of our technological capacity to control and manipulate the human reproductive process. Through sperm banking, in vitro fertilization and artificial insemination the means are at hand for the selective breeding of
human excellences. Galton's dream of ridding the world of pathology and defective specimens through biochemistry has come to seem like a pending reality.

Each of these scientific and technological advances carries with it a moral atmosphere thick with normative implications. Information garnered through genetic "screening" makes it possible to abort fetuses doomed to a life of pathology and devastating disease. Yet it also has implications for decisions about marriage, child-bearing and abortion and for the control and regulation of marriage, child-bearing and abortion by individuals or organizations with third party interests and worries about social costs (e.g., insurance companies, the State). The ways in which a "public health policy" can be a moral minefield quickly becomes apparent when one reads recommendations from well-intended liberal folk such as Linus Pauling (quoted in Duster 1990:46; originally Pauling 1968) that "there should be tattooed on the forehead of every young person a symbol showing possession of the sickle-cell gene or whatever other similar gene, such as the gene for phenylketonuria in a single dose. If this were done, two young people carrying the same seriously defective gene in a single dose would recognize this situation at first sight, and would refrain from falling in love with one another. It is my opinion that legislation along this line, compulsory testing for defective genes before marriage, and some form of semi-public display of this possession, should be adopted."

To cite another example of the normative implications of scientific findings, advances in extra-corporeal fertilization
make it possible for the egg of one woman to be fertilized in vitro and then gestated in the womb of another woman, a boon for some women. Yet our very capacity to separate the identity of the "mother" as genitor (the person who contributes the egg) from the "mother" as gestator (the person who contributes the womb and goes through the labor of birth) raises new and difficult moral questions hitherto never imagined, except perhaps in mythology or in nightmares or by Dr. Seuss.

Who is the "natural" mother of the child, the "mother" who lays the egg or the one who hatches it, the "mother" who contributes the genetic substance or the one who brings it to term. Imagine the effect on family life and on our sense of responsibility for the young when the notion of "shared substance" linking parent to child goes the way of "miasmas" and "ethers" and other notions that we now view as archaic. Imagine a world in which it is commonplace through technological innovations to re-design from scratch the genetic codes contributed by the genitors of a fetus or to dispense with the need for genitors entirely. At that point the distinction between "natural offspring" and "adopted child" is likely to disappear. Perhaps that will be for the good, and everyone will come to view the old distinction as invidious and feel highly motivated to care for everyone else's children the way they once selectively cared for their own. Or perhaps the waning of the primordial idea of kith and kin, of kindred and kind will lead to a disastrous weakening of the bond between generations and a diminishment in the inclination of adults to sacrifice for the young. Unintended conse-
quences can be a worry when one has the power of "God" but not her foresight.

There are many moral uncertainties and anxieties associated with technological change, and not every change in technological capacity is unequivocally an "advance". For example, the technologies associated with in vitro fertilization and cloning have even led one biological anthropologist (and feminist author) to project herself into the future and to imagine a world in which human cloning is common-place and women are no longer needed for reproduction. "Why", the anthropologist asks, "would the Nobel Prize-winning sex let the sex with the boring, meaningless lives eat up half the food if they are no longer needed for reproductive purposes?" (Elia 1988:272). This nightmarish anthropological anticipation of a battle of the sexes over scarce resources and fear of gender genocide as the unintended consequence of the growth of knowledge may seem extreme. Nevertheless, slippery slope and unintended consequence arguments abound in considerations of the ethics of bending the material essence of human beings to our own sometimes vulnerable will (although see Glover 1984, for a series of sophisticated philosophical arguments against slippery slope reasoning and in favor of intelligent and moral human answers to the question "What sort of people should there be?).

The fears of the feminist author help underline the point that the current fascination with eugenic thinking (and for some the sheer horror of it all) cannot and should not be understood without an analysis of the moral, political and social implica-
tions of advances in science and technology at particular times and in particular places and for particular individuals or groups of individuals within a society. Research on recombinant DNA, for example, holds out the promise that a defective fetus might one day, through human intervention, be transformed into an excellent fetus. Yet qualities of excellence such as "health", "civility" and "intelligence" are relatively abstract qualities which vary greatly in the degree to which those in and out of power, or those from different cultural or sub-cultural traditions, can reasonably be expected to agree on how they should be defined. Whoever has the power to define a human excellence in such cases will have the power to alter human fate. Within any complex non-egalitarian society composed of diverse ethnic and racial groups (such as the United States) that power and the presumed authority on which it rests are likely to be contested.

It can be assumed that the question of what constitutes "defective" genetic material is going to intrude itself into public policy debates with a force comparable to debates about "affirmative action", the "right to life" and the morality of capital punishment. The issue is not going to go away. Simple or inexpensive biomedical technologies will be used if they make it possible to eliminate "defective" genetic material without also eliminating "positive" genetic material or the potential for future reproductive success. They will be used even if they are illegal.

Advances in amniocentesis, for example, have made it possible to include gender criteria among the potential criteria of a
"defective" baby and to make abortion decisions accordingly. In South Asia and among many Americans and American residents of South Asian origin what counts as a "defective" baby is, at times, gender-based. Given the financial burdens associated with the practice of dowry, mothers who have already given birth to several girls are highly motivated to abort a female fetus. From a narrow utilitarian point of view, selective abortions of this type and the relative scarcity of females that would result if the practice were widespread, might even weaken the dowry system or at least increase the status of women in society. Ironically, many pro-choice advocates and feminists in the United States believe it is ethically acceptable to abort a healthy fetus that is unwanted but that it is ethically unsound to abort a female fetus that is healthy, whether it is wanted or not. If detailed "personal" information about the characteristics of the fetus is made available in the first trimester of pregnancy it is going to be harder for some women to argue that the fetus is not a person. Should such information be suppressed?

Twenty-five hundred years after Plato’s *The Republic* and one hundred years after Galton named the movement, eugenic thinking is very much with us today. Eugenic thinking, whether it is concerned with individual and group differences in the distribution of inherited human excellences or with an agenda for the alteration of the material essence of a single human being or a whole species, carries with it a set of provocative and controversial normative implications, which moral philosophers have a responsibility to address.
Eugenics and Moral Philosophy

Because there is no single authoritative moral philosophy there can be no single authoritative moral assessment of eugenic thinking. (See Gewirth 1984, for a very useful review and pithy critique of a variety of extant moral philosophies.) Among the most important contributions to moral philosophy in recent years I think most scholars would include Rawls (1971), Dworkins (1977), MacIntyre (1981), and Gewirth (1978). I would add Seung (1993).

Moral philosophies can be classified along several dimensions (see Gewirth 1984). One dimension distinguishes "cognitivists" from "emotivists". Cognitivists assert and emotivists deny the existence of objective moral qualities. From the perspective of moral emotivism, since there are no objective moral properties, when someone states that some action or policy is right or good their statement ("That is good" or "That is right") has no truth value, although it may serve some pragmatic or ideological function, such as expressing one’s likes or dislikes or influencing someone else to do what you want. In what follows I assume that emotivism is false.

A second dimension distinguishes deontological theories from consequentialist theories. According to deontological theories the crux of morality is a sense of obligation, of duty, of what is "right" (e.g., keeping promises, fair exchange) regardless of consequence, context or circumstance. Morality, according to the deontologist, is the compelling sense that no dignified exceptions can be made to one’s duty, except to fulfill a higher duty.
In contrast, according to consequentialist theories the crux of morality is a state of being that is achieved by maximizing the availability of outcomes that are "good" or of "value" (e.g., liberty or equality). This involves some degree of calculation, "cost-benefit analysis", and attention to circumstances.

"Utilitarianism", which is a sub-variety of "consequentialism", holds that "choice" or "preference" is the source of all "value" and that a good reason for someone having something is that they want it (as long as their having it does not interfere with what other people want).

A third dimension distinguishes several varieties of cognitive theories (cognitive rationalism, cognitive naturalism, cognitive intuitionism). This is done by reference to the particular type of rational process (deductive reason, inductive reason, instrumental reason, intuitive reason) that the theory proposes as the basis for knowledge of objective moral qualities.

A fourth dimension distinguishes monistic from pluralistic accounts of the "right" and/or the "good". The idea that the "right" or the "good" is composed of a heterogeneous collection of non-reducible and irreconcilable moral qualities is the essence of "pluralism." This "bag of virtues" approach contrasts with various attempts to reduce morality to a single thing (e.g., the formal principle of "universalizability", as in Kant, or the substantive notion of "utility", as in Mills).

To canvas all of moral philosophy is to confront a bewildering array of possible ways to evaluate what is at stake in the study of genetics and human behavior. Without some starting
point, however, one never gets started, so I shall take a stand by proposing a kind of "natural teleology" as a framework for thinking about eugenic thinking.

Following Aristotle I shall assume that there is something about the nature of a thing (its telos) that sets the standard for moral evaluation.

Following Kant I shall assume that human nature is at least complicated enough to have two sides; and that we live so-to-speak in "two worlds", a noumenal world and a phenomenal world. In the noumenal aspect of our nature we are all free and equal and we recognize and respect each other as autonomous "persons" (or "spirits"), and have high regard for all that is implied by the idea of "autonomy". In the phenomenal aspect of our nature, however, we are unequal and our autonomy is compromised to varying degrees. We are unequal in our material resources (both genetic and financial), in our motivations, in our bargaining power, in our foresight, in our vulnerability to duress, in the opportunities we are likely to have, given our location within the social order, and in our very capacity to act as autonomous agents.

There is thus an inherent tension in our nature and no easy reconciliation of noumenal and phenomenal claims. If we try to enforce noumenal liberty and equality in the phenomenal world we introduce too many degrees of regulation and authoritarian control (communism, the "iron cage" of the bureaucratic liberal state), which is inconsistent with the very autonomy we seek to protect. If we fail to enforce noumenal liberty and equality in
the phenomenal world we banish the "right" and the "good" from the natural world. If we throw up our hands and try to transcend or escape the phenomenal world in gnostic revulsion over the bleak absence of the divine in nature we abandon society for the cave. Morality, I believe, is the compromise we strike between these two inherently conflictual sides of our nature, for the sake of a life in a social order that has some semblance of decency. And precisely because morality is a compromise it is composed of plural goods and obligations which cannot be reconciled or reduced to a single thing. So the moral order is a cognitive order and a plural order, but that is not all.

Following W.D. Ross (1988) (also see G.E. Moore) I shall assume that abstract moral qualities (e.g., fidelity, gratitude, reciprocity, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, sanctity, fraternity) are objective and knowable but apprehended as "self-evident" truths; and that moral knowledge is distinct from other types of knowledge in that it cannot be derived from either formal reason (e.g., as an extension of some principle of consistency or universalizability) or instrumental reason (e.g., as a calculation from some utilitarian calculus).

In saying this I accept MacIntyre's (1981) important critique, in which he asserts that the "Enlightenment" project of deriving objective moral qualities from either deductive reason or inductive reason has failed. What that failure implies, I wish to claim, is not that objective moral qualities do not exist but rather that moral qualities are not logical properties or properties open to the senses for direct observation or to the
naturalistic procedures of discovery of modern science. Instead they are non-logical and non-sensible properties open to the rational intuitive capacities of the human mind or nervous system. In this regard, neo-Platonism has a point (see Seung 1993). Thus, at least for the sake of taking a stand, I locate my stance as cognitivist, pluralist, and intuitionist; and as equivocal as to the choice between the reduction of moral intuitions to either the "right" or to the "good."

I would quickly add, however, that moral judgments cannot be made in the abstract. The variety of abstract and objective moral qualities open to rational intuition (e.g., justice, reciprocity, beneficence) are only the "frames" or the "gross architecture" within which societies and cultures historically implement and develop their local and quite divergent moral practices and policies. Historical and cultural understanding is an ineliminable aspect of a considered moral judgment, although there is always more to a considered moral judgment (in particular the rational capacity to recognize something as a moral form) than only historical and cultural understanding can provide.

How our moral intuitions will be given historical and cultural definition in the light eugenic thinking remains to be seen. In the West, the current compromise between the noumenal and phenomenal sides of human nature is the "liberal expectancy", the moral idea of "equal life prospects". But the idea of "equal life prospects" is an abstract idea which needs to be filled in, implemented, and made relevant in the light of our beliefs about the sources of difference in the world, and in the light of what
it is possible for us to accomplish technologically and what it is possible for us to afford.

Many classical societies of old subscribed to the idea of "god-gifts" (of inherited qualities of excellence, of a natural telos) and to the idea of a divine plan to the unequal distribution of "god-gifts" in the phenomenal world. They never considered the possibility that the State might level the genetic playing field. Their expectancy was that each person should have the opportunity to realize the full potential of their natural endowment, whatever that endowment might be. It was also their expectation that the fruits or products realized by each person fulfilling his or her own peculiar nature would be valued and esteemed by everyone else in society. In this way a balance was achieved between the moral qualities of self-improvement, fairness, respect and community. That is what it meant for inherited differences to be part of a divine plan. That is what our liberal democracy will have to achieve if we are to convince ourselves and our offspring that our science, our technology and our social and political institutions are really an extension of the mind of God.
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