

Footnotes on Eugenics:

A new nomenclature for historical reference.

By Sophia Siedlberg.

Abstract:

Eugenics is a word that usually invokes images of Nazi concentration camps and genocide. I recently landed myself in hot water because I described the work of a psychologist as being a form of eugenics. OK, I thought, well the psychologist in question (Professor J Michael Bailey) actually states in one paper that “The status of eugenics in general is not determined by the horror of the Nazi version of it. (1) I actually say he would be correct and I agree with him. However, it did not change my view that the methodology he describes in his paper and advocates is eugenics. How do we describe a clearly identifiable methodology without the instant association of that methodology with something the methodology is commonly associated with? And how can we apply descriptions of that methodology without being accused of smearing an individual who advocates it?

We need to have a clear and unified terminology that allows someone to use the term “eugenics” while not causing offense and at the same time having an accurate historical framework to describe exactly what someone is proposing.

Introduction:

The problem is that there was never a nomenclature offered to describe eugenics above and beyond “Negative eugenics” and

“Positive eugenics”. Let’s be honest here. It is a very emotive word nowadays with a history that justifies such a negative reputation. Firstly we need to consider what eugenics actually was and is.

Essentially it is the belief that someone can “improve” a population by means of removing “unwanted factors”. The basis of eugenics as a set belief and methodology started in 1865 with the work of Sir Francis Galton who is considered the “Father of Modern Eugenics”. He had noted that his cousin Charles Darwin had described the theory of evolution and in particular natural selection. Galton interpreted this to describe a process where only those who were “fit enough” to survive would. In extending this to humanity Galton had somehow reasoned that human evolution was essentially off track and required intervention. Galton proposed that the solution to this could be to ensure those who were “Fit to survive” (presumably in the absence of industrialization) were encouraged to continue to perpetuate their genes while those considered “unfit” were removed from the gene pool.

Eugenics faced a number of problems not as evident then as they are today. The two main problems being that selective breeding usually gives rise to the effects of hidden mutations. (This remains the primary flaw with eugenics). And it is actually unclear as to what positive traits were actually genetic traits and whether or not these traits were determined to be positive or negative on the basis of pre-existing prejudices.

Ultimately it would turn out to be that these two problems were to be the downfall of eugenics as a credible science. Some of

the most horrifying chapters of the 20th century were either in part or whole influenced by eugenics. The problem is that today the underlying methodology proposed by Sir Francis Galton still remains in the science of genetics. It is my view that these remaining methodologies could be judged by their scientific validity as well as their social validity.

It is easy to turn round to any professor of medicine, or biology or genetics and say, “What you are doing is eugenics”. They will answer with, “Prove it”. (Usually while on the defensive). It is indeed difficult to draw valid historical comparisons with a proposed methodology and eugenics as a whole.

This is why I am proposing the “HME” (Historical Methodology of Eugenics) system. By producing a nomenclature where the methodology under scrutiny can be compared and cross-referenced immediately but in an objective manner. This way we remove all notions of “Slurs”.

It was a geneticist that prompted me to consider this. Professor Eric Vilain (2) had decided to take a range of medical conditions, and place them under a common term. The conditions he described were “Intersex” and “Hermaphrodite”. He decided to use “Disorders of Sexual Development” instead of “Intersex” because according to Vilain et al, “intersex is stigmatizing”(3).

You still have “Sex” in the title, and the less stigmatizing (for parents and doctors) “Disorders”. (Though affected individuals themselves may not agree).

It is ironic because three years earlier I more or less accused Professor Vilain of proposing an idea similar to eugenics in another paper (4) (5). And then felt I needed to find a way of presenting that argument in a “less stigmatizing manner”.

As I am myself an individual defined as a “DSD” on the basis of a health condition I was born with, I thought it may be an idea to produce a similar “non stigmatizing” terminology to describe the methodologies used by those like Professor Eric Vilain and Professor J Michael Bailey when they are determining the “viability” of people like me as human beings.

“HME” was the end result.

For example I can describe Professor Bailey’s methodology as a:

“Negative Par de-centralized, BH, GL-HME”.

And Vilain’s would be described as a:

“Negative Med centralized Con, SM + GM-HME”.

You still have “Eugenics” in the title and underlying motives in a “non-stigmatizing” manner. (For me, the person observing the methodology, though some professors may of course disagree).

At first the nomenclature looks quite complex because it may at some point be modified to suit a given set of circumstances. If anything this is the idea, you can take any existing branch of eugenics and classify it as a HME. You can also take eugenic methods in current medical practice and also apply the

nomenclature. It is also set out so someone can parse a line of text describing an HME for use in a database. This would be handy for people investigating medical malpractice who want to have a clear means of describing said malpractice where a HME is involved.

Describing the Nomenclature.

Type

Positive and Negative:

To begin with eugenics was divided into two main categories “Positive” (or Liberal) and “Negative” where negative eugenics would have been those examples we find in the history of Nazism. Positive eugenics was less brutal and often was used to deal with particular health issues. In the HME system you define first the assessment that a methodology is either negative or positive in the classical sense. (This is often subjective and usage of “positive” or “negative” could be avoided, by using “NI” or “No Opinion”)

Deciding Agents

Gov, Med, Par, Ind, Centralized and De-centralized:

The second definition would describe who decides what is “Dysgenic” (Defective) and what is “Good Stock” (fit basically) and also, in what context the term “dysgenic” is applied. There were numerous deciding agents in the history of eugenics. For example in some cases it was the medical

profession of the time (Med) or the government (Gov). It may well have been an independent agent (Ind) or even parents (Par) opting to avoid the birth of a given child under “medical advice” (Med-Par) or the parents conducting this of their own accord for non medical reasons usually associated with “not wanting a socially unacceptable child” (Par). The terms “Centralized and decentralized determine whether or not the agent involved in determining the application of “Dysgenic” are based on a uniform policy or personal choice.

For example: “Positive Par Centralized” would describe a situation where the parents opt to avoid having a child with a known disability and screening is available as a policy in a given healthcare system they would use. The use of “Positive” is of course a matter of opinion. (which is an important point).

It could be “Med-Par Centralized” where there is a medical condition the medical profession would advise (Coerce) avoiding (Via abortion after certain tests and so on) having a child with a given condition.

“Negative Gov Centralized” would be a state run eugenics program designed to eliminate a given population.

In Brief:

Par: The deciding agent is the parent;

Gov: The deciding agent is a Government, State, dictatorship, and do on.

Med: The medical profession act as the deciding agent.

Ind: The Deciding agent is an independent organization.

Target:

**Racial, (Rac) Condition Set, (Con) Sex, (Sex) Unnamed
Minority (Umm) Penal, (Pen) Class, (Cla) Behavioral, (Beh):**

Often throughout the history of eugenics, there have been specified targets, for example race was a common target. So a eugenics project to remove a given ethnic group operated by a state would be. "Negative Gov Centralized Race". Francis Galton proposed the removal of "Criminal Elements" by a government agency: "Negative Gov Centralized Penal".

In Brief:

Rac: The target is an ethnic or racial group

Con: The target is a group with a specific set of medically defined conditions.

Sex: The target are the members of a given sex (Usually due to other policies such as Dowry systems, etc.)

Umm: The target is an unnamed minority group.

Pen: the Target is those society deem "predestined for criminality"

Cla: The Target is a given socio-economic group

Beh: The Target is defined by a set of behaviors (Sexual minorities are targeted most often here)

Method:

**Soma Manipulative, (SM) Soma Terminating, (ST) Germ
Line Screening, (GLS) Screening, (Sc) Gene Modifying (GM)**

**and Post Natal Terminating. (PNT) Adult Terminating, (AT)
By any means (Bam):**

This is a complicated one because methods tend to overlap or be used in combination. These terms describe the methods. Often more than method is used in a given eugenic program so this can be expressed as "M + M". Take the evolution of the Nazi race eugenics programs. Initially the method was forced sterilization.

So this would be defined as a:

"Negative, Gov Centralized, Rac, GLS - HME"

Later people were also killed under a:

"Negative, Gov Centralized, Rac, GLS + PNT + AT - HME".

It ended up as a:

"Negative, Gov, Centralized, Rac, BAM - HME".

For Tiergartenstrasse 4 or "The deaf holocaust", the disabled were targeted and it was a:

"Negative, Gov, Centralized, Con, Bam - HME".

In Brief:

SM: Soma Manipulative, means to change the biological make up of someone post conception, (At the time of writing this usually refers to procedures that alter a fetus in-utero).

ST: Soma Terminating or Abortion usually after screening. basically.

GLS: Germ line Screening where people are “screened” usually by inheritance tests. This also means not reproducing or being allowed to reproduce on the basis of the results of such a test.

SC: Screening methods that do not rely on inheritance alone, for example testing a fetus or individual for having inherited a given trait individually (for example has the 1 in 4 in terms of autosomal genes or 1 in 2 in “sex linked” situations). This tests the individual at the end of a germ line rather than the germ line itself.

GM: The active modification of genes either in the germ line or the individual. Technically this will probably evolve as a definition as technology changes.

PNT: Post Natal Termination. “Strangling at birth” or “Infanticide”. This usually applies up until adulthood.

AT: Adult Termination, the killing of an adult for possessing a given genetic make up.

BAM: By Any Means: The use of all of the above.

Example of Classification:

Margaret Sanger: The case study.

I chose Margaret Sanger as an example because often the organization that uses her name (Based in New York) and many of her advocates feel very uneasy about the term

“Eugenics” being applied to a number of methodologies she applied.

This would be a classic example of describing the methodology without any reference to negative eugenics of the Nazi variety. That is her “eugenic method” is judged in its own right rather than by the standards of another manifestation of eugenics.

A lot of controversy surrounds what Margaret Sanger actually believed. From claims about her advocating negative eugenics, even to her allegedly advocating gas chambers for children. Had something like the HME system applied to reading her commentary, the things she was known to have said and written would have been judged on their own merits. Obviously it was not. But while there still remains a lot of discussion about her methodology. One statement she made is worth noting: (6)

"The campaign for birth control is not merely of eugenic value, but is practically identical with the final aims of eugenics.... We are convinced that racial regeneration, like individual regeneration, must come 'from within.' That is, it must be autonomous, self-directive, and not imposed from without."

This is de-centralized eugenics. Let’s construct it. I would argue that whatever claims were made, what I know of her and the attitudes of her time, it was indeed a negative HME, and in the above she was describing something she had set up (In an advisory capacity). So this would be “Negative, Ind” However, she did in practice ensure the parents had the final say as the agent with regard whether a given child was “Dysgenic”. So

the HME would be “Negative Ind, Par, De-centralized” the de-centralized resting on the fact that she did not coerce a parent with her stated policy, but offered the means to realize that. If we stick with the above statement, then yes what she was proposing was not good. But we can pin it down in practice.

Hers was a:

“Negative Ind, Par, De-centralized, Rac, GLS + ST - HME”.

Those rumors of gas chambers being proven would qualify this as a:

“Negative Ind, Par, De-centralized, Rac, GLS + ST + PNT - HME”.

Now the important thing is we are going by a known statement she herself had made. If this were practiced without the aid of her birth control center, then we read:

“Negative Par, De-centralized, Rac, GLS + ST + PNT? - HME”.

Question marks are allowed when the method of carrying out the HME is uncertain.

What we learn:

The merit of this system is that we can clearly differentiate what we have read here of Margaret Sanger’s “HME” is that it indeed does differ from Nazi eugenics on one fundamental point. While today both her “HME” and the Nazi “HME” would be clearly interpreted as racist. Sanger’s idea was not to force people to adopt the policy, rather make her case for it to

be carried out given the choice. (The one obvious point with this in a racial context is that people would not usually avoid having children because it furthers the ethnic group or race they belong to).

It does not put Sanger in a positive light because the connotation is that she was racist. And if a branch of eugenics is motivated by a clear social prejudice, then that is a negative. However the process Sanger advocated in the above quotation was “De-centralized” People had the freedom to decide for themselves. In fairness it was Sanger’s methodology that gave rise to the “De-centralized”. It does not condone what she was suggesting. In fact this is the point, the terminology is “morally neutral” as Bailey would put it. However it does give people the freedom to interpret Sanger’s branch of eugenics in a more objective way. Moral interpretation (Mine would be that She was expressing the racist views of the time. Thankfully society has grown out of that)

Conclusion:

I believe that eugenics was both flawed technically and fatalistic. It is in truth the fatalistic element of every branch of eugenics that gives rise to moral objections to them and eugenics as a whole. Even with suggestions of emerging technologies that enable in-utero manipulation (such as in-utero somatic gene therapy) or pre-conception genetic modification (designer babies). The element of fatalism is still there. It is presented paradoxically as the “relief of suffering”. Well that tends to depend on whether you are in a targeted group or not, and if you are not, whether you accept having to

manipulated to fit on a fundamental level. This is the whole point of eugenics: someone must “lose out” in order to give the lion’s share of “Quality of life” to the “Better people”.

The very thing that Galton missed was that the capacity for compassion and the underlying sense of need to preserve what can be preserved, for “good” or “ill” was most probably part of the evolution of the human mind. You see intelligence does not work without compassion. The placing of unequal intrinsic value on the basis of biology is fatalistic. I feel the need to clarify however that a clear understanding of what eugenics was, and is, and find a way of conveying this with a nomenclature.

My motivation is to give those people who are defined by “non stigmatizing terms” placed on them (Such as “DSD” and so on) to define the methodology of those doing the initial defining. As the people conducting research on different minority groups are clearly using eugenic methodologies and are offended by this being pointed out. Then fine, those of us who feel wrongly defined by the researchers are returning the courtesy.

“Eugenics” is stigmatizing, while HME (Historical Methodologies of Eugenics) would not be. Consider it Professor Vilain.

Sophia Siedlberg:

References:

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Aaron S. Greenberg, JD,1 and J. Michael Bailey, PhD. 2001.

2: Eric Vilain proposed “DSD” At the 2005 Intersex Consensus Meeting in Chicago.

3: At the 2005 Intersex Consensus Meeting in Chicago Prof Vilain stated “Intersex and Hermaphrodite” were stigmatizing and this was the reasoning behind the more stigmatizing “DSD”

4: Scientific American: News In Brief. Wednesday, May 02, 2001.

5: The Gender Genital Gene Genie. Siedlberg. S 2001 revised 2005.

6: Margaret Sanger. "The Eugenic Value of Birth Control Propaganda." Birth Control Review, October 1921, page 5