

**Compare the ways in which the science and practice of eugenics were presented to the British public between 1907-1912 and 1937-1942.**

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## 0. Introduction

'Eugenics' is a term with powerful and emotive connotations. It conjures nightmarish images of genocide, the murder of over six million innocent citizens and sterilization of a further 400,000. It has become synonymous with Hitler's race hygiene which aimed to create the perfect race through the extermination of 'undesirable' groups such as the disabled, homosexuals and, in particular, Jews. The history of eugenics, however, is far more complex than this well-known account. This essay will explore the ways in which the British movement considered and presented eugenics.

Eugenic-type ideas emerged in Britain from as early as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century as a result of increasing concerns about the fitness of the population and decline in birth rate. The publication of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection in 1859 fuelled the idea that human selection and manipulation could be used to improve the population.<sup>1</sup> The real starting point of eugenics is often attributed to Francis Galton who was a cousin of Darwin. In 1869 he published *Hereditary Genius* which advocated artificial breeding of humans. In 1883 he coined the term 'eugenics' coming from Greek 'eu' meaning 'good' or 'well' and 'genēs' meaning 'born' or 'produced'.<sup>2</sup> Galton defined eugenics as the "study of agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally".<sup>3</sup> Two approaches were soon identified by those involved.<sup>4</sup> 'Positive eugenics' sought to encourage those with desirable traits to pass these qualities on through having more children. The second, 'negative eugenics', focused on discouraging the eugenically unfit from having children and in some cases prevented them from doing so.

The idea that human reproduction could be controlled became a topic debated in the periodical press and at learned societies, including the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS).<sup>5</sup> Proponents hoped that scientific breeding could be used to deal with various problems within society, such as poverty, mental deficiency and the declining birth rate. The eugenics movement in Britain became established during the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Darwin's theory of natural selection in relation of the development of eugenics, see Farrall,

<sup>2</sup> Colman, 2001, p.254.

<sup>3</sup> Galton, 1909, p.321.

<sup>4</sup> Articles within *The Eugenics Review* frequently referred to positive and negative eugenics from the very beginning. For example, Anon, 1909 and Crackanthorpe, 1909.

<sup>5</sup> Sir George Campbell recommended the scientific breeding of man to the anthropological section of the BAAS during his Presidential Address in 1886.

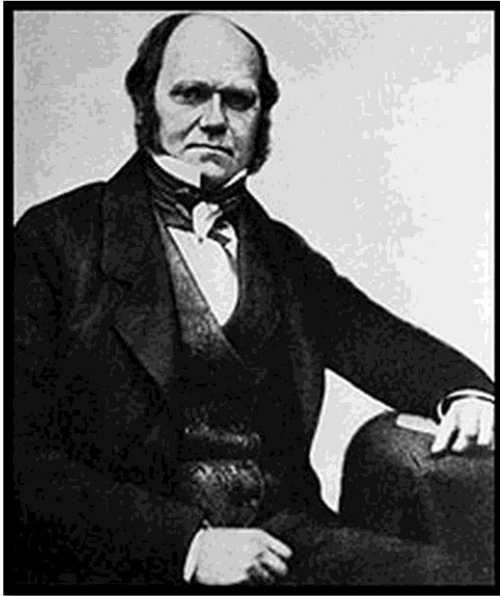


Image 1 - Charles Darwin, c.1855.  
Credit to Bettmann/CORBIS.

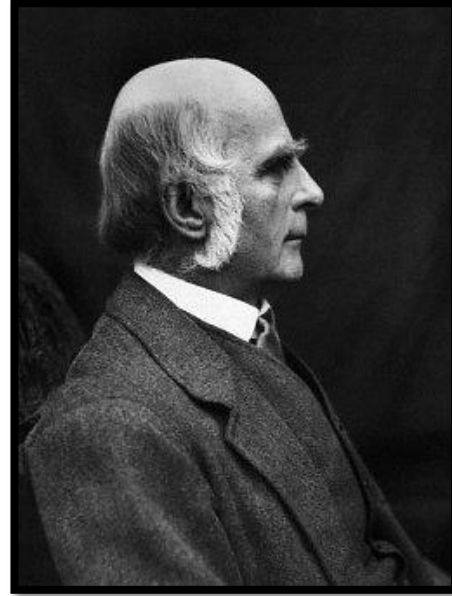


Image 2 - Francis Galton, 1886.  
Credit to Bettmann/CORBIS.

This essay will focus on how the science and practice of eugenics were presented to the British public by the Eugenics Education Society. It will give a comparison between the inclusive periods of 1907-1912 and 1937-1942, primarily based on an original statistical analysis of the Society's journal, *The Eugenics Review*. It will also examine archival material. These two periods were crucial in generating support for eugenics; the first period followed the establishment of the first organisations dedicated to eugenics and the second faced a growing stigma about eugenics in response to fascist regimes. The eugenics movement required support from the general public in order to be successful in its aims. A eugenic nation would only arise if the public also acted and reproduced eugenically, which they would only do if they accepted eugenic ideas. Given this crucial role of the public, it is surprising that there has not been more research into the ways in which the Society engaged with the public. Previous research has considered how members of the Society viewed eugenics; many historians have argued that members of the eugenics movement viewed eugenics as scientific-based support for middle class ideologies.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of whether these claims are justified or not, this essay will show that the Society rarely presented eugenics to the public in such a way.

This essay will show both continuity and major change between the two periods. During both periods eugenic practice was presented as moral, a national duty and necessary for the betterment of the nation, while the science of eugenics was continually presented as an area of development. Throughout the first period, eugenics was strongly presented as an

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Farrall, 1985 and Mazumdar, 1992.

independent area of study and practice and as a solution to social problems of the time. During the second period, however, eugenics was presented alongside other areas, such as the birth control movement, and saw the development of a major focus on population investigations.

The next section of this essay will present the historical background of the eugenics movement and the two periods under consideration. The results of my analysis of *The Eugenics Review* will then be given. Section 3 will consider four sets of results from this analysis. Due to space restrictions, they can only be considered briefly. It is clear, however, that further investigations would be beneficial in gaining a full understanding of how the Society presented different areas of eugenics to the public. Section 4 will present an in-depth analysis of the category 'What is Eugenics'. It will examine articles concerned with explaining eugenics and eugenic policies, along with some leaflets and a film produced by the Society. This section will focus on the presentation of eugenics in a narrow sense, considering presentation on a case-by-case basis. The fifth section will examine the presentation of eugenics in a broader sense through considering a major change in the way the Society presented itself and eugenics. It will look at the transformations within the categories of 'Social Problems and Solutions', 'Family Life' and 'Population and Economics' as related to changes outside of the Society. It will show that this was partially an attempt to reform the way the Society was viewed, in light of the eugenic connotations of Hitler's prevailing fascist regime. The essay will show that the question of how eugenics was presented is of much interest and it is worthy of further research.

## **1. Historical Background**

There were many contributing factors that assisted the growth of the British eugenics movement at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Concerns over the fitness of the nation, high levels of social problems such as crime, feeble-mindedness and poverty, and the declining birth rate were prevalent. A need for change was apparent and eugenics offered itself as a scientific-based solution.

Though the UK population rose from 41.5 million in 1901 to 45.3 million ten years later, this was due to falls in the death rate and infant mortality rate, whilst the birth rate decreased.<sup>7</sup> The main worry about this decrease was that it was occurring within the eugenically desirable sectors of society, which primarily corresponded to the professional and middle classes. The eugenically unfit, who tended to coincide with those living in poverty, continued

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<sup>7</sup> Wardley, 1994, p.61.

to reproduce at the same rate.<sup>8</sup> National newspapers fuelled anxiety over the decrease in fertility, warning that a decline in birth rate would be disastrous for the country and needed to be addressed urgently.<sup>9</sup> *The Lancet* proclaimed the falling birth rate to be "a national calamity seriously threatening the future welfare of our race".<sup>10</sup>

Along with a falling birth rate, there was widespread concern over the deterioration in the quality of the population. Seebohm Rowntree's study of the town of York at the beginning of the century predicted that conditions were even worse than feared. Published in 1901 in *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, Rowntree's studies showed 27.84% of York's population to be living in poverty.<sup>11</sup> York was regarded as a prosperous city so such a high rate of poverty was shocking and, further, Rowntree claimed this high rate was typical throughout urban England.<sup>12</sup>

In his study, Rowntree introduced the term 'poverty line' which was based on the minimum income that would allow a family to have a physically efficient and healthy life. This indicated a connection between poverty and poor physicality.<sup>13</sup> The poor physicality of the British population was also drawn to the nation's attention through the great setbacks of the Boer War of 1899-1902. Those sent to fight were supposedly the physically fittest, yet they were still defeated by the small number of Boers, showing the diminishing health of the British.<sup>14</sup> Physical deterioration was emphasised in high military rejection rates due to lack of fitness. Rejection rates of 40% were reported and this rose to 60% when recruits found to be unfit within two years were added.<sup>15</sup> The situation was so bad that in 1903 the Army Medical Services issued a memorandum that supported a demand for an inquiry to establish the full extent and nature of the degeneration.<sup>16</sup> Further, there were great concerns over economic national efficiency as Britain came under threat from Germany and the US.<sup>17</sup>

The rediscovery of Gregor Mendel's papers on inheritance in 1900 further fuelled eugenics. Mendel's works helped to show regularity in inheritance of certain traits. Eugenists, therefore, were able to use these to provide a scientific grounding for the claim that, with the

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<sup>8</sup> Hennock, 1994, p.80.

<sup>9</sup> Soloway, 1990, pp.4-5.

<sup>10</sup> Anon, 1906, p.1290.

<sup>11</sup> Rowntree, 1901, p.117.

<sup>12</sup> Hennock, 1994, p.80.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Farrall, 1985, p.51.

<sup>15</sup> Soloway, 1990, p.41.

<sup>16</sup> Soloway, 1990, p.42.

<sup>17</sup> Daunton, 2007, p.185.

right knowledge, humans could control their own breeding through laws of inheritance.<sup>18</sup> With a promising science behind the idea and an apparent need for change, eugenics became a much discussed potential solution.

The first period under consideration, 1907-1912, follows the founding of the first eugenics organisations. In 1904, Galton established the Eugenics Record Office at the University of London with the aim "to forward the *exact* study of what may be called *National Eugenics*, by which I mean the influences that are socially controllable, on which the *status* of the nation depends".<sup>19</sup> Later called the Galton Eugenics Laboratory, it was purely concerned with scientific research into eugenics, such as the workings of heredity. It did not attempt to disseminate its findings further than others scientifically involved in the discipline. Under Karl Pearson's instruction, lectures and papers presented by the Laboratory were not to "obtain a popular audience" and should be of use to those "capable of profiting by the instruction".<sup>20</sup>

The role of presenting eugenics to the public fell to the Eugenics Education Society. The Annual Report of 1908 outlines the aims of the Society:

- I. Persistently to set forth the national importance of Eugenics in order to modify public opinion and create a sense of responsibility, in the respect of bringing all matters pertaining to human parenthood under the domination of eugenic ideals.
- II. To spread a knowledge of the laws of heredity so far as they are surely known, and so far as that knowledge might effect the improvement of race.
- III. To further eugenic teaching, at home, in the schools, and elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>

As can be seen, the Society sought to educate the public about the science and practice of eugenics and stimulate support through creating a sense of responsibility. With such ambitious aims in place, it was crucial for the Society to promote eugenics to a wide range of people. This essay will examine how the Society tried to engage with varying audiences during its first six years of existence.

The second period under consideration, 1937-1942, also required the Society to work hard at promoting eugenics. This period follows a change in the direction of the Society and the way they presented eugenics. The Society had changed its name to the Eugenics Society in

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<sup>18</sup> Farrall, 1985, p.48-50.

<sup>19</sup> Pearson, 1930, p.222.

<sup>20</sup> Report of the Francis Galton Laboratory Committee for Presentation to the Royal Commission on the University Education in London, Jan. 1911, p.1. Seen in Farrall, 1985, p.177.

<sup>21</sup> 'Annual Report 1908', SA/EU/A.1, Annual Reports etc., Eugenics Society Collection, Wellcome Library, London, p.21.

1926, showing a change in their aims and approaches. By this time, eugenics was not a new idea; it had been addressed by a formal organisation for over 30 years, and it also benefitted from a greatly increased financial basis, due to a £70,000 bequest to the Society by Henry Twitchin in 1930.<sup>22</sup> This allowed new ways for the society to engage with the general public, most noticeably through the production of leaflets and even a short film promoting eugenics. Similarly to the first period under consideration, the late 1930s followed a time of severe national unemployment and poverty in Britain. Again, this drew the public's attention to the degenerating state of the nation which eugenicists claimed eugenics could solve.

The major hurdle of this period was the stigma becoming attached to eugenics. Soon after coming into power, Hitler implemented many so-called eugenic policies. For example, loans were provided to eugenically fit couples and with each child that they had, they did not need to pay back part of this loan. The Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring, made active in Germany in January 1934, allowed for compulsory sterilization. This caused major problems for the Eugenics Society which was campaigning for voluntary sterilization, as opponents worried that this would be the first step towards the legislation seen in Germany. Therefore, the eugenicists fought to distance themselves from Hitler's race hygiene. During the second period under consideration, the Society associated eugenics with other movements, such as birth control, in an attempt to rescue British eugenics. There was also a big change towards a focus on population investigations, such as population policies, trends and migration.

## **2. An original analysis of *The Eugenics Review***

*The Eugenics Review* was first published in April 1909 and ran until 1968. It was comprised of articles, book reviews and, from 1928, the addition of a regular well-used correspondence section. It also contained matters concerning the running of the Society, such as Notes and Memoranda and the Treasurer's Page, and general features such as Discussion and Other notes.<sup>23</sup>

The *Review* offers good insight into what the Society considered to be the most important areas of eugenic investigation and how it should be presented. As such a rich source of information, it is surprising that the *Review* has not been well studied by historians. Farrall offers a brief analysis of the content of the *Review* - primarily its first two volumes - presenting the number of articles on areas such as mental deficiency, crime and

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<sup>22</sup> Soloway, c.1998, p.64.

<sup>23</sup> Such articles have not been considered in this analysis.



sterilization.<sup>24</sup> Such an analysis has limited use due to its narrow focus. Through searching the *Review* for articles on certain topics only, Farrall disregards how these related to the rest of the journal. While it is useful to see which areas featured frequently, as Farrall's analysis allows, it is equally important to see which areas received little attention.

As such, the analysis I have conducted considers every article within *The Eugenics Review* from its establishment in 1909 to 1912 and from 1937-1942. Each article has been placed into a category concerning its general theme.<sup>25</sup> The original analysis has offered some surprising results and has helped identify major changes in the way the Society presented itself. These would not have been evident if articles had been considered in isolation. It is also worth noting that an analysis of the content of the book reviews and correspondences would also shed significant light on the way eugenics was presented to and viewed by the Society's members. An analysis of the full content of each journal in these two periods, however, demands more space than this present paper allows. The results of the conducted analysis can be seen in Figures 1-4 below.

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<sup>24</sup> Farrall, 1985, pp.232-237.

<sup>25</sup> Some articles may be open to interpretation as to which category they suit best, however the results at least indicate trends and allow comparison.

Some of the articles were equally concerned with two of these areas, in which case they were counted as a half in their respective categories.

The number of articles in each category has been converted to percentages so that direct comparison between the two periods can be made as the first period covers four years and the second covers six. All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

<b><u>Category</u></b>	<b><u>Number of articles 1909-1912</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage of articles 1909- 1912</u></b>	<b><u>Number of articles 1937- 1942</u></b>	<b><u>Percentage of articles 1937- 1942</u></b>
What is Eugenics	19.5	13	4.5	5
Science of Eugenics	17	23	9.5	11
Eugenics Societies	1	1	6	7
Morality	2	3	0	0
Education and Intelligence	4.5	6	6.5	7
War and National efficiency	4	5	4	5
Social Problems and Solutions	20.5	28	10	11
Family Life	9	12	14.5	17
Population and Economics	3.5	5	23	27
Other	3	4	9	10

Figure 1

The difference between each category in the two periods is seen more clearly in Figure 2.

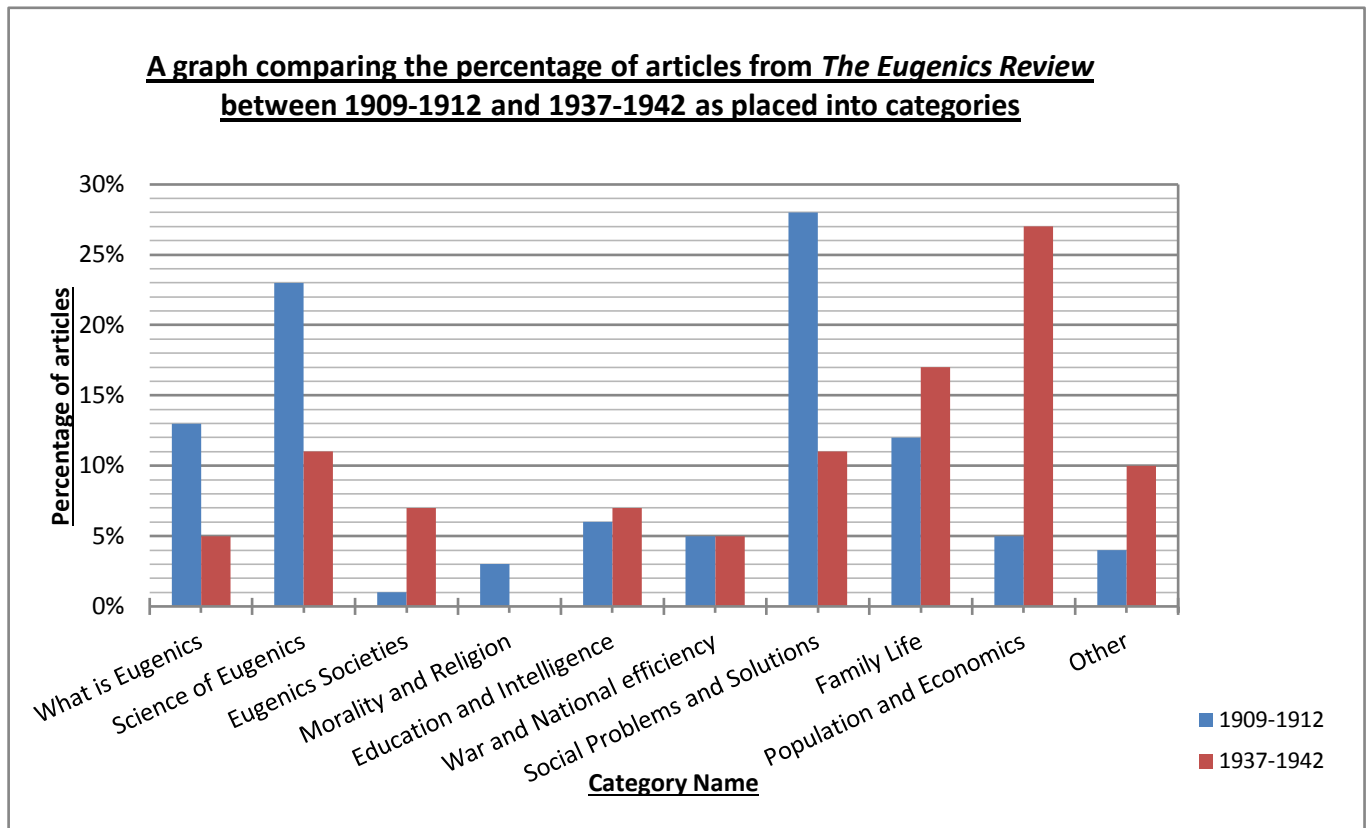


Figure 2

It will also be of use to see how the categories compare within the same period. This is visually represented through pie charts in Figures 3 and 4.

**A pie chart showing the percentage of articles from *The Eugenics Review* as placed into categories for the period 1909-1912**

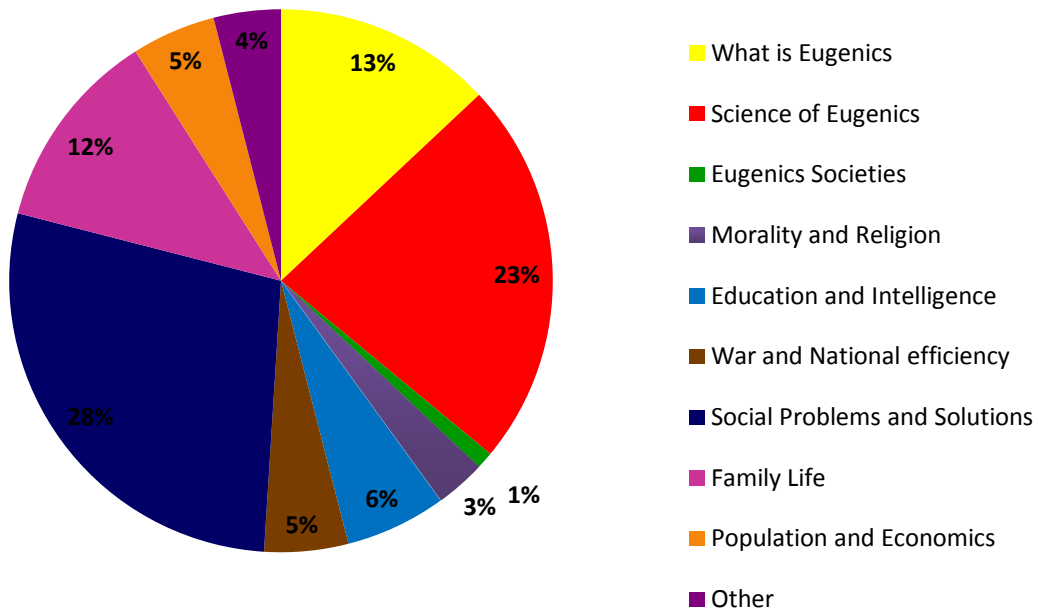


Figure 3

**A pie chart showing the percentage of articles from *The Eugenics Review* as placed into categories for the period 1937-1942**

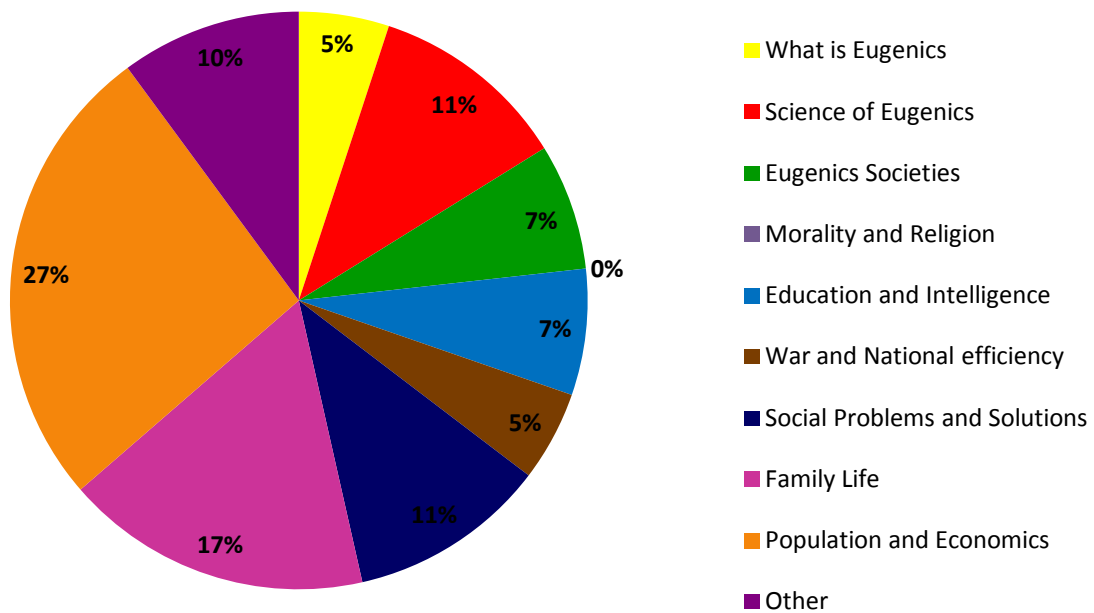


Figure 4

### **3. An examination of four categories**

The analysis has been illuminating and offered some surprising results, such as a low level of articles on war, despite both periods falling after or during war time, and the major increase of population related articles. The following categories can all be subjected to an in-depth analysis. Unfortunately, however, this essay is limited in the amount it can cover so will focus on the categories which are most concerned by the presentation of eugenics or follow major change in the presentation of eugenics.

The category 'Science of Eugenics' encompasses articles concerned with studies in heredity and other scientific aspects of eugenics. The category contains a weighty 23% of articles in the first period, the second biggest category from 1909 - 1912, which drops to 11% in the second period. A brief examination highlights differences between these articles; most significantly the change in length between the two periods. Many articles in the first period were over 20 pages long and tended to be broader in content, such as 'Mendelian Heredity in Man' and 'The Inheritance of Mental Characteristics'.<sup>26</sup> By the second period, articles on the science of eugenics were often just three pages and far more specific in their content, such as 'The Prevention of Crippling' and 'Haemophilia in the Royal Caste'.<sup>27</sup> It is not surprising that the first period contained many articles on the science of eugenics, as eugenisists wanted to present eugenics as grounded in science. Given continual developments in the science of heredity, however, it is surprising that the second period did not contain more science-based articles. This may reasonably be explained by the decline in the Laboratory's work due to its workers being called into service. Such interesting observations no doubt require much further investigation, however, due to restrictions this cannot be addressed here. The presentation of the science of eugenics within the Society's leaflets and film will be considered in Sections 4.1 and 4.2.

The intrigue of the category 'Education and Intelligence' also lies outside the realm of this paper. A major aspect of the Eugenics Education Society was spreading knowledge and furthering education in eugenics throughout Britain, as seen in their aims and objects. The content of the *Review*, however, does not reflect these educational objectives. From 1909-1912, only 6% of the *Review*'s articles concerned education or intelligence. This rose minimally to 7% from 1937 - 1942. This area is highly interesting due to the aims of the Society to educate the public on eugenics. A vast study can be conducted on the educational actions of the Society, such as their appointing of a committee to deal with educational matters, letters and leaflets which were sent to headmistresses of schools and,

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<sup>26</sup> Hurst, 1912; Burt, 1912.

<sup>27</sup> Anon, Oct 1941; Gun, 1938.

in particular, the dropping of 'Education' from the Society's name in 1926. This study would be extensive and would primarily concern how people should be educated so will not be considered further here.

Eugenics was frequently presented as a moral and national responsibility throughout the publications of the Society, as will be seen in Section 4. Despite this regular emphasis, very few articles in the *Review* focused directly on the relationship between eugenics and morality or the Church. The category of 'Morality and Religion' contains just two articles, both published in 1909 and written by reverends. Both presented eugenics as compatible with a moral or Christian outlook. 'Some Moral Aspects of Eugenics' focused on how moralists and eugenists were in search for the same thing; improvement of the human race for the good of the human race.<sup>28</sup> 'Eugenics and the Church' argued that Christians strive for philanthropy and this is something eugenists could help with through using reason and foresight to prevent suffering of future generations. It urged the Society to circulate its objects far wider than just their members so that the moral aims of the Society could be understood by those judging it otherwise.<sup>29</sup> This is something that the Society did through leaflets, exhibitions, posters and a film. Therefore, while it is surprising that there are only two articles within this category, this should not be taken to show that the Society was unconcerned by claims of immorality and going against Christian doctrine. As will be seen, the moral element of eugenics appeared in articles on various other topics within the *Review* and was particularly emphasised in the literature they disseminated to the public.

The category of 'War and National efficiency' is one of the smallest categories, with both periods containing just 5% of articles on this topic. This is very surprising given the events taking place during or surrounding the two periods. As seen, concerns over national efficiency were high during the first period. 1937-1942 included the start of World War II so more articles on the relation of eugenics to war may be expected. Both periods presented eugenics as a solution to concerns over national efficiency and war as highly dysgenic and detrimental to the future of the nation. Colonel C.H. Melville in 'Eugenics and Military Service' stated that war raises the profile of problems over physical fitness and the health of the nation and, in this way, it is beneficial, such as the events of the Boer War leading to enquiries and physical training programmes.<sup>30</sup> This allowed eugenists to promote eugenics as a solution to these high profile problems. Despite this raised profile, war is presented throughout the Society's literature as dysgenic as the fit go to fight and often do not return, leaving the unfit who could not enlist to restock the nation. In a 1938 article, 'Eugenics and

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<sup>28</sup> Inge, 1909.

<sup>29</sup> Peile, 1909.

<sup>30</sup> Melville, 1910, p.54.

War', war was called an "abomination" as its "influence on the qualities of future generations cannot be other than disastrous".<sup>31</sup> The British nation did not want to go to war so through opposing war, eugenics was presented as wanting the same things as the public, encouraging greater acceptance.

While these categories cannot be considered further in this essay, it does not mean that such a study cannot be done. This brief examination has shown how the presentation of eugenics is complicated and may not be fully reflected through the *Review*, such as in the case of education and morality. Although these areas were barely covered in the *Review*, both were of great importance to the British eugenics movement, as archival material shows. Placing archival material into the same categories used for the *Review* analysis would allow greater direct comparison between the ways in which the Society presented eugenics through different methods to different audiences. This approach has been used in the next section.

#### **4. Explaining eugenics to the British public**

##### **4.1. The inner circle: *The Eugenics Review***

The category named 'What is Eugenics' encompasses articles which explain eugenics or concern eugenic policies. These articles give insight into how the Society portrayed their view of eugenics to the *Review* readers and how they approached the issue of implementing eugenic policies. From 1909-1912, 13% of the *Review's* articles belong to this category, making it the third largest. These articles appeared frequently, with one such article in most issues. As the Society was the first organisation dedicated to the science and *practice* of eugenics, it was crucial that the *Review* presented what eugenics, as the Society saw it, was. Between 1937 and 1942, only 5% of the *Review's* content is based on this category, making it one of the smallest categories of the second period. This equates to just three articles, and one poem. The articles are 'Eugenic Problems Needing Research' by General Secretary C.P.Blacker, 'Positive Eugenics Policy' by Charles Galton Darwin, grandson of Charles Darwin and godson of Francis Galton, and the Presidential Address from the Galton Luncheon of 1940.

Several themes reoccur throughout these articles. All of the articles from 1909-1912 which mentioned the science of eugenics presented it as in need of further research so that eugenists would be in a suitable position to put eugenic practices in place.<sup>32</sup> A couple

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<sup>31</sup> Anonymous, 1938, p.163.

<sup>32</sup> The articles referred to here are: Crackanthorpe, 1909; Tocher, 1910; Tedgold, 1911; L.Darwin, 1912.

referred to difficulties in constructing long-term eugenic policies as these advances in science would greatly change the strategies they implemented.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, eugenic policies were presented as needing to be progressive and capable of change and refinement. These difficulties may explain why there does not appear to be a policy in place during these early years of the Society. Similarly, two of the articles between 1937 and 1942 presented the science of eugenics as in need of further research so eugenic policies could be established.<sup>34</sup> Darwin's article, contrarily, argued that eugenists could not wait for these advances in science and that there was always the possibility that they would be incorrect anyway.<sup>35</sup> Blacker's article mirrored some from the first period, stating that an extended eugenics policy could not be made as the science was always advancing.<sup>36</sup>

From 1907-1912, eugenics was presented in three of the articles as something which the public needed some basic understanding of. The public needed to be educated in the basic science of heredity and the young needed to be taught about the importance of responsible marriage.<sup>37</sup> Alongside further education, a couple of the articles emphasised the need for any eugenic policies to be accepted by society, as without their support eugenic policies would not succeed.<sup>38</sup> In order to encourage public acceptance and support, eugenics is presented as a moral or national responsibility. 'The Eugenic Field' by Crackanthorpe featured in the first issue of the *Review* and argued that the Society was an "essentially moral agency".<sup>39</sup> Crackanthorpe called charges of being materialistic "absurd" and presented a string of rhetorical questions to show it to be otherwise, such as "Is it materialistic to impress on all classes the duties, the privileges, and the responsibilities of parenthood?".<sup>40</sup> Here, Crankanthorpe emphasised the Society's key notion of responsibility, as will also be seen in their leaflets. Similarly to the first period, Darwin argued in 1939 that a feeling of eugenic duty among the public must precede eugenic legislation.<sup>41</sup> This was echoed further in the discussion following Lord Horder's Presidential Address, in which the importance of citizens accepting their race responsibility was stressed.<sup>42</sup> This emphasis on public acceptance, as mentioned previously, highlights why it is so useful to consider how the Society presented eugenics to the public.

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<sup>33</sup> Mügge, 1909; Schiller, 1910.

<sup>34</sup> Blacker, 1939; Anon, 1940.

<sup>35</sup> C.G. Darwin, 1939, p.16.

<sup>36</sup> Blacker, 1939, p.181.

<sup>37</sup> Anon, 1911; L. Darwin, 1912; Mügge, 1909.

<sup>38</sup> Mügge, 1909; Schiller, 1910; L. Darwin, 1912.

<sup>39</sup> Crackanthorpe, 1909, p.24.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> C.G. Darwin, 1939, p.22.

<sup>42</sup> Anon, 1940. pp.7-8.



Both periods considered who should be classed as eugenically desirable and encouraged to have large families. Two articles in the first period accepted the difficulty in determining which traits should be aimed at as decisions could become subjective. In 'Eugenic Qualities of Primary Importance', Galton addressed this by suggesting the qualities that distinguish prosperous communities were the ones that should be sought after, such as "taking pleasure in their work, by their doing it thoroughly, and by an honest pride in their community as a whole".<sup>43</sup> By the second period, it is still seen as a difficult question, with Charles Galton Darwin admitting that everyone will have differing opinions about what counts as a good quality. He asserted that one of the easiest ways to determine someone of civic worth is through their wealth as someone more desirable in what they do will receive a larger salary than someone who is not as good at the same job.<sup>44</sup> It is often asserted by historians that the eugenics movement reflected professional middle class ideologies and that members of the middle class saw eugenics as providing a scientific basis for their social position. Pauline Mazumdar goes as far to claim that "every historian who has read the public statements of the British eugenicists has recognised that as a movement they spoke on behalf of the educated middle class".<sup>45</sup> Darwin's assertion supports such a claim as the professional middle class would have been those receiving a higher salary, and in turn were those who he considered eugenically desirable. For this claim to be made at a speech and in the *Review* suggests that amongst members, middle class preferences were well known. However, eugenics was not presented in that way throughout all of the Society's literature and was not always presented to its own members like that. Contrary to Darwin, during his 1940 Presidential Address, Lord Horder refuted the accusation from critics that eugenics makes class distinctions:

Well, I am quite as much interested in one class as another, as I believe we all are. What we want is the truth of the question. None of us, I take it, have any bias or prejudice against blue blood or red blood or pale green blood, but if a certain class, *qua* class, produces through heredity as distinct from environment, a better race, then we have got to accept that, be it the poor, the middle, or the upper class.<sup>46</sup>

Whether or not such a claim should be considered sincere is questionable. It had already been noted during the address that some members of the Press were present, and therefore there is little doubt that all addresses given during the luncheon had been planned with this

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<sup>43</sup> Galton, July 1909, p.75.

<sup>44</sup> C.G.Darwin, 1939, p.20.

<sup>45</sup> Mazumdar, 1992, p.8.

<sup>46</sup> Anon, 1940, p.6.

in mind. Therefore, the President may have used this opportunity to deny class prejudices in the hope that this would be fed back to the general public. However, this claim of being unconcerned by class may well have been sincere in the sense that they correlated the professional middle class with the eugenically fit, so could advocate breeding regardless of class as they were confident that this would still benefit their middle classes. Therefore, whilst on the surface this statement seems to refute the historian's claims, it may also support them. This example also highlights the importance of considering how the Society presented eugenics to the public. As seen, the Society may have had different internal views to those which they portrayed to the public.

Uniquely to the second period, Blacker and Darwin's articles presented eugenic success as partially dependent on control. Darwin pushed for the government to accept the importance of practicable methods of control, to which he seems to be referring to birth control and sterilization.<sup>47</sup> Blacker emphasised the role the Society had played in birth control research and that it was through birth control organisations that much of the success of the Society could be seen.<sup>48</sup> Talk of birth control shows the changes that had taken place since the first period, with the Society focusing on birth control as essential in the fight towards a eugenic nation, as will be seen further in Section 5.2.

The analysis of the *Review* has shown how the two periods were very similar in their presentation of eugenics as a science and social practice, which is surprising given that 30 years had passed and other changes had been taking place. Both periods presented eugenics as something which needed to be accepted by the public in order for eugenic policies to be implemented and effective. They thought this would be best achieved through better education and instilling a sense of eugenic duty. The science of eugenics was primarily presented as an area requiring further research in order to strengthen the base of eugenic principles. Both, surprisingly, presented eugenics in a way that suggests it was an idea that was still developing and that the Society was not sure how to best seek its aims. The move towards an association with the birth control movement was limited to the second period and will be explored further in Section 5.2.

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<sup>47</sup> Darwin, 1939, p.15.

<sup>48</sup> Blacker, 1937, pp.186-187.

#### **4.2 - Expanding the circle: leaflets**

*The Eugenics Review* primarily reached members of the Society, affiliated societies and scientists with an interest in the area. Therefore, the Society needed other methods to explain eugenics and eugenic policies to a wider audience. They did this through sending speakers to others societies, holding stalls at exhibitions such as the Ideal Home Exhibition and producing posters, as seen below.

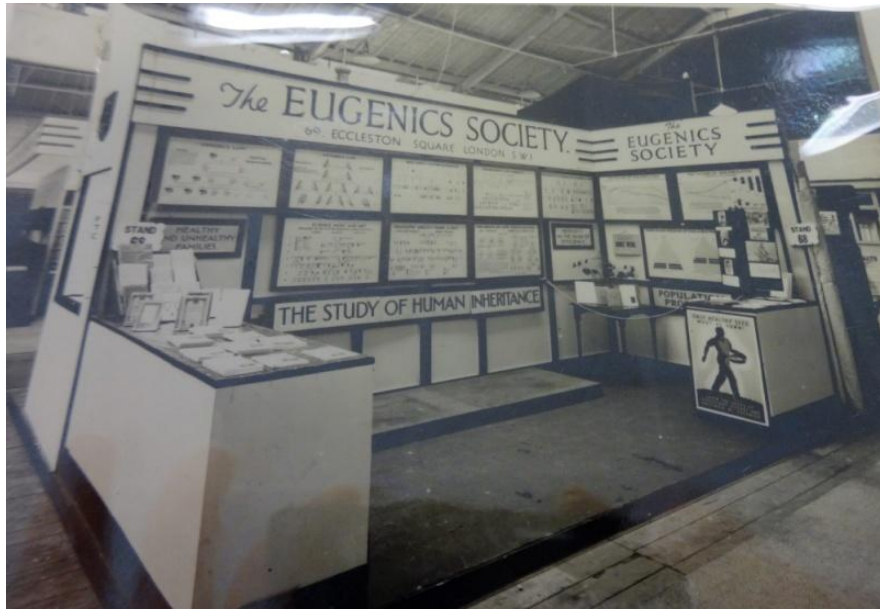


Image 3 - A postcard from the Society's archives of a Eugenics Society exhibition stall. The Society attended exhibitions such as the Ideal Home Exhibition, the Health and Housing Exhibition and the Health and Beauty Competition.



Image 4 - A poster by the Eugenics Society from their archives.

During the 1920s and 1930s in particular, the Society used leaflets to present eugenics to a far wider audience than *Review* readers. Given the Society's founding aims of engaging with the public, it is intriguing that it took around 20 years for the Society to publish for the general public. I suspect that it was primarily a financial matter, with the bequest in 1930 making the production of posters and leaflets possible. Most of the leaflets fall outside the two time periods under consideration; however a brief look at their content will help understanding of how the Society sought to present the science and practice of eugenics to the British public. The leaflets show the different audiences that the Society tried to engage with; some explicitly expressed middle class interests whilst others, appealing to a lower class of audience, presented the practice of eugenics as good for all. Eugenics was recurrently presented as beneficial for the development of the nation and as a duty that a good citizen would support.

The science of eugenics was presented in simple terms, accessible to an audience with little biological knowledge, with phrasing such as "heredity means continuity in life... the new individual grows from the same living substance as the parents, and life is handed on from one generation to the next" and "the transmission (passing on) of qualities or conditions of mind or of body from parent to offspring".<sup>49</sup> This second explanation comes from a draft for a leaflet entitled 'Boys and Girls Please Take One - Heredity', showing how the Society aimed to install a basic understanding in children so that the science and practice of eugenics could continue with the future generation.

Throughout the leaflets, eugenics was presented as a moral or national duty and as a practice that good citizens should follow. Frequent use of "you" and emotive language shows the Society aimed to be persuasive and make people feel obliged to follow eugenic practice, such as "If you are a good citizen you will want to prevent the waste and suffering caused by bringing into the world children doomed to misery because of that which they inherit".<sup>50</sup> Other leaflets included phrases like: "Being a good citizen means that we want Our Country to improve, and it can only grow better as its men and women are better" and "Philanthropy without Eugenics only multiplies misery in the future".<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> 'What is Heredity?', SA/EUG/J.17/18, Leaflets etc produced by Society, Miscellanea, Eugenics Society Collection, Wellcome Library, London, p.2.

'What is Eugenics (Boys and Girls please Take One and read what is Inside)', SA/EUG/J.17/19, p.3.

<sup>50</sup> 'What is Eugenics?', SA/EUG/J.17/21, p.3.

<sup>51</sup> First seen in 'What is Eugenics?', SA/EUG/J.17/21, p.3; second in 'Appeal to Stop Appeals', SA/EUG/J.17/11, p.3.

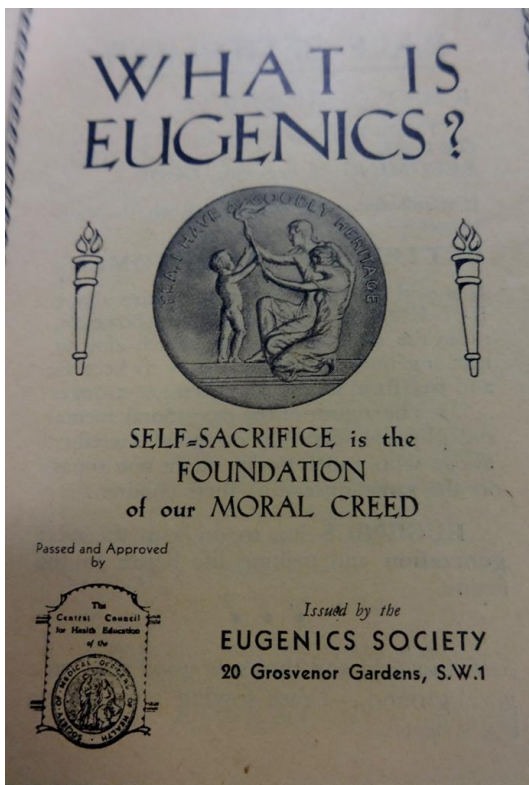


Image 5 - The front cover of a leaflet entitled 'What is Eugenics?' produced by the Eugenics Society c.1930.

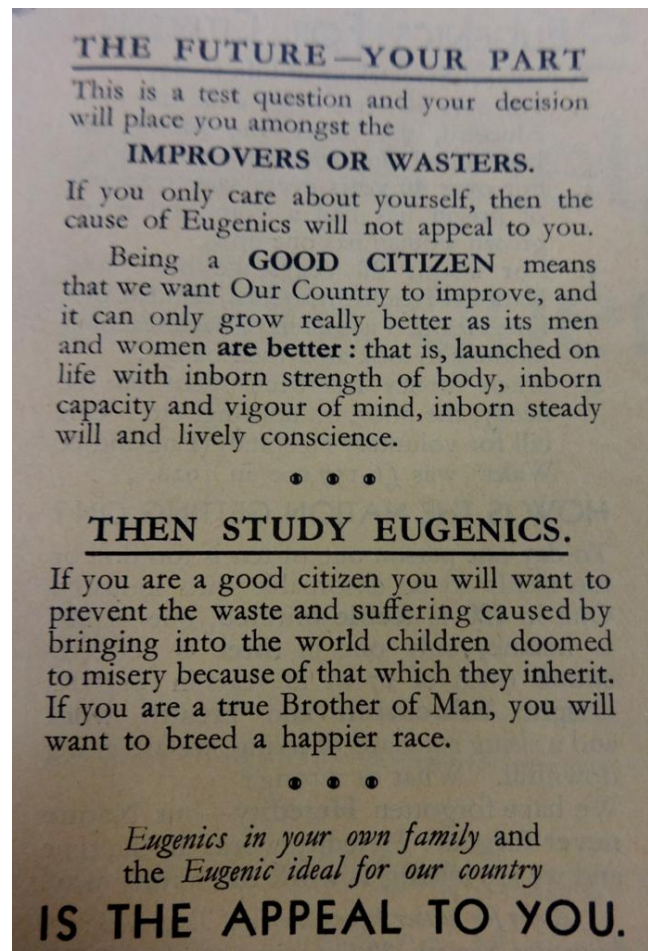


Image 6 - An inside page of the leaflet 'What is Eugenics?' shows how the Society enforced a sense of duty upon the reader.

A couple of leaflets stand out as being aimed towards a higher social class. An 'Appeal for Eugenics Taxation' from 1926 tried to gain support from the middle classes. It presented eugenics as a way to release the middle classes from the burden of tax caused by the great numbers of eugenically unfit. It stated that "national greatness has been built up on the solid virtue of the middle and lower-middle classes - thrift, independence and initiative, and a capacity for steady work" and that taxation upon these classes, in order to provide for the working and lower classes, was preventing them from having enough children to maintain their numbers.<sup>52</sup> This certainly supports the claim that eugenists were motivated by middle class ideologies.

<sup>52</sup> 'Appeal for Eugenic Taxation', SA/EUG/J.17/10, p.3.



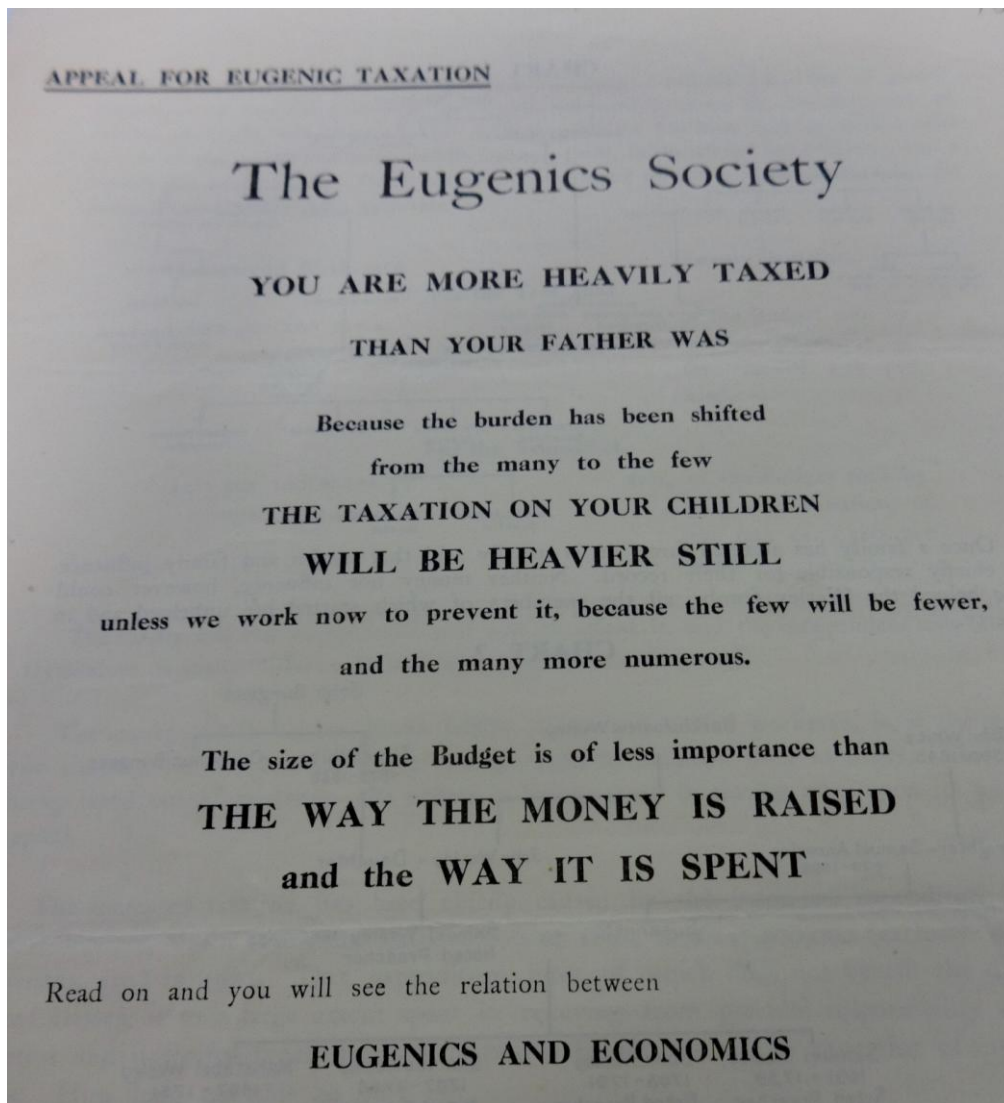


Image 7 – 'Appeal For Eugenic Taxation' leaflet. Produced 1926.

Another publication, 'Those Who Come After' was a short booklet, with lots of text and a few diagrams. It may have been the kind of material available at their middle class audience based exhibitions. It did not just present eugenics as promising a better life, as done in many of the leaflets. Instead, it asked for the reader to take an active interest in eugenics through going to Society meetings, listening to its lectures and reading its publications. Further to this, it asked for money in order to fund the "Educational Campaign upon which it must embark".<sup>53</sup> This strongly suggests that the Society was trying to gain more support from the professional middle classes as they would be the ones most able to understand the Society's works and be able to offer money. Despite almost certainly being aimed at the middle classes, it highlighted that:

<sup>53</sup> 'Those who come after: a word on racial responsibility', SA/EUG/J.17/2, p.2.

No class distinctions are implied. It is *not held* that the lower classes should be restrained from child-bearing and the middle and upper classes encouraged therein. Fit men and fit women are found in every class - so also are the unfit.<sup>54</sup>

This shows how the Society worked hard to present eugenics in a certain way, most of the time through presenting it as unmotivated by class ideologies. Although this leaflet explicitly denied class prejudices, its content suggests otherwise as they were trying to gain more middle class members and supporters. These few examples show how the question of how the Society presented eugenics is complex. Further, it has drawn attention to the fact that the aims, approaches and views within the Society may have differed significantly to how they portrayed themselves and eugenics to the public. This highlights the importance of studying the way they presented eugenics.

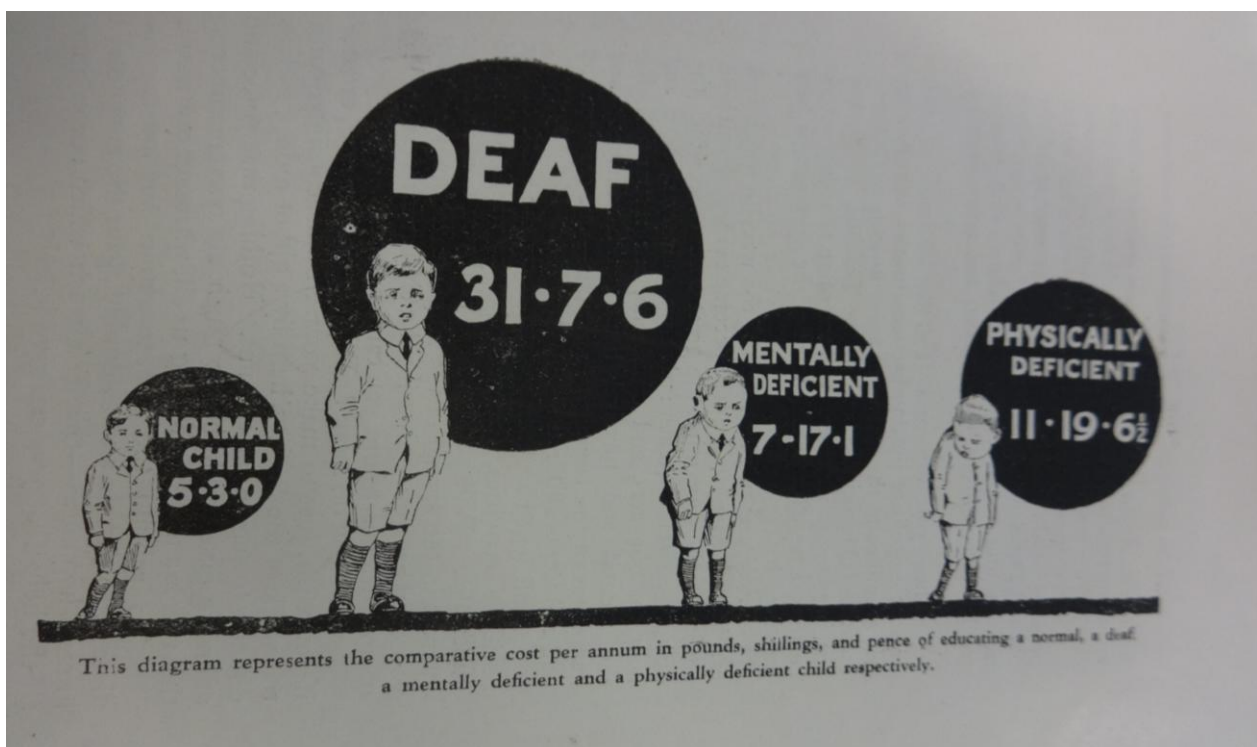


Image 8 – A diagram from 'Those Who Come After' leaflet. It shows the cost per annum in pounds, shillings and pence of educating a normal, a deaf, a mentally deficient and a physically deficient child.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.3.

#### **4.3. *Heredity in Man*: a film for all**

Further to leaflets, the Eugenics Society also produced a short film which was shown for free in local cinemas. The film *Heredity in Man* is a shorter version of *From Generation to Generation*. Both were released in 1937, showing how the Society was still trying to engage the public with eugenics and promote it. The film intended to present eugenics to an audience with no prior understanding and, as such, explained the science and practice of eugenics in simple terms, alongside case studies of families. The film showed a family of favourable heredity and a degenerate family. It then explained how a normal man from a mentally defective family and a normal woman had 17 children. Five of them died in infancy, three were too young for an opinion to be formed on their mental state, two were normal and seven were mental defects. The narrator, Julian Huxley, stated that once defective children are born, it is our responsibility to do the best we can for them which is done by putting them in specialist institutions. Despite trying to care for them once they are born, "it would have been better by far for them and the rest of the community if had they never been born".<sup>55</sup> Huxley went on to explain the rates at which traits get passed down to the next generation. In four generations, individuals below the average become more than five times as abundant as those above it. In order to maintain the race to a high standard, everybody sound in mind and body should marry and have enough children to perpetuate their stock and carry on the race. Along with educating on eugenics, the film also tried to gain support through presenting eugenics practice as a national duty. This is emphasised in the final line of the film in which Huxley thanked the parents of the degenerate family for their "public spirited cooperation".<sup>56</sup>

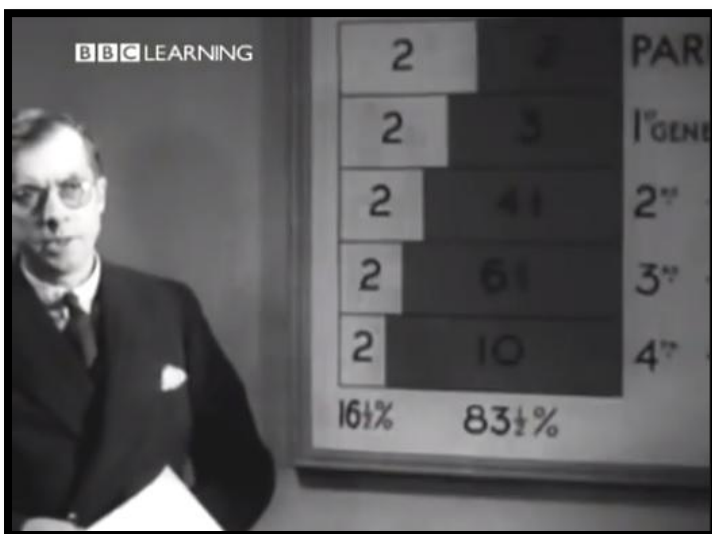


Image 9 - A still from *Heredity in Man*, presented by Julian Huxley. The chart shows the number of degenerate children that would be produced within four generations, if eugenic practice was not followed.

<sup>55</sup> *Heredity in Man*, 1937, SA/EUG/G.51, Propaganda and Publicity, Eugenics Society Collection, Wellcome Library, London.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.



The fact that the film was shown for free highlights the extent to which the Society wanted to reach as wide of an audience as possible. This shows that, 30 years down the line, the science and practice of eugenics still needed to be explained and promoted. Further, the Society undoubtedly used this opportunity to distance itself from the so-called eugenic actions of Nazi Germany. It presented eugenic practice as the best outcome for all and expressed sympathy towards those who were born with disabilities. This helped to distinguish their views from the German legislation which discriminated heavily against the disabled and outright favoured exclusive groups.

As has been seen, the leaflets and film produced by the Society during the 1930s were simple in nature, aiming to provide the middle and lower classes who had no prior knowledge with a basic understanding of eugenics. Eugenics was presented as a national duty in which good citizens should want to engage with. This was also the case in *Review* articles within the 'What is Eugenics' category. It has been shown that examining how the Society presented eugenics adds an important element to accounts of the history of the Society. Focusing on presentation has shown how internally the Society may have viewed eugenics very differently to the ways in which they presented themselves and eugenics to the public. A study of the Society's exhibition materials and posters would further contribute to this proposal.

## **5. The big change in eugenics**

### **5.1. Eugenics as a solution to social problems**

So far, this essay has focused on the content of the articles and the way in which the Society presented eugenics through public propaganda. This section will give a broader analysis, considering a major change in the way the Society presented itself and eugenics. The *Review* analysis has been most useful in identifying a transformation from a focus on social problems in the first period, to population investigations in the second period. Through examining each article in relation to the rest of the journal, instead of in isolation, this change was easy to identify.

As can be seen from the *Review* figures, the category of 'Social Problems and Solutions' makes up a large 28% of the content between 1909 and 1912. This is followed by 23% in 'Science of Eugenics', with the rest significantly lower. Being the biggest category reflects how social problems were of great importance within society at the time and that the

eugenists wanted to focus on this. This large figure drops substantially to less than half, just 11%, between 1937 and 1942. This is still the third largest category in this period; however, it is a very considerable decrease, showing a change in attitudes towards social problems and therefore less of a need to present eugenics as a solution.

Considering the articles in this category, there is an interesting difference in those that appear between 1909-1912 and 1937-1942. Within the first period, the articles really reflected the focus on social problems that was prominent at the time. This can be seen in the below table.<sup>57</sup>

<b><u>Topic addressed</u></b>	<b><u>Number of articles</u></b>	<b><u>Author and date of the articles</u></b>
The Poor Law	5	Brabrook, April 1909 Anon, Nov 1910 (a) Lidbetter, Nov 1910 Loch, Nov 1910 Webb, Nov 1910
Feeble-mindedness	4	Kirby, July 1909 Tredgold, July 1909 Anon, Nov 1910 (b) Anon, Jan 1912
Poverty	3	Brabrook, Jan 1910 Anon, Nov 1910 (c) Whetham, July 1911
Crime	2	Sullivan, July 1909 St.John, July 1911
Sterilization	1	Ellis, Oct 1909
Racial Poisons	3	Lane, Jan 1910 Saleeby, April 1910 Oliver, July 1911
Other	3	Leslie, Jan 1911 Ewart, July 1911 Greenwood, Oct 1912

**Figure 5 - A table showing 'Social Problems and Solutions' articles from 1909-1912 as categorised further by specific topic.**

<sup>57</sup> Figures 5-9 show the number of articles which address a certain topic. Unlike Figures 1-3, each article has been counted as 1, even if it shares its topic with another category.

The second period was somewhat different; only three articles concerned topics also covered in the first period. A large five concerned the newly addressed topic of welfare problems, such as family allowances, housing and developments in mental welfare work.

<u>Topic addressed</u>	<u>Number of articles</u>	<u>Author and date of articles</u>
Poverty	1	Titmuss and Lafitte, Jan 1942
Crime	2	Anon, April 1941 Anon, July 1942
Sterilization	1	von Hofsten, Jan 1938
Welfare	5	Fox, Oct 1938 Lafitte, Jan 1939, Moshinsky, Oct 1939 Spring Rice, July 1940 Lafitte, Oct 1941
Other	2	Cattell, Oct 1937 Neustatter, July 1942

**Figure 6 - A table showing 'Social Problems and Solutions' articles from 1937-1942 as categorised further by specific topic.**

As has been seen, concerns about the health of the nation were prevalent at the beginning of the 20th Century. Levels of poverty were worse than thought, Britain was being threatened economically and there was a decline in birth rate among the eugenically desirable. A Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-minded was set up in 1904 and reported in 1908 that approximately 0.46% of the British population were mentally defective. This rose to 0.83% when certified lunatics were added to the estimate.<sup>58</sup> Also in 1904, an Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration was established within the Home Office and Local Government Board to enquire into signs of physical deterioration. They concluded that physical defect was a result of nurture, not nature, and that this is what reforms needed to focus on in order to see a change.<sup>59</sup> While such reports drew further attention towards the problem of national deterioration, these results were not what the eugenists wanted, as they dismissed their claims of the significance of heredity. Many eugenists did accept the importance of improving conditions to give everyone the best chance at life; however they wanted further reform than this. They wanted the full

<sup>58</sup> Anon, 1908, p.415.

<sup>59</sup> Hennock, 1994, p.80.

significance of heredity to be understood and for eugenic practice to be seen as the best solution to these problems. Therefore, the eugenicists had to argue against these reports through promoting eugenics as the true solution. Given this, it is unsurprising that the *Review* contained such a large number of articles about social problems in which eugenics was presented as a solution.

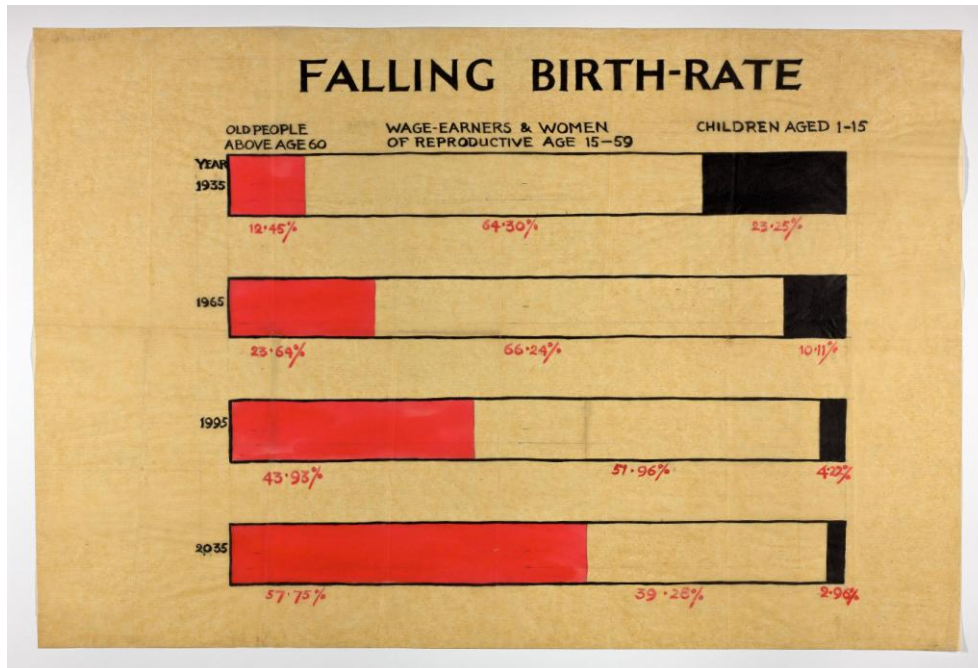


Image 10 - A poster from the Eugenics Society's archives. It shows the predicted decrease in the birth-rate.

A major area of contention at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was in regards to the Poor Law. The 'new' Poor Law had been in operation since 1834 as a poverty relief system and was greatly responsible for the large amount of workhouses seen throughout Britain. By the beginning of the 1900s, it was seen as insufficient and unsuccessful at dealing with those faced with poverty. In 1905 a Royal Commission on the Poor Law and Relief of Distress was formed by the government to investigate the Poor Law. The Commission was made up of a variety of people, such as Poor Law Guardians, members of the Charity Organisation Society, members of Local Government Boards, religious and trade union leaders and social researchers. The Poor Law was widely considered to be ineffective and the Commission showed this to be the case, urging that increased expenditure on education and public health had little effect as rates of pauperism had recently increased.<sup>60</sup> Two reports were finally produced in 1909. The Majority Report, led by Helen Bosanquet of the Charity Organisation Society, was primarily focused on the reform of administration of the Poor Law

<sup>60</sup> Brabrook, 1909, p.47.

act so that it was only available to those who really required it. The Minority Report, on the other hand, led by Fabian socialist Beatrice Webb, suggested a reorganisation of society on a state-supported basis.<sup>61</sup> Due to its lack of conclusion, the government ignored any suggestions and the Poor Law remained unreformed.<sup>62</sup>

The attempt to reform the Poor Law was of great importance to eugenists as it was crucial that the outstanding system was replaced by one which was eugenic. The present Poor Law was in complete opposition to eugenic principles as it provided the unfit with more reason to have more children, such as using the workhouses as free maternal care, and discouraged the eugenically desirable from having more children. While the Eugenics Education Society was not directly involved in the reports, many members were also members of other socially-concerned groups and this strengthened their recognition of the importance for new legislation that was eugenically beneficial. Three of the articles within the category of 'Social Problems and Solutions' from 1909-1912 concerned the Poor Law Commission in relation to eugenics. The first issue of the *Review* contained an article by Sir Edward Brabrook called the 'Poor Law Commission Report'. The November 1910 issue contained six articles on social problems, including two on the Commission; 'The Majority Report' by C.S. Loch and 'The Minority Report' by Sidney Webb. These three articles considered the Poor Law Commission Report in relation to eugenics and whether their suggestions were eugenic in nature.

Loch argued that the reports were little concerned directly with eugenics and that while they may develop to be eugenic doctrines, they were not intended to be that way. For example, the Majority Report said that adults who abused the state's support for their own purposes and pleasures should be detained. While this would have meant segregation of the unfit for a short period, eugenists wanted to see them segregated in the long term.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, eugenic consideration was presented as an aspect lacking from the foundation of the newly proposed system. Brabrook, on the other hand, argued that some of the Commission's recommendations were distinctly eugenic and would be a step in the right direction for eugenists.<sup>64</sup> He argued that the Majority Report focused on preventing the causes of pauperism from occurring through demanding greater powers of detention. He proposed that preventing the problem from originating was "true eugenic doctrine".<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Loch, 1910, p.229.

<sup>62</sup> Dauntton, 2007, p.185.

<sup>63</sup> Loch, 1910, p.231.

<sup>64</sup> Brabrook, 1909, p.47.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.50.

All three articles argued that eugenically fit babies would not be able to remain fit and would become dependent on the state if they were born into a bad environment. This was particularly argued by Sidney Webb, husband of Minority Report leader Beatrice Webb. He argued, based on the Minority Report, that eugenists needed to change this environment. He also stated that the best solution to practical eugenics would be for well-born children to be a valuable economic asset, encouraging the desirable to have more children. He urged that legislation should at least ensure that well-born children would not be a burden to their parents.<sup>66</sup> Webb insisted that the Minority Report was compatible with eugenics and, further, that it was drafted under eugenic considerations and on strictly eugenic lines. He even claimed that it could be considered an outcome of the educational work of the Society.<sup>67</sup>

Although the reports of the commission were not listened to and the Poor Law remained in place, other changes in legislation occurred. In 1906 and 1907, Education Acts which covered the provision of school meals and school health checks were introduced, along with the 1908 Old Age Pensions Act.<sup>68</sup> This period also covers the introduction of the National Insurance Act of 1911 which required contributions from employees, employers and the state.<sup>69</sup> 1912 saw the introduction of the Feeble-Minded Control Bill which rejected sterilization but allowed for registration and segregation; a step which eugenists could be pleased with. This bill went on to become the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913, which only three MPs voted against. This was largely a result of the work of the Eugenics Education Society and only came to be repealed in 1959 by the Mental Health Act.

With these changes in legislation, social problems became a less frequent topic in the *Review*. Other articles during the first period concerned feeble-mindedness, crime and poverty in relation to eugenics, however by the second period they were related also to family life, such as allowances and housing. While there were still many social problems during the late 1930s, the Eugenic Society's approach changed a lot. The Society no longer presented eugenics as a solution to certain social problems, such as feeble-mindedness and crime. Rather, during the 1930s, they pushed for the development and eugenic use of contraceptives. Instead of implementing institutions to segregate the unfit, birth control would prevent them from breeding. Further, there was a big move towards concerns over population trends and policies, rather than the state of the population itself. Although these two areas are clearly interlinked, they have been treated as separate categories in the *Review* analysis. The category 'Population and Economics' primarily concerns population

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<sup>66</sup> Webb, 1910, p.238.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.240.

<sup>68</sup> Hennock, 1994, pp.81-82.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.86.

trends, policies and their economic effects, whereas the 'Family Life' category considers areas such as fertility, birth control and marriage. These categories will now be considered.

## **5.2. A move towards birth control**

As seen in Figures 1-4, articles in the 'Family Life' category rise from 12% between 1909-1912, to 17% in 1937-1942. While this is not a major change in itself, it is emphasised when a further break down of the category is considered. Despite falling under the same category, there is a clear change in the areas these articles are concerned with. During the first periods there was an apparent focus on marriage selection and regulation, how to prepare for parenthood and the effects of parenthood on children, as seen in Figure 7.

<b><u>Topic addressed</u></b>	<b><u>Number of articles</u></b>	<b><u>Author and date of the articles</u></b>
Parenthood	4	Saleeby, 1909 Russell, 1909 Scharlieb, 1909 Ewart, 1911
Marriage	4	Slaughter, 1909 Crane, 1910 Field, 1912 Tredgold, 1912
Infant Mortality	1	Greenwood, 1912
Womanhood	1	Ravenhill, 1910

**Figure 7 - A table showing 'Family Life' articles from 1909-1912 as categorised further by specific topic.**

The second period, 1937-1942, saw the subject matter of these articles extended, as seen in Figure 8.

<u>Topic addressed</u>	<u>Number of articles</u>	<u>Author and date of the articles</u>
Marriage	2	Somersan, 1938 Pear, 1939
Mortality	1	Titmuss, Oct 1942
Fertility	4	Glass, July 1938 (a) Ghosh and Varma, 1939 Anon, July 1939 (a) K. T. Lim, 1939
Family Size	2	Leybourne, Oct 1938 Roberts, 1939
Abortion	3	Anon, April 1938 Anon, July 1939 (b) Thurtle, 1940
Welfare Problems	2	Lafitte, 1939 Blacker, 1939
Birth Control	4	Baker, 1937 Stone, 1937 Baker, Ranson and Tynen, Jan 1939 Baker, Ranson and Tynen, April 1939

Figure 8 - A table showing 'Family Life' articles from 1937-1942 as categorised further by specific topic.

The joint largest topic in the second period was birth control. This was very much a developing area during the 1930s and the Eugenics Society came to work closely with birth control organisations, along with funding much research.

*The Eugenics Review* first published on contraceptive methods in 1933, and again in 1935. 1937-1942 saw three articles published by birth control researcher John. R. Baker on the development of contraception, two of which explained the new Volpar contraceptive. The papers outlined the work taking place at the Sir William Dunn School of Pathology at Oxford, including explanations of the terms used, the importance of uncomplicated birth control and the tests they carried out. Baker emphasised the eugenic aims of birth control and the importance of simple-to-use contraceptives in the fight against the unfit out-breeding the eugenically desirable:



the existence of complicated methods of contraception will not prevent the innately careless and foolish women from having many children, while the innately careful and far-seeing ones produce fewer offspring. This will have a dysgenic effect, and thus the discovery of a really simple but effective method is of eugenic importance.<sup>70</sup>

The birth control movement started near the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century independently of eugenics and developed greatly in the 1920s and 1930s. Dr Marie Stopes was the driving force behind the British movement, opening the first permanent birth control clinic in Britain in 1921 in London with the Malthusian League, as well as the Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress.<sup>71</sup> In 1930 the National Birth Control Council was formed and the government allowed welfare centres to disseminate information about contraceptives.<sup>72</sup>



**Image 11 - Carlos P. Blacker, General Secretary of the Eugenics Society from 1930-1952.**  
Taken from the Wellcome library website.



**Image 12 - Dr Marie Stopes, pioneer of the British birth control movement.**  
Taken from Marie Stopes International website.

The birth control movement and eugenics movement started and developed in very different ways. Into the 1930s, however, the two became far more entwined as the Eugenics Society headed in a new direction. The addition of birth control related articles in the *Review* reflected the changing approach of the Eugenics Society in relation to the birth control movement. Leonard Darwin, President from 1911-1928, did not want to advocate birth control as he worried it would have dysgenic effects through allowing the eugenically fit to

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<sup>70</sup> Baker, 1937, p.110.

<sup>71</sup> Blacker, 1956, p.226.

<sup>72</sup> Soloway, 1990, p.193.

limit their breeding. However, he was forced to accept a compromise as reform eugenics began to appear, with particular pressure from General Secretary C.P.Blacker. Reform eugenists supported the birth control movement and considered birth control to be the best way to deal with the eugenic problems of society.<sup>73</sup> From 1923-1926 the Eugenics Society formed a relationship with the voluntary birth control clinic and appointed a sub-committee to study contraceptive practices among the working class in London. In 1927, the council provided £200 in order to establish the Birth Control Investigation Committee.<sup>74</sup> The Society even gave funding to the laboratory research done by Baker that led to the development of Volpar.<sup>75</sup> By 1935, around 10% of the Society's annual expenditure was on birth control related research and propaganda. Further, space in the *Review* was offered to the National Birth Control Association by its editor free of charge to help with their costs.<sup>76</sup> In 1935 there were even discussions of changing the Society's name to 'The Institute of Family Relations', though this did not go ahead.<sup>77</sup> Further, in 1936 Blacker entered into discussion with Margaret Pyke about a merging of the Eugenics Society and the National Birth Control Association to create a more positive family-orientated institution, however such unification never occurred.<sup>78</sup>

The move to associate eugenics with family planning was a conscious attempt to improve the way eugenics was perceived. The Eugenics Society fought to distinguish itself from Nazi actions which were being justified on eugenic grounds, in particular the legalisation of compulsory sterilization. The Eugenics Society had been lobbying for the legalisation of voluntary sterilization into the early 1930s. Their campaigns led to a government enquiry, headed by Laurence G. Brock, into sterilization which gave a mixed report in 1934. The report endorsed voluntary sterilization for indisputably hereditary disorders, however it opposed sterilization based on immorality or character defect, stating that there was no scientific justification for such cases.<sup>79</sup> This was the closest the Society got to the legalisation of voluntary sterilization. As news spread of the draft sterilization bill in Germany, which endorsed cases of compulsory sterilization, sterilization received negative attention, with worries that legalising voluntary sterilization may lead to extreme compulsory cases.

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<sup>73</sup> Soloway, c.1998, p.54.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp.61-63.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.70.

<sup>76</sup> Soloway, 1990, pp.208-209.

<sup>77</sup> Soloway, c.1998, p.72.

<sup>78</sup> Soloway, 1990, p.209.

<sup>79</sup> Soloway, 1990, p.203.



Image 13 - A German poster promoting eugenics, c.1937. "60,000 Reichsmark is the lifetime cost of this hereditarily diseased man to the community. Fellow German, that is your money, too." Copyright: Deutsches Historisches Museum

The Eugenics Society was aware of the growing stigma surrounding eugenics and quickly tried to prevent damage. Blacker wrote to *The Lancet* in June 1933 to distinguish the German legislation from the aims of the Society. He advocated the Society's view that as long as "sterilization is strictly maintained on a voluntary basis, there is no harm in its being applied" to the socially burdensome and in order to prevent the transmission of hereditary defects.<sup>80</sup> In regards to the German legislation, he criticised compulsory sterilization and condemned Hitler's persecution of the Jewish. He stated that:

In the interests of elementary justice it is to be sincerely hoped that in Germany sexual sterilisation will not be applied in a spirit of racial animosity; but if it is so utilised, may the motive not be misconstrued as either eugenic or economic in the senses advocated in the German draft Bill.<sup>81</sup>

Despite attempts like this to differentiate British eugenics from the wrongly-termed 'eugenic' legislation in Germany, the Society suffered greatly from these connotations. Reflecting on the effects of Germany's compulsory sterilization laws in 1956, Blacker admitted that efforts "to get a voluntary measure legalised in Britain were much hampered by what was going on

<sup>80</sup> Blacker, 1933, p.1265.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.1266.

in Germany", with opponents claiming voluntary sterilization to be "the thin end of the wedge".<sup>82</sup>

In an attempt for British eugenics to continue through this difficult time, Blacker associated the Society with better received organisations. In a change from the first period in which the Society presented eugenics as a independent movement, during the second period the Society presented itself and eugenics in association with the family planning movement.

### **5.3. Focusing on population problems**

The biggest change in content of *The Eugenics Review* is the huge difference in the 'Population and Economics' category which rises from a small 5% of articles in 1909-1912 to the considerable 27% in 1937-1942. This shows a major change in the proceedings of the Society and the way in which the Society wanted to present itself and eugenics.

The topics covered within 'Population and Economics' articles differ greatly from the first period to the second. 1907-1912 featured just five articles within this category; one about eugenics and economics and four concerning certain population types, such as Jewish heredity and the eugenics of migrants.<sup>83</sup> In the run up to the second period under consideration, articles on population appeared sporadically, right up until 1934 when they started to feature with nearly an average of one per volume. By 1937, population-concerned articles were a regular appearance and a main feature of the *Review*, reflecting the level of the Eugenics Society's involvement with the British Population Society. 1937-1942, therefore, follows the beginning years of this change in the Society's focus.

The topics addressed between 1937 and 1942 were much expanded compared to the first period, as can be seen in Figure 9.

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<sup>82</sup> Blacker, 1956, p.229.

<sup>83</sup> The articles referred to here are: Hamilton, 1912; Salaman, 1911; Woodruff, 1911. The other two articles in the category are Crawley, 1910 and Kohlbrugge, 1911.

<b><u>Topic addressed</u></b>	<b><u>Number of articles</u></b>	<b><u>Author and date of articles</u></b>
Economic consequences of changing population	4	Keynes, April 1937 Leybourne, April 1938 Lafitte, Jan 1941 Cadbury, April 1942
Economic status and fertility	2	Glass, July 1938 (a) Anon, July 1939 (a)
Works and reports of Population Investigation Committee and Populations Policies Committee	3	Anon, Jan 1938 (b) Anon, Jan 1939 Lafitte, April 1939
Population problems and policies in other countries	4	Still, Jan 1937 McClearly, April 1938 Glass, July 1938 (b) Glass, Oct 1938
Studies of mixed races	3	Trevor, April 1938 Little, Jan 1941 Little, Jan 1942
Migration	1	Walshaw, April 1939
War and birth rate	2	Titmuss, April 1941 Titmuss, Jan 1942
Population problems, policies and trends within the UK.	6	Bramwell, Jan 1937 Glass, April 1937 Kuczynski, July 1937 Anon, Jan 1938 (a) Carr-Saunders, July 1939 Lafitte, April 1941
Other	3	Tietze, July 1938 Blacker, July 1939 Lim, Oct 1939

**Figure 9 - A table showing 'Population and Economics' articles from 1937-1942 as categorised further by specific topic.**

This major change within the population and economics content of the *Review* reflected the Society's involvement with population studies. The second period follows the development of international interest in population trends, including the falling birth rate in Britain and the formation of population policies. The first World Population Conference was held in 1927 in Geneva and was attended by delegates from all around the world, including around thirty British participants. In response, a permanent international organisation devoted to the scientific study of population was established the following year; the International Populations Union. Three research commissions were established within the Union; population and food supply; differential fertility, fecundity and sterility; and vital statistics of primitive races.<sup>84</sup> The British component was established later in the same year and many founding members were also members of the Eugenics Society. Population problems were clearly of huge importance to eugenists, who were ultimately aiming to improve the state of the population. It is unsurprising that *The Eugenics Review* contained such a large volume of papers concerning population given that there was great overlap between members of the British Population Society and the Eugenics Society.<sup>85</sup> A Population Investigation Committee was founded just before the beginning of the second period, in 1936, by the Eugenics Society, although it was always intended to be an independent organisation. This new committee was founded for the purpose of research with the aim "to examine the trends of population in Great Britain and the Colonies and to investigate the causes of these trends, with special reference to the falling of birth rate" and a separate Populations Policies Committee was established in 1938 to deal with the formulation of policies.<sup>86</sup>

This huge emphasis on population investigations is the major transformation between the content of the articles in *The Eugenics Review* between 1909-1912 and 1937-1942. In turn, it signifies a shift in the way in which eugenics was presented. From the second period onwards, eugenics was presented as concerned by scientific studies of the population, ranging from birth rates to food supply. Eugenics was no longer presented as a solution to social problems such as crime, feeble-mindedness and poverty as it was in the first period. Rather, it was shown to be concerned with understanding the cause of problems that affect populations and in formulating policies to deal with this. This was a result of a world-wide acknowledgement for population studies and also, as with family planning associations, an attempt for the Society to distance itself from the so-called eugenic policies being implemented in Germany.

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<sup>84</sup> Langford, c.1998, pp.83-85.

<sup>85</sup> Langford, c.1998, p.89-96.

<sup>86</sup> Anon, 1938, p.239.

## **6. Conclusion**

Despite attempts to protect the reputation of eugenics and the Society, the negative attention eugenics had been receiving did cause serious damage. After the Second World War, it was an up-hill struggle for eugenists to convince the British public that their proposals were not like Hitler's discriminatory legislations. The Society managed to continue post-war and published *The Eugenics Review* until 1968. In 1989 the Society was renamed the Galton Institute, signifying a change in the Society's aims. To the present day, the Galton Institute supports and promotes the scientific study of human heredity and understanding of ethical and social implications of human genetics.<sup>87</sup>

This essay has compared the ways in which eugenics was presented to the British public between 1907-1912 and 1937-1942, primarily through an original analysis of the articles published in *The Eugenics Review*. The categorisation of each article by topic has been invaluable in identifying similarities and differences between the presentation of eugenics in the two periods. As previously suggested, analysing more archival material using the same categories would further this study through showing how the Society presented various aspects of eugenics through different mediums.

A crucial aspect of the Society was promoting eugenics in order to gain public support so that their aim of a eugenic nation could be fulfilled. Therefore, examining how the Society presented eugenics to the public is very important. As seen, the way the Society viewed eugenics may have differed significantly from how they portrayed it to others, as in the case of claims of middle class motivations. Therefore, it is necessary to consider both the Society's internal views and their external presentation to see the extent to which the Society chose to create a certain presentation of itself and eugenics.

The result of the comparison has been enlightening. As seen in Section 4, both periods presented eugenics as an area requiring public acceptance for it to be successful. Both thought that this would be achieved best through further education and instilling a sense of national and moral duty. This sense of responsibility is also seen in the Society's leaflets and film, *Heredity in Man*. These archival materials showed how eugenic ideas were presented to a wide range of people; from the middle classes who were encouraged to join the Society to the uneducated lower-classes who could access the free film.

The major difference between the two periods was the transformation from presenting eugenics as an independent area of study and practice in the first period, to presenting it alongside the birth control movement in the second. Further, during the first period eugenics

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<sup>87</sup> Galton Institute, *Galton Institute: About page* [online].

was presented as a solution to the social problems of the time. This was no longer the case by the second period, in which the content of the *Review* became heavily focused on population investigations. These changes were partially a result of the Society's attempt to distance itself from the prevailing Nazi regimes which claimed eugenic grounds for their discriminatory policies. Through presenting itself and eugenics in this new way, the Society was able to continue during and after these difficult times. 1937-1942, then, should be considered a crucial period for the Society as its actions during this time shaped its future. The Society continued throughout the war to focus on birth control as the best method of eugenic practice. To this day, the Galton Institute has a Birth Control Trust which supports practical initiatives in birth control, particularly in developing countries.<sup>88</sup> This emphasises how crucial the association with family planning was, as it is an aspect of the Society that has continued to the present day.

This analysis has presented some interesting results and has highlighted areas for further research, such as examining more of the Society's archives. Further, it would be beneficial to examine the period of 1913-1936 as the developments during this time led to the changes seen between 1907-1912 and 1937-1942. Once this extended foundation is in place, the picture can be broadened through an examination of how other groups within Britain presented eugenics, including those who opposed it. Focusing on Britain, however, is just a starting point. Similar research into the ways eugenics was presented by organisations in other countries and the influences they had on each other, from the US across to Japan, will further our understanding of the history of eugenics.

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<sup>88</sup> Galton Institute, *Galton Institute: About page* [online].



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