

Dysgenics: Genetic Deterioration in Modern Populations

by Richard Lynn - Praeger, 1996 237pp., \$59.95 1-800-225-5800 (for 20% off mention F238) reviewed by Marian Van Court

[A somewhat abbreviated version of this review appeared in the *Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies*, Volume 23, Number 2, Summer 1998. MVC]

Countless volumes have been written about the past evolution of the human species, yet hardly any attention has been paid to the crucial question, "Where are we evolving *now*?" Richard Lynn, of the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland, courageously addresses this question in his controversial book **Dysgenics: Genetic Deterioration in Modern Populations**. Professor Lynn presents compelling evidence that much of the world is deteriorating in its genetic potential for intelligence, health, and conscientiousness (or good character). The word for this is "dysgenics," the opposite of "eugenics."

The Bell Curve devoted one chapter to the question of where we are evolving with regard to IQ (Herrnstein and Murray, 1994). **Dysgenics** picks up where **The Bell Curve** left off. Professor Lynn surveys studies from all over the world, and everywhere finds the least intelligent people having the most children. The only exception is sub-Saharan Africa where contraception is rarely used. Our genetic potential for intelligence has been declining in Europe and North America since the mid- 1800s, with a total loss of about 5-8 IQ points. Currently, we are losing almost one IQ point each generation.

The decline in genotypic intelligence coincided with the dissemination of information about contraception. For several centuries prior to 1800, married couples had natural fertility, essentially uninfluenced by efforts to limit it. During this period, there was a strong taboo against sex outside of marriage, and many people never had children because they were too poor to marry. Illegitimacy was rare. Infant mortality was high, especially among the lower classes. Harsh though it may have been, natural selection operated to maintain a healthy population, and to keep intelligence gradually increasing.

Then in the early 1800s, several books on contraception were published. These ideas naturally affected the reading classes disproportionately. Goodyear perfected the vulcanization of rubber, making it an ideal material for the mass production of condoms and diaphragms. By the middle of the century, it was becoming apparent that educated people were having fewer children than the uneducated. Charles Darwin worried about the fact that "the scum" of society were so prolific, and expressed deep concern about

the future of civilization because natural selection had ceased to operate. Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, coined the term "eugenics," and was its main proponent:

The chief result of these Inquiries has been to elicit the religious significance of the doctrine of evolution. It suggests an alteration in our mental attitude, and imposes a new moral duty. The new mental attitude is one of a greater sense of moral freedom, responsibility, and opportunity; the new duty . . . is an endeavour to further evolution, especially that of the human race.

Man is gifted with pity and other kindly feelings; he has also the power of preventing many kinds of suffering. I conceive it to fall well within his province to replace Natural Selection by other processes that are more merciful and not less effective. This is precisely the aim of eugenics. (Blacker, 1952).

In the early decades of the 1900s, eugenics societies were being formed in Great Britain and the United States, and eugenics was advocated by leading thinkers along all points of the political spectrum. H.G. Wells summed up its common-sense appeal: "It seemed to me that to discourage the multiplication of people below a certain standard, and to encourage the multiplication of exceptionally superior people, was the only real and permanent way of mending the ills of the world. I think that still." Julian Huxley described eugenics as "of all outlets for altruism, that which is most comprehensive, and of longest range" (Van Court, 1982).

Eugenics made sense because few doubted that heredity was important. Life was more closely tied to the land, and farmers knew from experience that plants and animals vary widely depending on their inborn qualities. Common sense dictated that human beings, like all the rest of nature, are strongly influenced by heredity. In addition, most people had larger families back then. If a couple had many children, all of whom turned out good except one, it was perfectly reasonable to think that what accounted for the difference was inborn, especially if there were signs from early childhood. Since all the children grew up in the same house, with the same parents, eating the same food, it was just a matter of common sense.

Common Sense Confirmed by Science

Professor Lynn's major thesis in **Dysgenics** is that scientific evidence has proven the eugenicists were absolutely right in their concerns about genetic deterioration, and that we, as a society, have made a serious mistake by discounting them. Twin studies and adoption studies have established beyond any doubt the important role of heredity in determining IQ. Identical twins separated at birth have quite similar IQ's. When adopted children grow up, they resemble their biological parents more closely than their adoptive parents in IQ. Just as the eugenicists assumed, social mobility over centuries has produced a social class gradient for intelligence, and social class is determined partly by innate intelligence. One U.S. study found that in families with 2 or more

brothers, the boys with higher IQ's tended to move up the SES ladder when they grew up, whereas those with lower IQ's tended to move down. Finally, the evidence shows we are deteriorating genetically because the most intelligent people are having the fewest children.

A number of recent studies point to contraceptive practices as the key to understanding dysgenics today. People with low IQ's, whether married or unmarried, are less likely to use any form of birth control. Among women using the same birth control methods, those with low IQ's have much higher failure rates. After an unwanted pregnancy has occurred, low IQ couples are less likely to obtain abortions. Thus each factor selects against intelligence. One minor contribution to dysgenics is the fact that high IQ women often end up not having as many children as they would have liked to have had. By the time a baby is "convenient," it may be too late. However, the major reason for the decline in our genetic potential for intelligence is greater birth control failure on the part of low IQ women. In the United States, women of all IQ levels report that they would like, on average, about 2.3 children. But low IQ women frequently have more children, often far more children, than they would ideally like to have. If all women had exactly the number of children they desired, there would be no dysgenics, and we would at least break even in our genetic potential for intelligence (Van Court, 1983).

The loss of a 5-8 IQ points may not be a tragedy for an individual, but when applied to a population, it has profound consequences. As readers of **The Bell Curve** may remember, small shifts in the average of a bell-shaped distribution produce large effects on the tails--in this case, the retarded and the gifted. For example, a decrease in the average IQ of just under 5 points doubles the number of retardates (IQ less than 70), and cuts in half the number of gifted (IQ over 130). Furthermore, Herrnstein and Murray found that when they moved the average IQ down statistically by just 3 points, from 100 to 97, all social problems were exacerbated: the number of women chronically dependent on welfare increased by 7%; illegitimacy increased by 8%; men interviewed in jail increased by 12%; and the number of permanent high school dropouts increased by nearly 15%.

One anomalous finding known as 'the Flynn effect' adds an element of mystery to this picture. James Flynn, political scientist from New Zealand, has reported "massive gains" in IQ in the U.S. and elsewhere. When IQ tests are standardized, people consistently find earlier versions of the tests easier, and score higher, than did the original test-takers. There's no consensus on whether this is due to actual increases in intelligence, or some sort of artifact. Certainly, enormous gains are difficult to reconcile with casual observation and declining SAT scores. Many people dismiss 'the Flynn effect' on the grounds that if the population had actually gained 3 points per decade since 1932 as claimed, "Our ancestors would have been morons." Flynn himself is not unsympathetic to this view. Christopher Brand makes a convincing case that people have merely become more savvy test-takers over the years (Brand, 1996). Professor Lynn believes the gains are real, and probably due to better nutrition, which is thought to be the

cause of comparable increases in stature. He likens the situation to poorer quality seeds given ever greater quantities of fertilizer. But even if his optimistic view proves to be correct, there should soon be a limit to how much more benefit can be derived from nutrition, if the limit hasn't been reached already.

Decline in health and conscientiousness

Throughout our evolution, the weak and diseased died young and didn't pass on their genes. Now, because of modern medicine, people with numerous genetic diseases live long enough to reproduce and transmit defective genes to their children. (Examples: cystic fibrosis, hemophilia, diabetes, pyloric stenosis, various heart defects, thalassemia, phenylketonuria, and sickle cell anemia.) The incidence of many of these disorders is doubling or tripling each generation. No one would deny sufferers treatment, but it's important to realize that, as a result of it, our genetic potential for robust good health is declining. Life-long care will require ever-increasing expenditures. Furthermore, while sufferers are grateful for medical advances, most would nevertheless be quick to point out that the quality of their lives would be far better if they'd never inherited a disease in the first place.

Conscientiousness, traditionally known as "good character," consists of honesty, a strong work ethic, and concern for others. Since IQ is positively correlated to a number of desirable traits (such as altruism, anti-authoritarian attitudes, and middle-class values of hard work, thrift, and sacrifice), when IQ declines, so do these traits. People with low IQ's are far more likely to become criminals, so the fact that our genetic potential for intelligence is declining means our genetic potential for crime is increasing. Moreover, some evidence suggests that despite lengthy sojourns in jail, criminals still manage to procreate at a faster rate than the rest of us. Professor Lynn's research on London criminals found they had nearly twice as many offspring as non-criminals, and those figures are almost certainly underestimates. In demographic studies of fertility, the entire category of underclass males is frequently omitted because reliable data on their offspring simply can't be obtained--their sexual behavior is often promiscuous, and their relationships transient. Since twin studies and adoption studies have established that there is a substantial genetic component to criminality, the higher fertility of criminals significantly increases the genetic potential for criminality in the population.

What to do?

The solution to genetic deterioration in intelligence, health, and conscientiousness is not a matter of knowhow or resources. Rather, it's a matter of overcoming the pernicious association of eugenics with Nazi genocide. This association has made eugenics a taboo subject, and prevented most rational discussion of it for at least the past few decades. Previously I have addressed this issue:

An almost primitive fatalism and superstition underlie the assumption that as a society, we are utterly powerless to alter our course, however disastrous a legacy we may be leaving to future generations through our negligence, and the irrational fear that if we dare attempt to guide [our evolution] . . . we run a grave risk of being suddenly forced against our wills through some mysterious, outrageously implausible yet inexorable sequence of events culminating in genocide and World War III (Van Court, 1983).

The public has witnessed numerous grim and frightening stories about the Holocaust, along with Nazi propaganda on the creation of "a master race," so quite understandably, it has come to associate eugenics with Nazis and genocide. Who could ever forget the sight of bulldozers shoving mountains of emaciated bodies into mass graves? It's not surprising that the Nazi's strong and vocal support for eugenics has utterly destroyed it as a social movement, because nothing, no matter how inherently benevolent, could survive an association with such nightmarish images. But Germany is just one example of a country with a eugenics program--one very, very conspicuous example.

In the first half of the 20th century, a total of 29 countries passed eugenics laws, including Germany, The United States, Canada, Switzerland, Austria, Venezuela, Estonia, Argentina, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Brazil, Italy, Greece, and Spain. History tells us that in one country, Germany, there was genocide; in the other 28, there was not (Saetz, 1985). Further-more, numerous cases of genocide have been committed without so much as a mention of eugenics. Communism--far and away history's biggest mass murderer--never advocated eugenics, and, in fact, held the opposite beliefs from the Nazis, that the environment causes everything, and heredity counts for nothing. So how can there possibly be a causal connection between eugenics and genocide? In order to prove causation, it's necessary minimally to show a true association. Put simply, one case out of 29 does not an association make.

Consider the following analogy: Imagine that the most salient historical event of all times was the Crusades, instead of the Holocaust, and that for the past 50 years, the Crusades had been the subject of highly sensational movies, documentaries, commemorative ceremonies, newspaper and magazine articles, books, lectures, museum exhibits, and so on. If we didn't know much about Christianity, it would be easy to conclude that it was a war-like religion, and quite reasonably, we'd be concerned that if we should ever convert to Christianity, we might wind up fighting and dying in some Crusade. The emotionally-charged association between "Christianity" and "war" would become indelibly imprinted in our consciousness after being paired thousands of times. It wouldn't be a true association, with predictive value--whenever there's Christianity, there's likely to be war (and vice versa), as would be the case if Christians had actually engaged in a disproportionate share of the wars throughout history--but in fact, it would be a false association, because it's based on just one event which is replayed again and again.

Ghost of Adolf Hitler

To say, "The Nazis believed in eugenics, and they did terrible things" *just isn't good enough* as a reason to reject eugenics forevermore. Before rejecting the only solution to dysgenics--a serious problem which isn't 'could be' or 'might be' but rather is--it must be firmly established that a eugenics program would actually cause more harm than genetic deterioration of the population. In order to do that, it would have to be shown that genocide (or some other clearly-specified catastrophe) is, in fact, a very real danger of a eugenics program, and not merely hysteria and irrational anxiety resulting from a false association with Nazi's. The idea that there's an actual risk of *genocide* as a result of implementing a eugenics program is preposterous, and it has never been established *flimsily*, let alone firmly!

Draconian practices would be wholly unacceptable and unnecessary in a modern-day eugenics program. Professor Lynn offers no recommendations in **Dysgenics**, leaving that for his promised sequel, to be entitled **Eugenics**. But in light of the problems touched upon in this review, several possible eugenic measures come to mind. Since low-IQ women are much more likely to have unwanted children due to birth control failure, a reasonable first step might be to offer them free long-term and permanent contraception. (Prevention of unwanted births would be a worth-while humanitarian goal in itself, aside from eugenic benefits, because unwanted children are far more likely to be neglected and abused.) A second step might be to provide incentives to criminals (such as reduced sentences) to have vasectomies or tubal ligations. A third step might be to implement various measures to ease the burden of parenthood for college students. Such a program could go a long way toward halting dysgenics, or possibly even reversing it.

Professor Lynn concludes **Dysgenics** with a word to his critics:

[W]e have considered the criticisms of the view that the genetic quality of modern populations is deteriorating. These are that there is no genetic determination of intelligence, conscientiousness, crime, educational attainment or socioeconomic status; that there can be an inverse association between intelligence and fertility without genetic deterioration occurring; that there are no genetic differences between the social classes; that there are no such things as bad genes; that the genes for genetic diseases should be preserved, especially in other people, because they make a positive contribution to creative achievement; and that all human types, including the mentally retarded, criminals and psychopaths, are equally valuable. All these arguments have been examined and found wanting. Only one verdict is possible concerning the critics of eugenics who have advanced these arguments, and that is that they have not taken the trouble to examine the research evidence. The eugenicists believed that modern populations were deteriorating genetically. The evidence set out in this book shows they were correct.

Perhaps Professor Lynn is being charitable to his critics by suggesting that they are merely ignorant. A decidedly less charitable view would be that--at least with regard to the high percentage of Marxists and nihilists among them--his critics *have* read the research, and *know perfectly well* that it's true, but publicly they insist it's utterly false (in a tone of moral indignation, no less) because it threatens their thinly-veiled political agenda. Like all important works on genetics and IQ of the past few decades, **Dysgenics** is bound to send Marxists/ nihilists into apoplexies of agitation and rage. They respond to scientific facts which don't fit their egalitarian ideology by attempting to suppress them, branding scientists who report them "Nazis" and "racists," and publishing devoid-of-substance, pseudo-scientific "rebuttals," which--unlike the scholarly, substantive, straightforward works they line up *en masse* to rebut--are welcomed with open arms by the politically-correct media. They can do all of these things, and they can pitch a fit 'till they rupture an artery in their collective, thoroughly repugnant, brain. But they cannot make these facts go away.

We are deteriorating genetically, and the only alternative to leaving future generations an increasingly chaotic, violent, degraded society is called "eugenics." What a dilemma! Have we *no other choice* than to bequeath to our children a poorer genetic legacy than the one we ourselves inherited? And what if *they too* live in terror of the ghost of Adolph Hitler? Where will it end?

From every imaginable perspective--the economy, education, literacy, crime, welfare, government, the "misery quotient," advancing civilization, and science, to name just a few--human genetic deterioration in intelligence, conscientiousness, and health is a disaster. For the believers among us, add to these the religious implications of dysgenics: How could it be God's will for us to behave irresponsibly and cruelly to people who come after us? Would it not be a sacrilege to thoughtlessly squander God's most precious gifts--in fact, the very ones used to create us in His image?

In retrospect, it seems inevitable that at some point, the widespread knowledge and use of contraception would bring about dysgenics. Many people feel it's wrong for society to attempt to influence reproduction in any way. But it should be borne in mind that dysgenics came about as a result of society's 'meddling' with the natural order of things by introducing contraception, and it's clear some sort of 'compensatory meddling' will be required if we are ever going to set our evolution back on a healthy course.

REFERENCES

Blacker, C.P., (1952) **Eugenics Galton and After**, London: Duckworth

Brand, Christopher (1996) **The 'g' Factor**, New York: Wiley & Sons

Herrnstein, Richard, and Charles Murray (1994) **The Bell Curve**, New York: Free Press

Saetz, Stephen B. (1985) "Eugenics and the Third Reich," *The Eugenics Bulletin*, reprinted on Future Generations website at <http://www.ziplink.net/~bright/>

Van Court, Marian (1982) "Eugenics Revisited," *Mensa Bulletin*, #254

Van Court, Marian (1983), "Unwanted births and dysgenic fertility in the United States," *The Eugenics Bulletin*, reprinted on Future Generations website at <http://www.ziplink.net/~bright/>

Van Court, Marian, and Frank Bean (1985) "Intelligence and fertility in the United States: 1912-1982," *Intelligence* 9, 23-32