



Eugenics: From Science of Race (Biology) to Master Race (Ideology)

Mohd Arif

Figar Arif YouTube channel

Abstract: Eugenics is a set of beliefs and practices aimed at improving the genetic quality of a human population. It gained significant attention and support in the late 19th and early 20th centuries but has since been discredited due to its unethical applications and association with human rights abuses. The legacy of eugenics serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of pseudoscience and it has become the most controversial concept in history and literature. For some it has been the part of enlightenment while for others, it is nothing but indoctrination. It has been referred a science as well as a myth, a fact as well as a conspiracy theory. When we read the literature on Eugenics, we came to know that Knowledge which has always been treated as a virtue in Socratic sense or “a torch bearer of light” in various narratives, the same knowledge can also be used as a tool of human enslavement through propaganda, manipulation, surveillance and control, exploitation and scientific racism. In Eugenics, the knowledge of genetics and biology has been misused to justify racist policies, claiming certain groups are superior or inferior based on false scientific narratives. This has led to discrimination, forced sterilization and even genocide. Although the concept originates in scientific world, but later on it has wider social implications. So it is the combinations of both biology (DNA) as well as ideology (ISA- Ideological state apparatus a term used by Althusser).

Index Terms - Genomics, Genetic Engineering, selective breeding, social Darwinism, Race hygiene, Bio – politics, Genetic determinism.

Meaning of term

Eugenics is the theory or practice of selective breeding, achieved either by promoting procreation amongst the fit members of a species or by preventing procreation by the unfit. It is also called the science of combination. The term Eugenics is closely associated with scientific racism

FRANCIS GALTON: FOUNDER OF THE FAITH

The term Eugenics was for the first time coined in Literature by Francis Galton, an English Statistician, demographer and ethnologist in 1883 A.D. and defined it as the science of improving racial stock. Being Cousin of Charles Darwin, Galton was highly influenced by his theory of evolution (biological evolution) and social Darwinism of Herbert Spenser. Galton first published his Eugenics ideas in 1865-well before he coined the word itself _in a two-part article for Macmillan’s Magazine which he subsequently expanded into a book, **Hereditary Genius**, published in 1869.

Histography---Plato the forerunner of it

The initial seeds of Eugenics can be traced in the writings of Greek Philosopher Mr. Plato. He proposed these controversial idea millennia ago. Plato believed in the tripartite division of human and divided the human society into three classes in his ideal state as per unique personality traits --- Rulers representing Reason, warriors representing courage and producers representing appetite. He called only above two classes as Ruling of society and proposed communism of wives for them. He was against permanent marriage or separate family for them and suggested temporary mating (sexual intercourse) between the good amongst the men and women between the age group of 20-45. This procreation/ human reproduction shall be regulated by the state wherein all women shall be common to all men or vice versa. So he was the forerunner in the concept of Eugenics wherein he believed that virtuous among men and women can procreate better offspring. In Book 5 of 'The Republic' Plato discusses the idea of selective breeding of the guardian class and writes:-

“Weak parents should not procreate, because their children would inherit their inferior qualities and only mating between the best in individuals shall be encouraged...” Plato even go the extent of saying that the weak children shall be killed immediately as they may not hamper the development of healthy ones and only virtuous shall be allowed to live.

Eugenics Under the doctrine of Natural Selection and Survival Of The Fittest (Malthus, Darwin and Herbert Spenser)

The concept of Eugenics can be further traced in the writings of Malthus, Charles Darwin and Herbert Spenser. The doctrine of Natural selection and survival of fittest was common to all. Thomas Robert **Malthus**, a late 18th century economist apply natural selection principle in the field of demography in his Book 'Essay on the principle of population'(1798) and said that hunger and disease were aspects of life implemented by God to stop populations from exploding.

Charles Robert Darwin an English naturalist, geologist and biologist, widely known for his contributions in the field of evolutionary biology. He developed his theory of evolution in his book 'the origin of species' in 1859 and said that there exists the diversity of species found on earth. He proposed that each species undergo a series of random physical and mental changes or what he call mutations. Some of the changes enable a species to survive and prosper: they are pro-survival. Other mutations are less favorable and make survival more difficult or even impossible. A process of 'natural selection' therefore decides which species are fitted by nature to survive and which are not.

By the end of 19th century, these ideas have extended beyond biology and were increasingly affecting social and political discourse. **Herbert Spenser**, in his book 'the man vs the state' (1940) used the theory of natural selection to develop the social principle of 'the survival of the fittest'. It was Herbert Spenser, not Darwin who coined the phrase 'survival of the fittest' due to the fact that he believed human behavior was designed in a way that strives for self-preservation. Darwin later uses the term 'survival of the fittest' in his next edition of 'the origin of species'. All this have given impetus to 'the theory social Darwinism' which does have contributed to the scientific, social, physical, mental etc. acceptance of Eugenics as it creates the thinking that only the strongest and the fittest would survive and flourish in society. People, who are best suited by nature to survive, rise to the top, while the less fit fall to the bottom. Inequalities of wealth, social position and political power are therefore natural and inevitable and no attempt should be made by government to interfere with them. So in short, the doctrine of natural selection and survival of the fittest proliferated the concept of Eugenics which states that species go through a process of random mutations that fits some to survive (and possibly thrive) while others become extinct.

LAWS OF GENETICS (MENDEL) AND THE POLTICS OF RACE (GOBINEAU, NIETZCHE, CHAMBERLAIN AND ROSENBERG)

The father of Modern Genetics Gregory Johann Mendel, akin to three classes of society envisaged by Plato and three racial divisions of world given by Hitler in 'mein kampf' (explained later on herein) have given three laws of inheritance which are as

1. Law of dominance
2. Law of segregation
3. And law of independent assortment

The laws of inheritance were proposed by Mendel after conducting experiments on pea plants for seven years and bring revolution in the field of modern genetics. But the legacy of all these laws have been distorted in ushering various racial theories and biological or genetic differences among human beings have been fully exploited to justify the Eugenics under the politics or science of race. Genetics began to determine politics with the belief that political and social conclusions can be drawn from the idea that humankind is divided into biologically distinct races, some of them are racially superior while others inferior. Genetic divisions began to reflect cultural, intellectual or moral differences, making them politically or socially significant. This politics of race began manifest itself in calls for racial segregation and in doctrines of blood superiority or inferiority.

Joseph Arthur Gobineau, a French social theorist is widely viewed as the architect of modern racial theory. In his major work, *Essay on the inequality of the human races* (1853), Gobineau advanced a 'science of history' in which the strength of civilizations was seen to be determined by their racial composition. In this, 'white people' and particularly the 'Aryans' (the German people) were superior to black, brown and yellow people and miscegenation (racial mixing) was viewed as a source of corruption and civilizational decline.

Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1884) emphasized the role of 'Übermensch' translated as 'the super men' who alone are unrestrained by any conventional morality. Anticipating modern existentialism, he emphasized that people create their own world and make their own values, expressed in the idea that 'God Is Dead'.

Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a British born German writer, also played a major role in popularizing racial theories, having major impact on Hitler and the Nazis. In his book *Foundations of the nineteenth century* (1899) he used the term 'Aryan race' to describe almost all the peoples of the Europe, but portrayed the 'Nordic' or 'Teutonic' peoples (by which he meant the Germans) as its supreme element, with Jewish people being their implacable enemy.

Alfred Rosenberg, a German politician and wartime Nazi leader developed the idea of 'race soul'. In his book *The myth of twentieth century* (1930) he argued that race is the key to a people's identity. His hierarchy of racial attributes allowed him to justify both Nazi expansionism (by emphasizing the superiority of the 'Aryan Race') and Hitler's genocidal policies (by portraying Jews as fundamentally 'degenerate', along with sub-human, Slavs, Poles and Czechs).

From Science of Race to Master race: Hitler and his Mein Kampf (My struggle)

The most well-known application of Eugenics occurred in Nazi Germany in the leading up to the World War II and the holocaust. The Nazi German racial state between 1933 and 1945 used its resources to 'cleanse' the German people and the Nazi state of those they deemed "unworthy of life". Nazis in Germany, Austria and other occupied territories euthanized (to kill an animal as it is old or sick) at least 70,000 adults and 5200 children. They implemented a campaign of forced sterilization that claimed at least four lakhs (400,000) victims. This culminated in the near destruction of the Jewish people, as well as an effort to eliminate other marginalized ethnic minorities, such as the Sinti and Roma, individuals with disabilities and LGBTQ+ (Lesbians, Gays, Bi sexual, Transgender and Queer or Questioning) people.

This was the Eugenics in its darkest face with **Adolf Hitler** as in the frontline. **Adolf Hitler**, an Austrian-born German politician (also a famous painter by profession during his initial days), became leader of the Nazi Party (German Nation Socialist Workers Party) in 1921 and was the German leader from 1933 to 1945. Largely expressed in his book *Mein Kampf* (My struggle 1925), Hitler's world view drew expansionist German nationalism, racial anti-Semitism and a belief in the relentless struggle together in a theory that highlighted the endless battle between the Germans and the Jews. Under Hitler, the Nazis sought German world domination and after that in 1941, the wholesome extermination or genocide of the Jewish people.

Hitler portrayed the world in pseudo-religious, pseudo-scientific (Eugenics) terms as a struggle for dominance between the Germans and the Jews, representing, respectively the forces of 'Good' and 'Evil'. Like the Plato's unique number of three (classes) and Mendel's unique number of three (laws of inheritance), **Hitler** himself divided the races of the world into Three Categories:

1. **The Master Race:** - the first, the Aryans, were the (in German) Volkgeist or The Harrenvolk, the 'master race'. Hitler described Aryans as the founders of culture, and literally believed them to be responsible for all the creativity, whether in art, music, literature, philosophy or political thought.

2. **Bearers of culture:** - Second, there were the 'bearers of culture'. Peoples who were able to utilize the ideas and inventions of the German people, but were themselves incapable of any creativity.
3. **Destroyers of culture:-** At the bottom were the Jews, who Hitler described as the 'destroyers of culture', pitted in an unending struggle against the noble and creative Aryans.

So Eugenics remains no longer a fringe movement. Starting in the late 1800s, leaders and intellectuals worldwide perpetuated eugenics beliefs and policies based on common racist and xenophobic attitudes. In **Hitler's Germany**, Eugenics took a form of scientific racism. **Hitler's Manichaeism** (world view) was therefore, dominated by the idea of conflict between good and evil , light and darkness, reflected in a racial struggle between the Germans and the Jews, a conflict that could only end in either Aryan World domination (and the elimination of Jews) or the final victory of the Jews (as the destruction of Germany

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