

Public and Private Memory of the First World War and the British Eugenics Movement

Bradley W. Hart
bh337@cam.ac.uk
Cambridge University

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The early days of the eugenics movement were marked by decidedly militaristic and Social Darwinist tendencies on the part of its most prominent practitioners. At its most basic level, Social Darwinism preached the importance of evolutionary law to human affairs, even if its practitioners did not always agree on exactly what the logical implications of the theory were.¹ In Britain, Social Darwinism and eugenics alike were frequently associated with the militarist national efficiency movement and thus the early forms of both were largely oriented towards ensuring that Britain was sufficiently strong to defend, manage, and expand her imperial possessions. For the eugenicists who adhered to the most militaristic interpretations of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and Francis Galton's theory of "hereditary genius" and biological worth, warfare and violence were one of the key ways nature practiced natural selection on the human race.² Far from being undesirable, therefore, war could actually have desirable eugenic consequences.

As will be shown, this optimistic view of warfare's biological consequences was widespread in the late 19th century, though hardly universal. The two most famous, or perhaps infamous, advocates of a biologically informed imperial policy in the late 19th century were statistician Karl Pearson and civil servant Benjamin Kidd, whose work *Social Evolution* gained international fame and was translated into a host of languages.³

¹ See D. P. Crook, *Darwinism, War and History: The Debate over the Biology of War from the 'Origin of Species' to the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

² Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (London: Macmillan, 1869).

³ Benjamin Kidd, *Social Evolution* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1894). While Pearson and Kidd agreed in principle on many issues, their ideas had significant differences as well, and towards the end of his life, Kidd began to distance himself from the eugenics-based projects Pearson had begun to advocate. (Robert C. Bannister, *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought*, American

For his part, Pearson was a socialist-leaning mathematician and statistician who was determined to prove Darwinian and eugenic theory correct through mathematical means.⁴ Throughout the 1880s, he advocated a form of what might be termed “biological national socialism” by arguing for a highly patriotic, non-revolutionary socialism that viewed the world as pure struggle between individuals and nations alike for resources.⁵ Under the system Pearson envisioned, the state would be strengthened internally to better compete with its adversaries by removing internal competition between individuals and weeding out the weak through war to ensure progress.⁶ War was thus a critical part of social and biological progress. Pearson’s outspoken Social Darwinism and militarism have commonly been compared and contrasted with that professed by Kidd. The similarities between Pearson’s theories and Kidd’s seem numerous: at the most basic level, both agreed that human progress was the result of selection, either artificial or natural, and that for progress to continue or be accelerated, the state must adopt policies designed to harden itself against inevitable conflict and ready to expand and gain the resources needed.⁷

Scholars have long identified the militaristic type of Social Darwinism as a key component of late nineteenth century militarism and imperialism. In one of the more extreme arguments for the importance of Social Darwinist thought in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, H.W Koch listed Social Darwinism as one of the key mentalities that led to the outbreak of the First World War. According to Koch, a disparate group of Anglophone individuals subscribed to Social Darwinist thought, including British essayist Walter Bagehot, statesmen like Joseph Chamberlain, and American President Theodore Roosevelt.⁸ Similarly, in the closing days of the Second World War Richard Hofstadter claimed that the far-reaching influence of Social Darwinism in America was

Civilization(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), pp. 150-151; Paul Crook, "Historical Monkey Business: The Myth of a Darwinized British Imperial Discourse," *History* 84, no. (1999): pp. 642-645.)

⁴ In the process, Pearson was responsible for the creation of the field of statistical biology (biometrics) and established the first journal on the subject in 1901. (Bernard Semmel, "Karl Pearson: Socialist and Darwinist," *The British Journal of Sociology* 9, no. 2 (1958): pp. 112-113.)

⁵ *Ibid.*: p. 114.

⁶ *Ibid.*: pp. 114-115.

⁷ Kidd, pp. 40-43.

⁸ H. W. Koch, "Social Darwinism in The "New Imperialism"," in *The Origins of the First World War: Great Power Rivalry and German War Aims*, ed. H. W. Koch(Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972), p. 332-334.

responsible for the expansion of cutthroat capitalist practices and American “imperialism” in the Caribbean in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁹

In the calculus of Social Darwinists who believed that life was little more than a struggle for resources and survival between individuals and groups, the field of eugenics was seen as a key means to ensure the “fitness” of the collective unit. As late as 1922, Italian eugenicist Corrado Gini was arguing that compulsory military service and the experience of front-line combat often had a positive impact on national racial characteristics, though he conceded that more research was needed into the question.¹⁰ More commonly in the aftermath of the First World War, however, this rhetoric of struggle and strength through conflict largely disappeared, to the extent that in Britain the Eugenics Society actually denounced the notion that international conflict could have eugenic consequences in 1937.¹¹ To a great extent, this rapid about-face was not due to increasing scientific knowledge about evolutionary biology or genetic inheritance but the personal experiences of the individuals who came into prominence in the Society in the Interwar years. While older men like Pearson had been too advanced in years to enter the trenches, an entire generation of young men and women who witnessed and felt the effects of the war first-hand were noticeably less inclined to believe that it had unintended positive consequences.

To illustrate the importance of the First World War’s living memory in the Interwar years to those leading the eugenics movement, I have selected three illustrative case studies: those of C.P. Blacker, George Pitt-Rivers, and Ursula Grant-Duff. All three of these individuals were intimately associated with the First World War; the first two fought in the British Army in the conflict and both were wounded while Grant-Duff lost her husband, also in the British Army, in the war’s opening months. In the post-war world all three became deeply involved in the eugenics movement and were its veritable leaders on both the domestic and international stage. At the same time, their

⁹ Subsequent historians have greatly doubted Hofstadter’s linkage between capitalism and Social Darwinism, and several have attempted to show that few if any businessmen bothered to justify their practices with references to biology. (Gregory Claeys, “The “Survival of the Fittest” And the Origins of Social Darwinism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, no. 2 (2000): p. 226; Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915*(Philadelphia, Oxford University Press: University of Pennsylvania Press, London, 1945), pp. 146-147.)

¹⁰ Corrado Gini, “Eugenic Aspects of the War,” *The Eugenics Review* XIV, no. (1922-23).

¹¹ Anonymous, “War,” *The Eugenics Review* XXVIII, no. 4 (1936-37).

memories of the war led them to three extremely different views of eugenics and its role in the world, as will be shown. Despite the vast literature on eugenics and the British Eugenics Society, in particular, it seems no scholar has directly traced the impact of the War on the movement's leading practitioners, and, by extension on the overall ideology and trajectory of eugenics. Most, in contrast, have taken a purely scientific view, arguing that the development of eugenics ideology was almost exclusively the result of new research into inheritance and heredity.¹² While this is certainly a valid view to take, it ignores the human element, opting instead for a largely disconnected and unrealistic view of scientific practitioners.¹³ In this sense, this paper will seek to paint a more complicated view of eugenics than has often been done in the past, showing that it was essentially a shaky coalition of individuals who had adopted its tenets for a variety of diverse reasons. Fundamentally it was the memory of the First World War and the terrible losses all three of these significant individuals experienced in it that was largely driving their views of eugenics and science in the 1920s and 1930s. This, in turn, had significant consequences for the development of eugenics, leading the British movement to ultimately take a rather schizophrenic view toward the eugenic policies of Nazi Germany at a time when significant scientific opposition might have had a measurable affect on the regime's reputation abroad.¹⁴ In this sense, the reaction of British eugenicists might be seen as vaguely similar to their government's policy of appeasement in years before the outbreak of war. While holding serious reservations about the nature of German racial hygiene programmes, eugenicists were largely unwilling to attack German scientists out of an idea that war had to be avoided at all

¹² See, for instance, Kevles; Pauline M. H. Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings: The Eugenics Society, Its Sources and Its Critics in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992). One exception to this general trend is the excellent though now somewhat dated work of Greta Jones: Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction between Biological and Social Theory* (Brighton, Atlantic Highlands: Harvester Press, Humanities Press, 1980); Greta Jones, "Eugenics and Social Policy between the Wars," *The Historical Journal* 25, no. 3 (1982). Jones' views on eugenics, while groundbreaking and significant, can now be expanded upon.

¹³ It should also be mentioned that none of the individuals under consideration in the course of this study were proper eugenics researchers: none ever held a university chair in eugenics or genetics, and none were widely known as significant theoreticians or expert authorities in the field, though all were internationally known for their activities in the movement's formal structures.

¹⁴ For German views on the significance of international support for their policies, see Sheila Faith Weiss, "'the Sword of Our Science' as a Foreign Policy Weapon: The Political Function of German Human Geneticists in the International Arena During the Third Reich," in *Ergebnisse, Vorabdrucke Aus Dem Forschungsprogramm 'Geschichte Der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft im Nationalsozialismus' Der Präsidentenkommission Der Max-Planck-Gesellschaft*. (Berlin: 2005).

costs. This attitude was a direct result of the experiences of the First World War, which had seemed to strip conflict of both its romantic and potentially beneficial characteristics, at least in the eyes of those who had experienced it.

The first of the individuals to be examined in the course of this analysis is Carlos Patton Blacker. Born in 1895, Blacker came from distinctly cosmopolitan roots: his father was an English “gentleman of leisure” who fled to Europe after a gambling row with the Duke of Newcastle, and as a result C.P. was born in Paris and did not even visit England for a number of years.¹⁵ Raised primarily in Europe rather than Britain, the young Blacker spent a substantial period in both France and the German city of Freiburg, where his aunt lived.¹⁶ This early affection for Germany was tested during the First World War when Blacker enlisted in the elite Coldstream Guards. In the course of the war his brother Robin was killed and he himself saw a substantial amount of fighting which he later recounted in an extensive and haunting posthumously published memoir.¹⁷ Overall, however, the war seems to have had little effect on Blacker’s humanitarian optimism, and in his account of the conflict he recounted how the Germans had behaved extraordinarily humanely to the British wounded.¹⁸ A great number of his friends were killed in the trenches, often brutally, but he himself remained unscathed until the Battle of the *Canal du Nord* when he was hit in the head by shrapnel from a German shell.¹⁹ Rejoining his unit about a month later, Blacker was in the field when the November armistice was signed and recounted later that he felt little joy at the announcement and thought only of his parents. “I was simultaneously aware of their happiness on my behalf, or responsibility to them for what I was later going to do with my life, and, underlying the rest, misgivings about what was going to happen to the world,” he recalled.²⁰

With the Military Cross he had won as testimony to his personal heroism, after the War Blacker entered Balliol College, Oxford, and read zoology under Julian Huxley, later a friend and ally in the Eugenics Society, before entering Guy’s Hospital Medical

¹⁵ C.P. Blacker, *Have You Forgotten Yet? The First World War Memoirs of C.P. Blacker*, ed. J.G.C. Blacker (London: Leo Cooper, 2000), 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 250.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 251-270.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

School, which he completed in 1925.²¹ By training Blacker was a psychiatrist, and he continued to practice at Maudsley Hospital until shortly before his death.²² In addition to his professional activities, however, Blacker was involved in a large number of organizations concerned with population and demographic problems, including the Eugenics Society and the Birth Control Investigation Committee.²³ Blacker's first publication was on the necessity of making birth control available to the poor and as leader of the Eugenics Society he was influential in securing the Society's support for the fledgling contraceptive movement. In the early 1930s Blacker was made the first General Secretary of the Society: a position that had been created in an effort to better manage the Society's various factions. Under Blacker, connections between the Eugenics Society and organizations including the National Birth Control Association and the Population Investigation Committee that would have been unthinkable prior to his leadership became reality as the Society not only entered strategic alliances with these groups but also funded and housed them in their London headquarters.²⁴ For Blacker, controlling reproduction was the key to achieving eugenic reforms, and this effort was where he placed the vast majority of his attentions. In his formulation, eugenics should not focus on class, as it had been accused of doing in the past, but on the elimination of mental disease for humanitarian reasons.

Blacker's primary innovation, therefore, was to put the propaganda arm of the British eugenics movement on the road to establishing alliances with other groups that seemed to share its motives, at least in the short term. At the same time, Blacker realized acutely that achieving reform would be an uphill battle and had to rely on more than simply encouraging the development of a "eugenic conscience" or "eugenic" reforms of government institutions such as the House of Lords.²⁵ After the Second World War, in which he served as a medical officer in his old unit, Blacker was influential in investigating the medical abuses of the Nazis and reported to the British

²¹ Anonymous, "Obituary: Carlos Paton Blacker," *The Lancet* 305, no. 7915 (1975): 1096-1097.

²² *Ibid.*: 1096.

²³ Richard A. Soloway, "Blacker, Carlos Paton (1895-1975)", Oxford University Press <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47726> (accessed 19 May 2009).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See Kevles, chapter 7.

government and the Eugenics Society on his findings.²⁶ Blacker's view of eugenics was always based in the principle of liberalism, and he strongly believed that by giving carriers of hereditary disease sufficient information about their conditions they would make the right decision and choose not to reproduce and pass on their malady.²⁷ Indeed, much of this liberal humanitarianism seems to have been the direct result of his experiences in the bloodshed of the War. In the late 1930s Blacker was largely responsible for the Society adopting an officially anti-militarist stance for the first time by promulgating a statement that, "modern war is dysgenic (1) because the persons most likely to be killed in wars are above the physical average; and (2) because war and the prospects of war deter from parenthood persons who take into account the well being of their children".²⁸ Clearly, for Blacker and the post-generation, eugenics had to adopt a kinder, gentler tone: one derived directly from the experience and seemingly senseless of the trenches. This type of statement denouncing war was largely in line with Blacker's own views on warfare, which might to an extent be extrapolated from the fact that unlike so many of his generation he never seemed to use his military title in civilian life.²⁹

While C.P. Blacker fell away from his Catholic faith and into Galton's religion of eugenics largely out of an effort to improve the world, much the same could be said of George Pitt-Rivers, though the two men greatly differed in their approaches to eugenics and politics. By background the two men were in fact fairly similar.³⁰ Pitt-Rivers was born in 1890 to wealthy landowning parents and the young George Henry Lane Fox, as his full name went, attended Eton before serving as a captain in the Royal Dragoons in the First World War.³¹ Being in the cavalry before the outbreak of the War, Pitt-Rivers was sent into the field and was severely wounded by a German machinegun, ending his

²⁶ See C.P. Blacker, "'Eugenic' Experiments Conducted by the Nazis," *The Eugenics Review* XLIV, no. (1952).

²⁷ Anonymous, "Obituary: Carlos Paton Blacker," 1096. See also Blacker's introduction to C.P. Blacker, *The Chances of Morbid Inheritance* (London: H.K. Lewis & Co. Ltd., 1934), v-vi.

²⁸ Anonymous, "War."

²⁹ Blacker, *Have You Forgotten Yet? The First World War Memoirs of C.P. Blacker*, 287.

³⁰ For Galton's views on the eugenic religion, see Francis Galton, "Francis Galton's Utopia: The Eugenic College of Kantsaywhere," in *The Life, Letters and Labours of Francis Galton*, ed. Karl Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914).

³¹ David Renton, "Rivers, George Henry Lane Fox Pitt- (1890–1966)", Oxford University Press <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/75512> (accessed 5 June 2009).

wartime experience and leaving him with an injury that would trouble him for the rest of his life.

With his military career effectively over, Pitt-Rivers returned to his family estate in Dorset. After completing his degree at Oxford he became a fairly prolific author and privately supported researcher, first penning anti-Bolshevik tracts and anthropological works.³² In the late 1920s Pitt-Rivers made his name in the anthropology world by publishing an account of his explorations in the South Pacific, in which he reflected on the extinction of native races following their encounters with Europeans.³³ It was during this period that he also seems to have formulated and refined his ideas on the role of eugenics in social reform. Given his experiences in the Pacific, he concluded that race was the most important division of humanity. The overall quality of the population was the most important factor in determining the rise or fall of empires, and for that reason Pitt-Rivers advocated policies to improve the hereditary quality of society's best elements: a standard eugenicist position. The British empire itself was at stake if these warnings were not heeded, he claimed, and if it collapsed due to the biological decline of its best citizens it would likely be replaced with a number of small republics beholden to Russian Bolsheviks who purported to take an interest in third-world affairs.³⁴ This formulation was a typical mix of imperialism, eugenics, and anti-Bolshevism that Pitt-Rivers would cultivate in the 1930s, eventually taking him into the circles of the far right.

In 1931, Pitt-Rivers published his only major work focusing exclusively on eugenics. Written during the period in which the Eugenics Society was strongly and unsuccessfully advocating sterilization legislation, *Weeds in the Garden of Marriage* was a strong defence of eugenic principles that spared few of the field's critics from almost unfairly harsh critiques.³⁵ A large section was devoted to attacking Catholics for their opposition to eugenics and sterilization. "Eugenics is, above all, an attitude of mind, a readiness to face the realities of life, to study what is happening, so that individually and

³² Ibid.

³³ "Pitt-Rivers, George Henry Lane Fox," in *Who's Who*(London: A&C Black Limited, 1935), 2661. For this work, see George Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers, *The Clash of Culture and the Contact of Races: An Anthropological and Psychological Study of the Laws of Racial Adaptability, with Special Reference to the Depopulation of the Pacific and the Government of Subject Races*(London: G. Routledge, 1927).

³⁴ Pitt-Rivers, 12.

³⁵ George Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers, *Weeds in the Garden of Marriage*(London: N. Douglas, 1931).

collectively we may foster all that is healthy and beautiful and sound, and avoid encouraging all that is diseased and ugly and decayed to multiply,” he wrote. “It can hardly be profitable, therefore, to argue with opponents who declare war against such an attitude from the start. Regretfully we must admit that the Roman Catholic Church declared war on us before it even discovered whom we were”.³⁶ Beyond simply defending the general principles of eugenics from its opponents, Pitt-Rivers extended his notions to include decidedly racial factors. There was a strong dose of anti-Semitism in this logic: Jews, he claimed, were “the most race-conscious people in the world” and yet conspired to keep others from asserting collective racial identity by feigning offence at the use of such categories.³⁷

Eugenics, for Pitt-Rivers, was thus a melding of racial consciousness with control over human reproduction, without which civilization would crumble. After Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, Pitt-Rivers became a devoted follower of National Socialist ideology coupled with eugenics. To help promulgate these ideas he gave a series of lectures in Germany about the tenets of racial hygiene and even the British fascist movement, of which he was claiming himself to have sympathies with by the mid 1930s, in part possibly because of his increasing anti-Semitism.³⁸ Pitt-Rivers’ political radicalism only increased as tensions flared between Germany and Britain. In 1938 he published a short tract defending Hitler’s annexation of Czechoslovakia and denouncing Jews for allegedly hatching a plot to lead Britain into another world war with Germany.³⁹ Many of the “facts” appearing in his work seem to have come from Konrad Henlein, the pro-Nazi Sudeten separatist who became *Gauleiter* of the Sudetenland under Nazi occupation.⁴⁰ Clearly, Pitt-Rivers’ political affiliations were on the far right of the British political spectrum. After taking part in a series of meetings between members of various radical far right groups including Oswald Mosley, Pitt-Rivers was arrested in 1940 and interned under the infamous Defence Regulation 18B until 1942 on suspicion that he harboured pro-Nazi sympathies. Before his apparent conversion to the spirit of National Socialism,

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁸ Renton.

³⁹ George Henry Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers, *The Czech Conspiracy: A Phase in the World-War Plot* (London: Boswell Pub. Co., 1938).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

however, Pitt-Rivers was one of the most influential members of the Eugenics Society, though he has inexplicably been left out of existing histories focusing on the movement. He was elected a Society member immediately following the conclusion of the First World War and quickly rose to become the Society's official representative to the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations. At the same time he became involved in the International Union for the Investigation of Population Problems, an organization focusing on variable birth rates and other demographic issues. In these capacities, Pitt-Rivers established a massive network of overseas contacts, including German notables such as Eugen Fischer.

For Pitt-Rivers, like Blacker, eugenics seems to have been a means by which the major problems facing the world might be addressed using the tools of modern science. It is instructive that in *Weeds in the Garden of Marriage*, for instance, eugenics is presented as a necessary solution to international strife and even warfare, which both Pitt-Rivers and the Nazis were keen to link to a combination of biological degeneration and the rise of Bolshevism: an idea with widespread currency in the eugenics movement of the 1920s particularly that has seen little attention from scholars.⁴¹ There are contradictions that are difficult to comprehend in Pitt-Rivers' life and work: how, for instance, was it possible for a man who had been severely wounded by a German machinegun in the trenches of the Western Front to become so pro-German that he was seen as a national security threat by the government he had been serving? The key to understanding these seems to lie in Pitt-Rivers' affinity for a combination of eugenics and racial nationalism that he believed had found voice in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. The memory of the First World War's seemingly pointless bloodshed and killing no doubt pushed Pitt-Rivers to seek a radical alternative to the liberal political system and to advocate eugenics as a means to ward off what was perceived to be an inevitable disintegration of the western powers under the weight of their own biological decline. Like Blacker, Pitt-Rivers seems to have supported eugenics out of a feeling that biological improvement was the only way to prevent another major European

⁴¹ See, for instance, Lothrop Stoddard, *The Revolt against Civilization* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1922).

conflagration. In his case, however, this belief led him to support a regime that would eventually use these same ideas to justify mass murder.⁴²

While Blacker and Pitt-Rivers came from similar backgrounds and experiences of the First World War to find themselves on diametrically opposite sides of the political fence in the 1930s and 1940s, there was a third type of eugenicist who was deeply influenced by the war as well. These were the women who were deeply involved in the formal structures of eugenics and in the promulgation of its propaganda. As Lesley Hall has observed, eugenics was a unique movement in that it allowed a special place for women's involvement and dealt with issues including sex and birth control that were still largely taboo at the time.⁴³ One of the most prominent female proponents of eugenics in the 1920s and 1930s was Ursula Grant-Duff (*née* Lubbock), an upper class matriarch and the daughter of Liberal politician Lord Avebury. In 1906 she married Adrian Grant-Duff, a promising young Army officer who had already served in South Africa and had just been appointed to the General Staff. In late October 1913 he was promoted and returned to his unit, and consequently found himself in command when war erupted in August of the next year. Just a month later he was killed in heavy fighting in the allied advance following the Battle of the Marne, leaving Ursula to raise their three children in London.

In the years following her husband's death, Ursula Grant-Duff turned her attentions to both her family and to a wide variety of philanthropic causes that she believed would help prevent future conflict. A physically small woman, Grant-Duff was known for her tenacity, and Blacker reminisced after her death that:

Many complacent administrators and doctors have been disconcerted by being suddenly confronted with her small figure: quivering with indignation she would ask them by what principle of justice and humanity they could approve of children thus doubly handicapped by nature and nurture being brought into the world: was it not their duty as public-spirited men to do all in their power to circumvent

⁴² See Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966).

⁴³ See Lesley A. Hall, "Women, Feminism and Eugenics," in *Essays in the History of Eugenics: Proceedings of a Conference Organised by the Galton Institute, London, 1997*, ed. Robert A. Peel (London: Galton Institute, 1998); Lesley A. Hall, "Eugenics, Sex and the State: Some Introductory Remarks," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C: Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 39, no. 2 (2008).

injustices to unoffending children? What, she could ask them, had become of the quality of mercy?⁴⁴

Indeed, humanitarianism seems to have been Grant-Duff's primary concern. As her daughter later recalled, Grant-Duff made a point of teaching her children to "hate war".⁴⁵ Heavily involved in the Eugenics Society's efforts to pass a sterilization bill in the early 1930s, Grant-Duff's humanitarian impulses, internationalism, and possibly even pacifist leanings led her into interesting circles after 1933. Like Pitt-Rivers, she seems to have become something of a Germanophile after Hitler's rise to power and made perhaps her most significant contribution to the Eugenics Society by acting as a liaison between British eugenicists and their German counterparts. As a capable German speaker and a foreign woman she proved invaluable in this respect, eventually courting the opinion of leading figures in the National Socialist health establishment. The Germans, for their part, were happy to encourage cooperation between British and German scientists by providing access to major figures in the Nazi health apparatus and invitations to researchers from abroad who hoped to carry out research in German universities.⁴⁶

Grant-Duff's multiple visits to Germany in the early 1930s were a public relations success for the Nazis, as she returned to Britain with vivid and favourable accounts of the German racial hygiene exhibits and policies she had seen firsthand.⁴⁷ Following her return from the exhibition on "The German People – German Work", which included an opening address by "Herr Goebbels", she reported that the German exhibits on eugenics were "extremely well set up and on the whole very fair. There was comparatively little about the Jews, and the point stressed is that alien races are all right in themselves and provided they keep themselves to themselves, but that they must not be allowed to 'poison the good German blood'".⁴⁸ A portion of the exhibition dealing with the racial dangers posed by the so-called "Rhineland Bastards", who would find increasing

⁴⁴ Anonymous, C.P. Blacker, and Cedric Dover, "Obituary: Mrs. Ursula Grant Duff," *The Eugenics Review* LI, no. (1959-60): 9.

⁴⁵ See Shiela Grant Duff, *The Parting of Ways: A Personal Account of the Thirties* (London: Owen, 1982).

⁴⁶ See Weiss, 6.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, her account of an exhibition on the falling birth-rate in Germany prepared, evidently, by her friend Gebhard (Ursula Grant-Duff, "German Eugenics Propaganda," *The Eugenics Review* XXV, no. 2 (1933-34): 133-134.)

⁴⁸ Ursula Grant-Duff, "German Eugenics Exhibition," *The Eugenics Review* XXVI, no. 2 (1934-35): 164.

significance in the German eugenics movement later in the decade, was dismissed by Grant-Duff as a “side issue”. The overall focus and tone of the exhibition, she claimed, was largely in line with British eugenics thinking and dealt with the dangers of the “differential birth-rate, the growing burden of taxation to support the infirm, the aged and the mentally defective”.

Anyone who doubted the necessity of such legislation, she stated, could see the evidence in the Eugenics Society office in London, where the Society had evidently chosen to display German propaganda materials. She concluded her account by quoting several captions from the exhibition itself that are worth quoting in full:

1. ‘Which is best? To build decent homes for our healthy people—or country estates for our lunatics?’
2. ‘A sound people can be enslaved, oppressed, dismembered—but not exterminated. A national can only be blotted out and exterminated by its own unfruitfulness. That is the most dangerous enemy of any people.’
3. ‘The only group which still has a preponderance of births over deaths is that of the hereditarily diseased. Even more and more they propagate themselves in the body of the German people.’⁴⁹

Further comment on these points, she concluded, “is superfluous”, and it was clear from her account that she was favourably impressed with the commitment of the Germans to the principles of eugenics.⁵⁰ In addition to these adulatory and uncritical accounts of German eugenics dogma, Grant-Duff provided the Society with numerous materials from the exhibitions she visited, including some that featured examples of Nazi racial propaganda and anti-Semitic content.

Grant-Duff’s views of German eugenics and sterilization legislation were undeniably coloured by her memories of the First World War’s bloodshed and killing that had claimed her husband amongst so many others. Her efforts to build international cooperation between Britain and Germany led her to reach out to the Nazi regime whilst the British government pursued its Appeasement policy. Within the eugenics movement this amounted to a sort of Appeasement of its own, as German racial hygiene was cautiously engaged with despite its dubious scientific underpinnings and strongly anti-Semitic elements. These latter characteristics eventually led scientists

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

such as Julian Huxley to outright denounce German eugenics altogether, but not before much damage had been done by the international movement's overall silence.⁵¹ Unlike Pitt-Rivers, Grant-Duff did not turn to National Socialism as an ideology but it is undeniable that her efforts to build international understanding undoubtedly lent significant international credibility to Nazi science.

Collectively, these three case studies provide an important illustration of how the memory and experience of the First World War drove the development of British eugenics in the Interwar years. As Stefan Kühl has effectively argued in the German case, eugenics in the Interwar years had essentially jettisoned the earlier militarism of its Social Darwinist proponents.⁵² Those who still professed the view that warfare could lead to positive evolutionary development were increasingly marginalized by even the 1920s and had little credibility by the time Hitler came to power. It is worth noting, however, that even after the start of the Second World War there were some scientists including Sir Arthur Keith and Pearson who argued that war could act as a desirable evolutionary bottleneck that would select out and eliminate the weak for the overall betterment of society.⁵³ These voices were largely ignored by the mainstream of the eugenics movement, however, and there was clearly an increasing interest in distancing the idea of racial improvement from the militarism of the Edwardian age, as the statement explicitly denouncing war as "dysgenic" demonstrates. Even the right wing of the eugenics movement, epitomized by Pitt-Rivers, was unwilling to openly embrace warfare as a tool of eugenic reform, opting instead to advocate central state planning to ensure the propagation of the fit.

It is clear that the personal experiences of the younger generation of eugenicists who had fought in the First World War or been touched by its events and came to prominence in the Interwar years had largely learned two distinct lessons from their experiences. Firstly there was the idea that eugenics could be used, indeed must be used, to prevent future international conflict and to generally improve human society.

⁵¹ See Julian Huxley, Alfred C. Haddon, and A. M. Carr-Saunders, *We Europeans: A Survey of 'Racial' Problems* (London: J. Cape, 1935).

⁵² See Stefan Kühl, "The Relationship between Eugenics and the So-Called 'Euthanasia Action' in Nazi Germany: A Eugenically Motivated Peace Policy and the Killing of the Mentally Handicapped During the Second World War," in *Science in the Third Reich*, ed. Margit Szöllösi-Janze (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

⁵³ See, for instance, "Race and Propaganda" address by Keith, 15 July 1941, Arthur Keith Papers, Royal College of Surgeons, London

To use eugenics in this way, however, required vast amounts of international collaboration. This in turn led to a veritable legitimisation of Nazi biology and state policy as seemingly impartial observers such as Grant-Duff reported favourably on its ideas and application. The second lesson was largely in line with the ideas underpinning the British government's Appeasement policy in the mid to late 1930s: that Germany could not be profitably excluded from the international community, lest another war might follow. As with the first case, this led the eugenicists to embrace their German colleagues in a way they would later regret.⁵⁴ Together, these two lessons led British eugenics, indeed, eugenics worldwide, to give Nazi science inappropriate levels of legitimization and material support that proved valuable to the regime.⁵⁵ In a somewhat unusually direct statement in 1936, the *Eugenics Review* argued that the maintenance of peace was essential to the furtherance of eugenic aims. Considering the government's Appeasement policy and its detractors, the *Review* stated that, "Even those who, in the opinion of their political opponents, support policies which may result in war do so in the conviction that these policies will in fact ensure peace".⁵⁶ With almost chilling prescience of later events, the eugenicists argued that there was little doubt that another war would have catastrophic consequences:

Whether future wars will be dysgenic in the same way [as the First World War] depends in large part of their nature. If like previous wars they are fought mainly between healthy young adults, and if casualties are heavier among these than among persons less endowed with physical fitness and other solitary virtues, then answer must be yes. But what of wars waged by comparatively small bodies of highly-trained men against helpless civilian populations? The bombing planes may return safely to their bases, but will the bombs, the poison gas and germs discriminate between the biological qualities of those whom they attack?⁵⁷

Certainly there was not universal agreement amongst eugenicists on this point, as the work of more militant eugenicists such as Gini, Pearson, and Keith seems to demonstrate.⁵⁸ What is important to note, however, is that eugenics in the hands of the

⁵⁴ See, for instance, Blacker, "'Eugenic' Experiments Conducted by the Nazis."

⁵⁵ See Weiss.

⁵⁶ Anonymous, "Notes of the Quarter," *The Eugenics Review* XXVIII, no. 1 (1936-37): 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ See, for instance, Keith's writings on war in Arthur Keith, *Essays on Human Evolution* (London: Watts & Co., 1946).

First World War generation underwent a significant transition in its official stances that moved it out of its 19th century obsession with empire and colonial domination towards a more modern stance of advocating the tools of science to address social problems on a compassionate basis. The individual ideologies of the three individuals under consideration in the course of this study were clearly very different: Blacker was a left-leaning scientific rationalist, Pitt-Rivers was a right-wing racist who fell afoul of his own government, and Grant-Duff was a liberal-minded humanitarian who sought to improve the world for her children. Yet in the 1920s and 1930s they were brought together by their common belief that society could be improved by controlling human biology, and this belief eventually took them into the circles of one of Europe's most reprehensible regimes.

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