Published in final edited form as:

Camb Q Healthc Ethics. 2011 April ; 20(2): 191–203. doi:10.1017/S0963180110000848.

Eugenics and the Genetic Challenge, Again: All Dressed Up and Just Everywhere to Go

TOM KOCH

Dashiell Hammett's reaction was "sharp and angry, snarling" when he read, at her request, a work in progress by his friend and lover, Lillian Hellman. "He spoke as if I had betrayed him."¹ His judgment was absolute and his advice unsparing: "Tear this up and throw it away. It's worse than bad—it's half good."² That is exactly what I thought of Matti Häyry's *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge*³ as, for the third time in the evening, I penned a note in its margins and sent it sailing across the room in disgust. Cambridge University Press knows its book binding, however, and the spine of the text was undamaged.

I have no doubt this is the best book on its subject to date, one whose excellence builds from the work of a short list of bioethicists and philosophers who have argued one or another element of the "genetic challenge" that Häyry and his authors believe is exigent, real, and requiring their expert response. The authors he has chosen as the principal resources for this review roughly divide into three separate camps, each representing "normative doctrines of Western moral philosophy."⁴ Jonathan Glover⁵ and John Harris⁶ are consequentialists with a "rational tangibility approach" that is more or less utilitarian in its essence. Leon R. Kass⁷ and Michael J. Sandel⁸ are the Aristotelians, representatives of a more or less theological ethics. Jürgen Habermas⁹ and Ronald M. Green¹⁰ are harder to pigeonhole, especially Habermas, who is a philosopher but not a bioethicist (thank God!) and thus someone Harris loves to criticize.

These are the voices Häyry marshals to fashion his discussion of issues arising from the genetic challenge whose management is the subject of this book. He does this so well that it is often difficult to separate his argument from that of the authors and especially Glover and Harris, whom he especially admires.¹¹ The issues Häyry engages through his authors' works include, in a partial list, the idea of building "better babies" by genetic selection, the use of genetic screening to assure the birth of a child with specific characteristics, the conception of "saviour siblings" brought to term for the body parts they offer, embryonic stem cell research, genetic therapies, and the possibility of continued life extension. Other voices are safely lodged in footnotes and asides, a kind of shadow text whispering on occasion that other perspectives are available.

The Half Good

Häyry is ... nice. He is the kindly preacher who sees some good in everyone, perceiving God's hand among his congregants. Yes, Clem is a wastrel and a cheat, but he loves his dogs and does not beat his wife, at least not with any frequency. Mark beats his dogs but does not lay the strap to his children, whom he vigorously spansks. And Pam is rather promiscuous in her ways, but—heavens!—she does love that child of hers, whoever the biological father might be. Not for Häyry (in reading, I think of him as a familiar, shouting "Matti, really?" as I go) the defensive bombast of John Harris bellowing down the dissident view.¹² Nor does Häyry shy away, as Jonathan Glover often seems to do, from uncomfortable histories and their attendant issues.¹³ Häyry understands that, as Joseph Raz put it, "there is not much in ethical theory that is not disputed"¹⁴ and that those disputes can be honest, heartfelt, and still respectful. "The point of this book is to show that rationalities

vary, that disagreement is not necessarily an indication of stupidity or wickedness,” Häyry writes. “Although ethical issues have solutions within individual rationalities, they cannot be universally solved by intellectual arguments.”¹⁵ The promise of this ecumenical stance is something of a relief. It is Mao Tse Tung come back from the dead and into medical ethics: Plant one hundred flowers (and as the saying became), “let 100 flowers bloom.”¹⁶

Equally welcome is Häyry’s explicit definition of his “nonconfrontational notion of rationality” that, in theory if not necessarily in practice, informs his reading of the authors his book presents: “A decision is rational insofar as it is based on beliefs that form a coherent whole and are consistent with how things are in the world; and it is aimed at optimizing the immediate or long-term impacts on entities that matter.”¹⁷ In a book on “rationality and the genetic challenge,” this is the yardstick by which Häyry will parse his experts’ arguments across his book’s 240 pages.

The rationality is “nonconfrontational” because Häyry seeks neither agreement nor synthesis (really, he should try reading Hegel) but respectful coexistence. “I do not aim in this book to criticize other ethicists’ views at a normative level,” he states. “To claim that any of the six scholars whom I have introduced is wrong in any absolute sense forms no part of my philosophical conclusions.”¹⁸

There is a problem here. The definition of nonconfrontational rationality presents a set of criteria that require specific tests both of logic (Is it coherent? Is it consistent?) and factuality (“consistent with how things are in the world”). The rational decision aims at long- and short-term optimality as well, but this is a judgment and not a fact and so always open to dispute. If an author fails these criteria then Häyry, or a reader, must criticize the result. Häyry thus apologetically shreds John Harris’s frequent insistence that he can argue that the birth of people of difference (deaf, low vision, limited mobility) is wrong without affecting and perhaps harming the persons whose conditions he disparages. Häyry’s critique ends with a qualified, apologetic, conditional slam: “If this judgment cannot be eluded in the consequentialist analysis provided by Harris, his defense of the medical view seems contradictory.”¹⁹ Translated into his ministerial voice, he was saying: “You’re wrong, John, and egregiously so. But your fellow bioethicists still love you despite your hubris and errors.”

The Half Bad

A very narrow collection of hybrid flowers populates Häyry’s intellectual garden. All come from *genera* philosopher and mostly from *species* bioethicist. These are academic intellectuals generally lacking clinical or practical experience with persons of difference (I do not use disability as an adjective). This is important because Häyry’s principal authors, Glover and Harris, feel justified to speak about the existential “harm” of the existence of things they know little about, judging confidently the “life quality” they assume attends on those whose cognitive, physical, or sensory traits differ negatively from the authors’ norms. Absent from the authorial list are those whose arguments are based on experience as well as philosophy, whose critiques suggest the judgments of these bioethicist-philosophers are prejudicial, neither as well informed nor as compassionate as Häyry assumes them to be.²⁰

This is an unnecessary limit to both the book’s argument and its potential utility. Häyry could have included Eva Feddor Kittay, for example, a philosopher whose *Love’s Labor* deals elegantly with both the realities of loving and raising a child with differences and with things like Rawlsian theories of justice.²¹ He might have engaged any of the many feminist theorists active in both general philosophies, including Kantian theory,²² and the concepts of care, caring, and the sometimes rich existence of persons of difference.²³ In thinking about the quality of a life and its future, where is the argument from capabilities—a strong critique

of elements of those positions Häyry chooses to privilege—proposed by Amartya Sen²⁴ and carefully considered by Martha Nussbaum?²⁵

The result is not the ecumenical “nonconfrontational rationality” Häyry promises but a “conformal rationality” that is exclusive rather than inclusive, narrow and incomplete. Go to the rose garden (Glover, Harris) and you will find ... roses. Add a petunia or two (Habermas, Green) and it is a rose garden with two petunias. Häyry might say, “Well, I had to make a selection.” That is the point. He did choose and in his so doing steered the content of his book, its reality, away from certain arguments and toward others. At this point, after reading the introduction and first chapter, the book set sail toward the far wall of my living room. Cambridge University Press clearly understands its readers. The book held its own.

Bioethics and Eugenics

As a noun, *bioethics* conjures up a very Foucauldian sense of modern agency, of the politics and technologies that together create a bio-power “that takes as its object life itself, the life of the human qua living being, that is, the life of the human insofar as it is a living being.”²⁶ This is, for bioethics, a fortunate but absolutely incorrect definition of the noun. Bioethics began in hopes of a thoroughly eugenic enterprise that sought not the living being but its restructuring along guidelines whose purpose has never been clear. A Wisconsin research oncologist, Van Rensselaer Potter, coined the word in the 1970s to describe the eugenic enterprise “to help mankind toward a rational but cautious participation in the process of biological and cultural evolution.”²⁷

It is this eugenic sense of future management “for the benefit of human kind” that drives this book’s principal intellectual influences, Glover and Harris, who think they can prune the human tree by choosing people who will be like them, only better in some quasi-quantifiable way. Others are to be deselected, unborn. This resurrects a thoroughly American tradition begun at the latest in 1912 with Dr. Harry J. Haiselden’s active and passive euthanasia of children with obvious differences in Chicago, Illinois.²⁸ The authors advance a view of the undesirable person that owes much to Oliver Wendell Holmes’s landmark majority opinion in 1927, *Buck v Bell*.²⁹ Holmes not only permitted but also encouraged the involuntary sterilization of “defective” women (Carrie Buck was believed to have subnormal intelligence) so they could not breed further defectives. Should we seek the origin of the “better not born” argument, it lies in this American history, not elsewhere.

Where Holmes argued against the birth of “defectives” on the basis of the needs of the state, Glover and Harris argue on the basis of the person’s own good (do you want to be a dummy?³⁰), parental obligation (do you want to be the parent of a dummy?), and, perhaps, the species in general (we don’t want dummies here). To even begin to make their case, the authors and Häyry would have to demonstrate that modern technologies are sufficiently adept that they can both correctly characterize and appropriately value individual traits.

Those they assume would be better not born almost universally disagree, of course, insisting, when asked, that cognitive, physical, or sensory differences do not diminish their joy in life.³¹ It was the potential of the physically different but at least equally enjoyable life that Harriet McBryde Johnson argued to Princeton’s bioethicist–philosopher Peter Singer in her famous article “Unspeakable Conversations.”³² To her admirers, she was the living proof of the failure of the bioethicist’s argument that different capabilities necessarily result in inferior lives. University of California Professor of Psychiatry Dr. Harlan Hahn offered a similarly strong, equally personal rebuttal to Peter Singer (and thus to Harris and Glover) as part of an extended exchange in 2004–2005.³³

If our “nonconfrontational rationality” defining difference as harm is to be any more than prejudice disguised as wisdom, then it needs the ground-truthing Häyry promised and at least modest accord with the way the world is. He does not provide it, however, and neither do the authors he praises.

Eugenics (Figure 1)

The authors Häyry admires respond variously to the charge that the bioethics they argue continues a thoroughly eugenic tradition. Glover dismisses it, asserting those arguing equivalence between bioethics and a Nazi-style eugenics “do so at some distance from any serious knowledge of what the Nazis did.”³⁴ This is also the view of philosopher–ethicist Art Caplan, who similarly insists Nazi eugenic practices “have little to do with contemporary ethical debates about science, medicine, and technology.”³⁵

This is not, however, the position of young German geneticists and social scientists intimate with the history of German eugenics and human experimentation. In the early 1990s, Canadian researcher and writer Varda Burstyn traveled to Germany to ask young geneticists and scientists about the relationship between the old regime’s science and that being then advanced under the rubric of new reproductive technologies.³⁶ Burstyn’s interviewees grew up amidst the postwar German soul-searching as the nation paid reparations to families injured by Nazi programs of genetic selection and ethnic cleansing. These young scientists saw strong parallels in the then evolving new reproductive technologies and the eugenic programs of the Third Reich.

To deny the contemporary relevance of 20th century eugenics as if it were a solely German construct is incorrect, bad history, and thus a dissembling intellectual sleight of hand. The United States was the redoubtable birthplace of the international eugenic movement and a major exporter of its policies in the 1920s and 1930s.³⁷ To argue as if eugenics was a Germanic blip on the humanist screen, as authors like Glover, Harris, and Häyry seem to assume, is factually incorrect and, worse, misleading. What these authors are arguing is 1920s style American Eugenics—“for the betterment of Humankind”—and, at the least, that is, or should be ... troubling. As Gregor Wolbring argued in 2001, the real trick is not the “genetic challenge,” whatever that means, but surviving the eugenics advanced by authors like these in a “technological world.”³⁸

Evolution and the “Genetic Challenge”

Caplan, Glover, Häyry, and Harris are not geneticists, physicians, historians, or sociologists of science, medicine, or technology. They are moral philosophers generally inexperienced in the complex fields of knowledge assemblage they seek to apply. The question of competency is important both because Häyry’s definition of a “nonrational conformity” requires at least a pretense to accuracy (what I call ground truthing) and because Häyry asserts that their expertise is compelling and humanistically applicable: “Their prescriptions are always designed to reduce suffering and to promote the physical and psychological good of humanity in an impartial and equitable manner.”³⁹ On this throw the book’s binding bent.

Genetic Traits

Häyry defines the “genetic challenge” and its potential to reduce suffering and improve humanity this way: “Children’s inborn characteristics can be detected by prenatal and preimplantation tests; the molecular processes of the human body can be studied and modified; and changes can be introduced to our inherited and heritable features either individually or collectively.”⁴⁰ By selecting those characteristics, and their “molecular processes” (by which he means genetic signature, I think), individuals can be engineered in a fashion that will improve them (performance/lives) and thus humanity at large. Really?

First, it is more precise to speak of traits rather than characteristics. Traits are singular attributes (height, hair color, and so on) that are genetically defined. Characteristics more properly refer to a complex of interactive traits that result in “character” and personhood (the character of the person). The words are often used interchangeably, and that can, as it does here, lead to certain confusion. The inborn characteristics of children sounds like the complex person who is to be, and that is unknowable, in part because that character will result from familial and social realities that are anything but genetic.

It is correct to say that certain traits can be detected that will, if the embryo is allowed to survive, be present in the developing fetus. If the fetus is allowed to live, the traits will manifest in the person to be. We cannot modify them. We cannot change the XX to an XY chromosome (or vice versa); we cannot transpose Trisomy 21 into a nontripled pattern. If there is to be male pattern baldness, the best we can do is put aside money for a good toupee to be purchased in 30 years. If the recessive gene for Huntington’s disease is dominant, we can abort the fetus or let it live with the knowledge that, in 30–50 years, the disease will be activated if the person to be survives birth, childhood, adolescence, and early maturity. That is it. We cannot modify the evolving genetic structure to tweak brilliance, the production of pheromones, or the neurochemistry of the brain. We take it as it is or, really, we just kill it.

Evolution

Terminating that fetus (or discarding that embryo) will have no beneficial effect on the “physical and psychological good of humanity.” This has always been the error of the eugenicist, who thinks favoring this trait (that one lives) and disallowing that one (this one dies) is a noble boon to evolution. If evolutionary selection were as simple as Glover, Harris, and Häyry think, then all species members would have become as fleet as gazelles on the Savannah, as strong as our primate forbearers in the forest, and as brilliant in the water as the dolphin. In each generation only the fastest, strongest, and smartest would survive (a small sample, perhaps 1.5%?). That did not happen. We remained relatively slow, weak in comparison to natural predators, and of modest intelligence.

This is not to say we were evolutionary failures, of course: slow, weak, and dumb. The evolutionary processes of the Pleistocene period resulted in a human species whose survival depended on diversity within a community, not conformity.⁴¹ Some were faster and some were slower, some were timid and some adventurous. This person had great vision and that one extraordinary hearing and perhaps perfect pitch. It was not the individual trait but the congress of traits that evolved together that gave the human community its adaptive characteristics (and here the word is right). It is true of the stickleback fish and it is true of us.⁴² Species require different abilities, perceptions, and skills in their individual members so the species at large will possess a range of potential responses to a complexly changing environment. Because diversity persists in the human genome, the potential for change in response to changing environmental changes is preserved. Were the “genetic challenge” real, and not a eugenic skill, if we could change everyone to reflect the mundane norm, it likely would be the death knell of the species.

Selection of a specific trait is a great way to create a hothouse flower. But making a rare orchid does not improve orchids at large, just the hothouse species that will require perpetual care and selective breeding to maintain. Were the eugenicists able to select traits, the result would be, at very best, hothouse humans. What we have in these authors is not good science but in Richard Lewontin’s memorable phrase, *Biology as Ideology*,⁴³ and an unsavory ideology born of misunderstood biologies at that.

Traits In

Glover longs for the day when “genetic disadvantage should come to be seen as injustice.”⁴⁴ What is a genetic advantage and, conversely, what is disadvantageous? The eugenic philosophers think this obvious (faster, prettier, stronger, and so on) but obvious it is not. Most often they choose intelligence as an example of a trait we “of course” would seek to promote. Again, this is fantasy, not a present “challenge,” because we are not sure what intelligence is and do not know how to “select” for it. What intelligence are they discussing and how should it be measured? At present, this would mean breeding (or genetically selecting if such a thing were possible) high scorers on the Stanford-Binet intelligence test. Here, again, a bit of history is useful.

The creator of these tests, 19th century French educator Alfred Binet, sought not a measure of “intelligence” (a characteristic whose precise nature remains mysterious) but a diagnostic designed to identify kids in need of remedial education.⁴⁵ He was adamant this was not a test of anything but educational deficiencies. It was during the eugenics of the early 20th century that the American psychologist Charles Spearman conceived (incorrectly, we know today) of intelligence as a single, unitary, biologic thing whose existence could be tested as if it were, say, lung function. Stanford psychologists took this idea and transformed Binet’s diagnostic into the I.Q. test as a measure of biological reality, thus constructing the “intelligence” whose merits the ethicist–philosophers promote as a boon for future generations.

In the transformation of a diagnostic test into an existential attribute, American psychologists coined the noun *moron* to describe persons who tested at the low end of their tests. When the Stanford-Binet tests were applied to World War I army recruits, something like 30% of the inductees were classified as moronic.⁴⁶ That did not disbar their service, of course. It should have but did not make the tests themselves disreputable. It turned out that test performance was as much a function of education, economic advantage, literacy, and social support as it was a measure of something innate. Intelligence, however it is measured, is not a trait like hair or eye color but a complex characteristic outcome of biological, environmental, and social influences. Should the bioethicist–eugenicist wish to improve the performance of future generations, he or she would need, therefore, to advance as a species necessity the economic development, general education, and healthcare of all peoples, with special attention to those identified as needing help. That is what science requires of Glover, Harris, and Häyry if they are serious about species promotion.

The Will to Be

Even if we could breed children with the potential speed at maturity of a gazelle, the innate balance of a monkey, and the strength of a gorilla, innate traits only become actualized abilities with repetitive study and practice. To have the potential for speed one needs to run, and run, and run. To perform on the uneven parallel bars takes years of bruising practice that occurs within the painful and humiliating experience of countless failures. The will to be is not a trait even Glover or Harris, or the admiring Häyry, think can be gifted genetically.

Every parent I know has despaired at some point of the slug of a child (or spouse) whose gifts were being wasted on a sofa in front of the television, on the broadening seat of the stretch pants before the computer. Excellence may require an innate ability, but it also demands a passion to work at something that seems worth doing. The will to *do*, the practical equivalent of the will to be, is not something that can be instilled in a eugenic program of “species advancement.” It is typically nurtured in a context of familial and social support, things the faux science contemporary eugenicists do not treat.

Similarly, useful intelligence is the result of hard work and long study and longer struggles with the application of acquired data to create useful knowledge. Breeding, or otherwise selecting genetically for a future population who perform well on the Stanford-Binet I.Q. test, would populate the world with members of MENSА (“the international high-IQ society”). Founded in 1945, the society’s members are, in the main, not noble prize laureates, not Pulitzer Prize writers, fine musicians, good artists, great scientists, or particularly deep thinkers. Those I have known were more likely to be under-rather than overachievers. Their ability to score well on the test does not necessarily transpose into any more useful characteristic.

As a personal aside, I would rather spend a week with members of the Canadian Down syndrome Society (I am a member) than any time at all with MENSА society members. The latter seem to be general underachievers who think they are owed something by a world that does not recognize their smarts. The former are funny, unassuming, and often extremely perceptive emotionally. They are concrete in their thinking, direct in their speech, and, unlike me, largely nonjudgmental. Compared to the congregants at the American Society for Bioethics and the Humanities (I am a member), the folks at the annual meeting of the Canadian Down syndrome Society are paragons of human civility.

Simply, one cannot breed human attributes (affection, artistry, intelligence) in the same way that an orchid is bred to a bizarre coloration. We do not know what traits will be needed to make a life full or what characteristics in persons will be needed by the community at large. Even if we knew those we could not force them through genetic manipulation because they are all complex outcomes rather than simple traits like eye color. “The betterment of mankind,” as the old eugenics slogan stated it, lies in the arenas of education, health, and social infrastructure, the hard work that permits a society to encourage its members to their full potential. It is this hard if pedestrian work that the eugenic-philosophers cum ethicists, including Häyry, studiously ignore. Without hard work in the complexly interconnected arenas of socioeconomic endeavor, the eugenicist’s “project of mastery”⁴⁷ will necessarily fail, I argue, and will do so in a spectacular manner.

Cloning

Here, by the way, is the secret of the cloning debate, framed as if the science were immediately present and not lodged in some future. Anyone who wants a genetic replica of him- or herself should be allowed that privilege as long as it is understood that the progenitor and his or her clone will be required to live in the same domicile for 20 years. The cloners will deserve themselves. The genetic potential replicated in their offspring will not necessarily be actualized in a fashion resembling the cloner’s parental dream. An Albert Einstein clone might become a school teacher who plays oboe at night. A Tiger Woods clone might grow up despising golf as a ridiculous waste of time (“But it gave you a good home, son”), choosing instead to spend his life in fashion design. Glover’s or Harris’s genetic offspring might become scientists, disdaining parental philosophies as lacking in the rigor of electron microscopy.

One does not gift ability or excellence through genetic selection. There is no call for the thousands of words poured since the early days of eugenics upon the “genetic challenge” of a science that does not exist and a possibility that is unlikely to occur. Human characteristics are multifocal and multivariant, a result of a complex interaction of natural resources and social conditionings. The one thing rarer, and less well understood, than comprehensive intelligence is personality, the complexity of traits that makes each of us unique.

Parental Rights

Even if the “genetic challenge” is something of a sham and the potential for “enhancing evolution” a huckster’s promise, so what? Häyry and his colleagues are united in asserting that, irrespective of the limits of contemporary science, parents have the right to make reproductive choices for the offspring they will raise. This is apparently true, however, only when people make choices the bioethicist–eugenicist approves. In Häyry’s book, we see this in the discussion of the famously contested case of prospective parents who, deaf, sought for implantation a viable embryo that would, when mature, also be deaf.⁴⁸ Häyry gives John Harris full rein here and Harris fulminates no little against this parental choice. It is “harmful” he says and not to be condoned. So this is not a matter of “you get to choose” but “you get to choose only if your choices fall within our parameters.” To be fair, Häyry is uncomfortable with Harris’s point of view, giving some space to the view that deafness is the least disabling of all the disadvantages. Were he not so heartfelt and sincere, this would be insulting, of course, in ways that he cannot imagine.

But he does recognize that the real questions are how to judge harm and who does the judging. If we credit Glover and Harris (disability *is* disadvantage) we do not listen to those who share the disputed trait, and certainly not the parents who have made their free choice based on personal experience. Nor do we listen to the many social scientists and medical researchers like Oliver Sacks who have studied the communities of the deaf with open admiration.⁴⁹

This is a debate I have had with Harris in the past,⁵⁰ one he reprises in his book *Enhancing Evolution*.⁵¹ As proof of harm, he insists the person that would be will not be able to listen to music. I remind him of Beethoven, whose great, later works were written and conducted in a state of increasing deafness. Harris says irrelevant, and I say no, listen to the rhythmic structure of the late symphonies that is felt through the vibration of percussion as well as heard. Bosh, he will say. I then say, well, what about the work of Grammy Award-winning musician Evelyn Glennie, who is also deaf. I can send you a video.⁵² And so on. At a certain point honest posture becomes simple posturing and the wealth of evidence (“how things are in the world”) makes the assertion of harm an empty prejudice, nothing more. That Harris and others are so willing to deny parental choice on the basis of this type of prejudice makes “parental choice” a thoroughly contingent goal to be granted or withheld at the nonclinical, nonmedical, and the ethicist’s divine eugenic whim.

The Real Question

None of this considers the questions that do require ethical debate and philosophical consideration. First, what are the characteristics of the society we wish to create through our treatment of the individuals in it? Evolution, after all, is about the species and the character of the human society we wish to build, not the traits of this or that individual. How are we to promote a society in which the capabilities of people, capabilities that will necessarily be diverse, are nurtured and then given full play? The second question is whether we wish to treat members of that society as fungible persons, interchangeable ciphers, or as important and valuable members whose relative strengths will be celebrated and whose limits will be accepted, compensated for by others. Alas, those are questions this book does not treat, and for me, that is its failure.

A Personal Note

I have been tasked in the past, and will be tasked here, with being insulting where collegiality requires a certain diffidence. All this is, after all, “good fun,” issue editor John Coggon wrote to me, and if it is a serious business, then not too, too serious. This is all deadly serious to me, however. Were the eugenicist–philosophers to hold sway, the world I

live in would be a depopulated, barren place. Indeed, if the eugenic philosophers held sway in 1949, and the science they propose as fact in place, I would not have been born, my father told me in his last years. I would have been aborted because of an inherited, genetic condition causing low vision. Had he relented and permitted my birth, I would never have known Berkeley anthropologist Devva Kasnitz, my friend for 40 years, who lives with dystonia, a neurological muscle disorder.⁵³

If the eugenicists had their way, Princeton's Peter Singer would not have had a McBryde Johnson to challenge him with her acute intelligence argued from the perspective of her wheelchair. Bioethics would have been bereft of blind Adrian Ashe and her contributions to their literature. Perhaps we would have lost San Francisco philosopher Anita Silver, too, if the logic of eugenics held and the "harm" of killing a person before birth extended to not saving a person with a paralyzing disease in youth (poliomyelitis). Music would not have had Paul Pena (blind from birth), Woodie Guthrie (familial Huntington Disease), or Blind Doc Watson to enlarge our days.

If we aborted all the female embryos and fetuses that would in late maturity manifest breast cancer, MS, and familial dementia, I would never have known many of the partners whose lives I have shared. Termination is not compassion, and there is no science to support the great boon these authors promise, as eugenicists always have promised, so confidently.

There may come a day in the far future when we are indeed able to alter with great specificity the genetics of the developing embryo or fetus. There may come a day when we can speak knowingly about the complexity of species diversity and flexibility. At that time, we may question the continuance of certain traits, but, I suspect, we will by then have learned to leave diversity be. Species improvement is a fine goal. To actualize it requires not eugenic terminations but improving the education and health of species members, promoting diversity and its potential within our communities. There is philosophy here, and an ethics to be advanced. But it is not a simplicity that masquerades as wisdom or an ethics that poses as compassionate. When considered carefully, the arguments of Häyry and the authors considered most prominently in his book are grounded in little but a prejudicial hope that future generations might be more like them. My hope is the opposite. I would prefer—and I say this compassionately and in hopes of a better humanity—they were the endangered species rather than my friends and I.

Notes

1. Hellman, L.; Hammett, D. Introduction. In: Hellman, L., editor. *The Big Knockover: Selected Stories and Short Novels by Dashiell Hammett*. Random House; New York: 1966. p. xiv
2. See note 1, Hellman 1966:xiv.
3. Häyry, M. *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge: Making People Better?*. Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, UK: 2010.
4. See note 4, Häyry 2010:27.
5. See, especially, Glover, J. *Choosing Children: Genes, Disability, and Design*. Clarendon Press; Oxford: 2006.
6. See, especially, Harris, J. *Enhancing Evolution: The Ethical Case for Making Better People*. Princeton University Press; Princeton, NJ: 2007.
7. For example, Kass, LR.; Wilson, JQ. *The Ethics of Human Cloning*. AEI Press; Washington, DC: 1998.
8. Sandel, MJ. *The Case against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; Cambridge, MA: 2007.
9. Habermas, J. *The Future of Human Nature*. In: Reh, W.; Pensky, J., editors; Beister, H., translator. Polity Press; Cambridge, UK: 2003.

10. Green, RM. *Babies by Design: The Ethics of Genetic Choice*. Yale University Press; New Haven, CT: 2007.
11. See note 4, Häyry 2010:40.
12. Compare, for example, Häyry's treatment of Habermas and that of Harris in his *Enhancing Evolution*; see note 7.
13. Here I take especial exception to Harris's refusal to treat seriously the relationship between early and late 20th century eugenics, his posture, and that of the early American eugenicists discussed later in this paper.
14. Raz, J. *Value, Respect, and Attachment*. Cambridge University Press; New York: 2001. p. 1
15. See note 4, Häyry 2010:xii.
16. Mao, TD. On the correct handling of the contractions among the people. In: Kau, M.; Leung, JK., editors. *The Writings of Mao Tse Tung, 1949–1976*. Vol. Vol. 2. Sharpe; New York: 1992. p. 6-16. The 100 flowers campaign of 1956–1957 was advanced by Mao Tse Tung in China to encourage different ideas and perspectives in both art and the civil life of the nation. The campaign is generally said to have begun with Mao's January 1956 *Speech on the Question of Intellectuals*. The precise translation of the phrase is: "Let a hundred flowers blossom, let a hundred schools of thought contend."
17. See note 4, Häyry 2010:43.
18. See note 4, Häyry 2010:40.
19. See note 4, Häyry 2010:89.
20. See note 4, Häyry 2010:40.
21. Kittay, EF. *Love's Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*. Routledge; New York: 1999.
22. Shott, RM., editor. *Feminist Interpretations of Immanuel Kant*. Pennsylvania State University Press; University Park, PA: 1997.
23. For example, Held, V. *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global*. Oxford University Press; New York: 2006.
24. Sen, A. *Inequality Reexamined*. Harvard University Press; Cambridge, MA: 1992.
25. Nussbaum, MC. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Harvard University Press; Cambridge, MA: 2006. p. 155-216.
26. Tremain, S. Introduction. In: Tremain, S., editor. *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critical Disability Theory*. University of Michigan Press; Ann Arbor, MI: 2005. p. 4
27. Reich WT. How bioethics got its name. *Hastings Center Journal*. 1993; 23:S6–7.
28. Pernick, MS. *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures since 1915*. Oxford University Press; New York: 1996. p. 29
29. *Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S. 200 (1927).
30. It is impolite in the bioethical literature to speak bluntly. Sometimes, however, bluntness is needed because those affected see these things without the covering language of polite collegiality with which we tend to mask our judgments. Here I use "dummy" to translate the effect to the concrete.
31. Koch T. Life quality versus the "quality of life" assumptions underlying prospective quality of life instruments in health care planning. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2000; 51(3):419–28. [PubMed: 10855928] ; Koch T. Future states: Testing the axioms underlying prospective, future-oriented, health planning instruments. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2001; 52(3):453–66. [PubMed: 11330779]
32. McBryde Johnson, H. [last accessed 11 Mar 2010] Unspeakable conversations. *New York Times Magazine*. Feb 16. 2003 available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/16/magazine/unspeakable-conversations.html?pagewanted=1>
33. Koch T, Singer P. Point counter-point: The ideology of normalcy. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*. 2005; 16(2):123–9.
34. See note 5, Glover 2006:29.
35. Caplan AL. Misusing the Nazi analogy. *Science*. 2005; 309:535. [PubMed: 16040671]

36. Burstyn, V.; Lipman, A. Breeding discontent. In: Basen, G.; Eichler, M., editors. *Misconceptions: The Social Construction of Choice and the New Reproductive and Genetic Technologies*. Vol. 1. Voyageur Publishing; Hull, Quebec: 1993. p. 171-96.
37. See note 28, Pernick 1996:163.
38. Wolbring, G. Where do we draw the line? Surviving eugenics in a technological world. In: Priestly, M., editor. *Disability and the Life Course: Global Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, UK: 2001. p. 38-49.
39. See note 4, Häyry 2010:40.
40. See note 4, Häyry 2010:2.
41. Jacquard, A. *Praise of Difference: Genetics and Human Affairs*. Moriarty, M., translator. Columbia University Press; New York: 1984.
42. Katsnelson A. Odd man out: Do fish have personalities? *The Scientist*. 2010; 24(3):34–9.
43. Lewontin, RC. *Biology as Ideology: The Doctrine of DNA*. HarperPerennial; New York: 1994.
44. Glover, J. *Choosing Children: The Ethical Dilemmas of Genetic Intervention*. Clarendon Press; New York: 2006. p. 61
45. Brosco, JP. More than the names have changed: Exploring the historical epidemiology of intellectual disability in the US. In: Commachio, C.; Golden, J.; Weisz, G., editors. *Healing the World's Children: Comparative and Interdisciplinary Approaches to Child Health in the Twentieth Century*. McGill-Queens University Press; Montreal: 2008. p. 205-34.
46. See note 45, Brosco 2008.
47. See note 4, Häyry 2010:34.
48. See note 4, Häyry 2010:84-6.
49. Sacks, O. *Seeing Voices: A Journey into the World of the Deaf*. University of California Press; Berkeley, CA: 1989.
50. Harris J. One principle and three fallacies of disability studies. *Journal of Medical Ethics*. 2001; 26:383–7. [PubMed: 11731601] ; Koch T. Disability and difference: Balancing social and physical constructions. *Journal of Medical Ethics*. 2001; 27:370–6. [PubMed: 11731598]
51. See note 6, Harris 2007:102-3.
52. Riddelsheimer, T. *Touch the Sound: A Sound Journey with Evelyn Glennie*. Shadow Distribution; Waterville, ME: 2005.
53. This would not have been my loss alone, of course. See, for example, Kasnitz, D. Life event histories and the US independent living movement. In: Priestly, M., editor. *Disability and the Life Course: Global Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, UK: 2001. p. 67-79.

Figure 1. American Philosophical Society poster from the 1920s promoting eugenics as a means of “self-direction” and “human evolution.” Courtesy: Library of Congress.