EXPLAINING RUSSELL'S EUGENIC DISCOURSE IN THE 1920S

Stephen Heathorn
History / McMaster U.
Hamilton, ON, Canada L8S 4K1
heaths@mcmaster.ca

In his biography, Ray Monk expresses surprise and disgust that Bertrand Russell should have included a discussion of eugenics in his famous book on marriage and sexual morality, *Marriage and Morals* (1929). Monk is especially horrified that Russell advocated the sterilization of the "mentally defective". He draws the conclusion that such views must have been due to a combination of Russell's negative feelings about his second wife, Dora, and his life-long fear of insanity. In fact Russell came to his views in dialogue with the dominant scientific and political communities of his day. Russell's position was the logical consequence of his fear of the rise of State intervention in society and the erosion of individual rights. When put into proper historical context, it is clear that it was Russell's engagement with early twentieth-century politics and science, not personal or psychological demons, that was the motive force behind his views on marriage and eugenics.

INTRODUCTION

In the second volume of his biography of Bertrand Russell, Ray Monk correctly remarks that Russell's *Marriage and Morals* (1929) generally does not live up to its *post facto* reputation as an amoral tract on sexual liberty. The book's notorious reputation stems mostly from its use to condemn Russell in the 1940 City College of New York appointment controversy.[1] Monk rightly notes that in actuality, Russell

[1] See Thom Weidlich, *Appointment Denied: the Inquisition of Bertrand Russell* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000).

russell: the Journal of Bertrand Russell Studies n.s. 25 (winter 2005–06): 107–39
The Bertrand Russell Research Centre, McMaster U. ISSN 0036-01631

presented a case for stoic self-control over jealousy and not for free reign of one's sexual impulses. Russell did indeed attack conventional morality, especially the "Christian abhorrence of sex", but suggested that sexual liberty, in itself, is not necessarily good, but may prove to be the only way to preserve the institution of marriage in the face of the advance of a scientific outlook. This is because marriage, for Russell, was really about parenthood, and since adultery is less harmful to the parental relationship than jealousy it ought to be tolerated. While Monk finds the success of such views to be improbable, he nonetheless suggests that *Marriage and Morals* is the most important work written by Russell in the 1920s. Yet he also suggests that the book "contains, perhaps, more eccentric views than any other book Russell wrote" (Monk, 2: 104).

What puzzles Monk most about *Marriage and Morals* is that Russell devoted a chapter to eugenics and, moreover, explicitly advocated the sterilization of the mentally "defective". Eugenics originated in Britain and melded together three strands of late-Victorian science: a hereditary theory of population, the study of population statistics, and a theory of population regulation derived from population genetics.[2] The common aim, and perhaps only unifying belief behind eugenics, was the conviction that it was possible to intervene in the reproduction of the population to biologically improve future generations. These included "neo-Malthusian"-inspired measures, like promoting birth control amongst the poor, or reducing public funds needed for poor relief; "positive" eugenic measures, like encouraging the "fit" to breed more and only with other "fit" individuals; or "negative" eugenic measures, like decreasing the fertility rate of the "unfit" by either separating so-called defectives from society, or preventing them breeding altogether through medical sterilization.[3] Monk is amazed that a "defender of individual

[2] Richard Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birth-rate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chapel Hill, NC: U. of North Carolina P., 1990). See also Geoffrey Searle, *Eugenics and Politics in Britain 1900–1914* (Leyden: Noordohf International, 1976).

[3] Eugenists emphasized selective marriage and large families among the best stock as the path to social and racial improvement whereas neo-Malthusians stressed restriction rather than an increase of births. Nevertheless, the two groups were in some respects allies against indiscriminate breeding. That alliance was shattered, however, by fears of greatly reduced population levels resulting from World War I. See Richard Soloway, "Neo-Malthusians, Eugenists, and the Declining Birth-Rate in England, 1900–1918",

liberties against the power of the State" could advocate that

> the State should be empowered forcibly to sterilise all those designated as "mentally deficient" by experts, and that this measure should be introduced in full knowledge of the misuses to which it might be liable, because reducing the number of "idiots, imbeciles and feeble-minded" people is a benefit to society that outweighs the dangers of such misuse. (Monk, 2: 105)

Monk's response to his own puzzlement and revulsion with Russell's views is to take recourse to a psychological treatment of Russell's state of mind in the 1920s. For Monk, *Marriage and Morals* reflected Russell's feelings about his relationship with his second wife, Dora, anxiety about his rights and responsibilities as a father, and—in order to bolster a theme that runs through both volumes of Monk's biography—a product of Russell's intense, life-long fear of insanity.

This may seem like a plausible explanation—it does at least acknowledge Russell's interest in eugenics (an issue glossed over entirely by the other major biographies of Russell[4])—and Monk is certainly less psychologically determinist than some of Russell's other biographers.[5] However, Monk's argument is not a very good explanation. First, Monk fails to account for the fact that neither Russell's views on marriage nor those on eugenics were a product of his situation in the 1920s. In fact, they evolved steadily from the 1890s. Second, Monk ignores the fact that Russell came to embrace these positions as part of an ongoing dialogue with the prevailing consensus of his time. Indeed, what is entirely missing in Monk's account is the intellectual and cultural context to the ideas that Russell was promoting. When properly contextualized, however, the chapter on eugenics in *Marriage and Morals*, and its placement in a text on the reform of marriage, were not eccentric for 1929. Rather, Russell's views were entirely consistent with the general framing of sexual ethics by progressive sex and moral reformers since the turn of the

Albion, 10 (1978): 264–86, and *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877–1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: U. of North Carolina P., 1982).

[4] In *SLBR*, 1: 127, Griffin does have a brief discussion, as do a number of headnotes in the *Collected Papers*. Wood, Clark, Moorehead, and Alan Ryan, *Bertrand Russell: a Political Life* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988), however, do not.

[5] For instance, Andrew Brink, *Bertrand Russell: the Psychobiography of a Moralist* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities P., 1989).

century.

This is not to claim that Russell's challenging personal life with Dora in the later 1920s did not have an impact on the content or timing of *Marriage and Morals*, or that anxiety about the history of mental instability in his own family did not influence his views. Clearly, they did. But if we are to fully understand the shape of Russell's arguments about marriage reform and the place of eugenic discourse within them, we need to be attentive to more than just Russell's personal life: we need to contextualize Russell's views within the range of possibilities of his time, to place his views in the debates that were unfolding, and to see how his dialogue with other viewpoints advanced his own position. This article will attempt to do just this, by first outlining British eugenics and contextualizing Russell's own views within the continuum of eugenic ideas between the 1890s and 1930s, and then explaining the place of eugenic ideas within sex and marriage reform generally, and in Russell's *Marriage and Morals* in particular. Third and last, it will explore Russell's endorsement of the sterilization of the unfit, and demonstrate, given the full context provided, the continued libertarian logic of Russell's position. In sum, once the intellectual and cultural contexts of the ideas presented in the book and Russell's other writings on eugenics and marriage in the 1920s are made apparent, the autobiographical element privileged by Monk can be put in its proper, subordinate place.

RUSSELL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BRITISH EUGENICS

In the two decades prior to the First World War, a number of British intellectuals expressed concern over a perceived demographic trend in Britain—the so-called "differential birth rate", in which the poor reproduced much faster than the wealthy.[6] This was feared because it was accompanied by a "rediscovery" of the terrible physical and moral condition of much of the labouring poor, but especially of the "submerged tenth" (or the "residuum"—the very lowest rung on the socio-economic hierarchy).[7] After the majority of working-class volunteers for the Brit-

[6] Soloway, "Neo-Malthusians".

[7] Anthony Wohl, *Endangered Lives: Public Health in Victorian Britain* (London: Methuen, 1984), pp. 43–79. For two studies that discuss this rediscovery in radically different ways, see Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London* (Harmondsworth; Penguin,

ish forces in the Boer War (1899–1902) were found to be unfit for service, the government struck a committee to determine if the population was facing progressive "racial degeneration".[8] Although the committee's findings were ambiguous, and indeed suggested environmental factors were mostly to blame, the neo-Lamarckian understandings of genetic inheritance expressed in the report mirrored those of numerous early twentieth-century scientists and social reformers, many of whom posited that urban environmental factors were causing the progressive decline of the nation's "racial" stock.[9] Conservatives and social Darwinists, in particular, posited that each generation reared in poor working-class urban crowding were successively more physically and mentally stunted. These traits were then passed on through "in-breeding" resulting in a "racially" inferior population.[10] The long-term health of the British "race" was thought endangered by Victorian social amelioration legislation that penalized "the fit for the sake of the unfit". Indeed, eugenists argued that public health and social reform initiatives, often heralded by the Victorians as key measures of progress, "have been based on the [wrong] assumption that better environment meant race progress."[11] In this view, class hierarchy and poverty were not social or economic problems but biological in origin.[12]

But eugenics was not merely a conservative backlash to social reform.

1976) and Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: the Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

[8] Great Britain, *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration* (1904), Cd. 2175, Vol. 1, Report and Appendix. It should be stressed that the term "race", when used in such discussions, was variously and promiscuously deployed to refer to the whole of the human species, or various subsets within it. While some British eugenists certainly did advocate what we would today recognize as explicitly racist policies, not all those who used eugenic language did so. For a discussion of these and the interpenetration of race and class categories in British eugenics, see Dan Stone, "Race in British Eugenics", *European History Quarterly*, 31 (2001): 397–425.

[9] Searle, *Eugenics and Politics*, pp. 23–4.

[10] Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, pp. 128–30. See also Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain 1800–1960* (Hamden: Archon, 1982), which argues that the concept of race in scientific research developed as a series of accommodations to the idea that inequalities among human races are of natural origin.

[11] First editorial of the *Eugenics Review*, 1 (April 1909): 4.

[12] Greta Jones, *Social Hygiene in Twentieth Century Britain* (New York: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 29; Wohl, *Endangered Lives*, p. 334; Searle, *Eugenics and Politics*, pp. 29–34, 45–66.

Given the intellectual ferment among scientists about the applicability of Darwinian biology at the turn of the century, and the growing sense that Britain was in some way falling behind its European competitors, it is hardly surprising that attempts were made by intellectuals of all political stripes to link the new science to national life, political action, and social reform.[13] As Richard Soloway notes: "Eugenics permeated the thinking of generations of English men and women worried about the biological capacity of their countrymen to cope with the myriad changes they saw confronting their old nation in a new century."[14] Many of the progressive intellectuals with whom Russell associated in the 1890s and early 1900s agreed that manipulation of the social environment through "rational selection" could improve human conduct and thus help direct evolutionary change in a positive way. This view was expressed in an influential set of pamphlets—"The New Tracts for the Times"—authored by many progressive acquaintances of Russell.[15] Fabian socialists, in particular, saw in eugenics a scientific programme of social engineering that corresponded to their views of the role of professional elites in the State.[16] Progressives and Fabians supported the 1909 introduction of an allowance of £10 to income payers for every child below sixteen.[17] Since only the middle and upper classes paid significant income tax at

[13] See Peter Bowler's books, *The Mendelian Revolution: the Emergence of Hereditarian Concepts in Modern Science and Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1989); *Evolution: the History of an Idea* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1984); and *The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. P., 1983).

[14] Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, pp. xvii–xviii.

[15] Havelock Ellis, *Sex and Race Regeneration* (London: Cassell, 1911); C. W. Saleeby, *The Methods of Race-Regeneration* (London: Cassell, 1911); Rev. F. B. Meyer, *Religion and Race-Regeneration* (London: Cassell, 1912), Arthur Newsholme, *The Declining Birth Rate: Its National and International Significance* (London: Cassell, 1912); R. F. Horton, *National Ideals and Race Regeneration* (London: Cassell, 1912); Mary Scharlieb, *Womanhood and Race Regeneration* (London: Cassell, 1912); John E. Gorst, *Education and Race Regeneration* (London: Cassell, 1913). The first six of the "New Tracts for the Times" were reviewed in glowing terms in the *Eugenics Review,* 4 (1912): 94–6.

[16] Christopher Shaw, "Eliminating the Yahoo—Eugenics, Social Darwinism and Five Fabians", *History of Political Thought*, 8 (1987): 521–44. Shaw concentrates on D. G. Ritchie, H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, and Beatrice and Sidney Webb, all of who saw in the Darwinian theory of natural selection an argument for a program of social engineering.

[17] Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 135.

the time, the measure altered the tax system so as to encourage middle-class procreation, with the hope of reversing the fertility differential. Similarly, many progressives supported the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913, which provided that people certified as "feeble-minded" by two medical doctors could be confined in an institution indefinitely.[18]

Significantly, Russell's own interest in eugenics predated this Edwardian outburst of debate and legislation. Russell first engaged the ideas of the originator of eugenics, Francis Galton, in the 1890s, debating them with his fiancée Alys, and at that time even suggesting a number of mildly eugenic policies of his own, including a proposal to issue marriage suitability certificates—an idea that was frequently promoted by members of the Eugenics Society in the *Eugenics Review* well into the 1930s.[19] Indeed, Alys and Russell made a fundamentally eugenic decision not to have children with one another precisely because they had been warned by Russell's family of the prevalence of mental illness among their ancestors. Thereafter, Russell seems to have kept well abreast of developments within genetic research. He was certainly aware of the debate in England between proponents of deductive experimentation based on Gregor Mendel's rediscovered theory and those, like Karl Pearson, who argued for a purely statistical, "biometric" approach to population genetics: both sides actively supported eugenics at the time.[20] Russell's own discussions of genetics rested on both Pearson's statistical reasoning and on the biological tradition of vital forces evident in Galton's law of ancestral heredity. Significantly, Russell tried to sup-

[18] The best discussion of the Act, its origins and consequences is to be found in Matthew Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency: Eugenics, Democracy, and Social Policy in Britain c. 1870–1959* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1998).

[19] For Russell's proposal see his letter to Alys, 2 Oct. 1894 (*SLBR*, 1: 128). Marriage regulation was routinely raised as a eugenic possibility in the Edwardian years; see A. F. Tredgold, "Marriage Regulation and National Family Records", *Eugenics Review*, 4 (1912): 74–90, and "Legal Certificates of Health before Marriage", *Eugenics Review*, 5 (1913): 356–62. The Council of the Eugenics Society proposed the exchange of marriage certificates in its "Outline of a Practical Eugenic Policy", *Eugenics Review*, 18 (1926): 97.

[20] While at Cambridge Russell had met the biologist William Bateson who popularized the Mendelian position after 1900. (See Robert Olby, "William Bateson's Introduction of Mendelism to England: a Reassessment", *British Journal for the History of Science*, 20 [1987]: 399–420.) William was the elder brother of Mary Bateson, a friend and confidant of Russell at Cambridge, and Russell had read Pearson in the 1890s. See "Journal" and "What Shall I Read?", in *Papers* 12 and 1, respectively.

port biological explanations where he thought them warranted, while simultaneously exposing the ideological prejudices of many eugenists to withering ridicule. As he noted in 1907:

> … social reformers must not be misled by biologists into regarding science as their enemy, but must learn to take account of science, however repulsive may be the garb in which it is presented to them. And men of science, too, one may hope … will cease to use a scaffolding of biology merely to build a shelter for their prejudices. ("The Politics of a Biologist", *Papers* 12: 373)

As is well known, Russell came to fear what he saw as the worship of the State and distrust of democracy implicit particularly in the beliefs of Fabians like the Webbs (*PfM*, p. 102; *Auto.* 1: 76–80). But on the demographic differential, Russell publicly agreed with the concern evinced by Sidney Webb and other progressives on the prospect of "race suicide" if the differential birth rate continued and that the State should step in to do something about this problem.[21] The paradox for Russell was that "economic and military success" were "causes of biological failure" as the successful elite left

> … fewer descendants than are left by the poor and the vanquished. Consequently courage, intelligence, perseverance, foresight and energy, biologically speaking, [were] disadvantageous to a race or an individual, and these qualities, if selection continues to operate as at present, will tend to die out of the human race. ("Politics of a Biologist", *Papers* 12: 366–7)

While Russell argued, dubiously, that biologically innate values like "foresight and energy" were at risk, he nonetheless reasoned that the mechanism of this process was socially, rather than biologically, determined. It was a combination of economic and social factors—primarily the cost of raising children—that led to a diminution of the propagation of children of the better sort (by which he clearly meant more intelligent) and to an increase of the less desirable. As he explained in his *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (1916):

[21] Sidney Webb, "Regeneration or Race Suicide", *The Times*, 11 Oct. and 16 Oct. 1906, and Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *The Decline of the Birth Rate* (London: Fabian Tract no. 131, 1907). Russell cited Webb's arguments in *PSR*, p. 192.

> Working-class boys of exceptional ability rise, by means of scholarships, into the professional class; they naturally desire to marry into the class to which they belong by education … [but due to their origins] they cannot marry young, or afford a large family. The result is that in each generation the best elements are extracted from the working classes and artificially sterilized, at least in comparison with those who are left. (P. 178)

This explanation follows very closely the consensus of mainline eugenists like Oxford pragmatist philosopher F. C. S. Schiller—"the ability in the lower classes always tends to be drafted off into the higher"[22]—a maven of the Eugenics Society, with whom Russell debated both logic and politics in the years prior to the Great War.[23]

That Russell and mainline eugenists would agree that the most intelligent were more often found amongst the middle and upper classes is really not surprising: the idea came straight from Galton himself.[24] Galton's view—that the vast majority of material and intellectual accomplishments of British society were the result of successive generations of highly talented individuals from upper-class families—had been the stated basis for forming the Eugenics Society in 1907, which was charged with both educating the public on the importance of genetic inheritance, and with advocating public policy that would preserve the talents and energy of the fit and prevent them from being swamped by the "residuum".[25] Given his own Whig pedigree and respect for mathematics, it is hardly surprising that Russell would have had considerable sympathy with Galton's arguments. In 1895 Russell had excitedly exclaimed to Alys that Galton "gets a numerical estimate of the contribution of each ancestor to heredity."[26] But rather than embracing social Darwinism and *laissez faire* political economy as did many others who took up Galton,[27] Russell found in Galton's work the "preaching [of] Socialism as a method of keeping up the breed—it is the best argument I know for

[22] Response to Carr-Saunders by F. C. S. Schiller, *Eugenics Review*, 6 (1914): 331.

[23] This correspondence is in RA1 710 and RA3 REC. ACQ. 126.

[24] Galton's position was set out in his *Heredity Genius: an Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* (1869); 2nd edn. (London: Macmillan, 1892). Russell's copy of the second edition in BRA has extensive marginalia by him.

[25] Pauline Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings: the Eugenics Society, its Sources and its Critics in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1991).

[26] Russell to Alys Russell, 15 June 1895 (RA1 710).

[27] Griffin, *SLBR*, 1: 127.

Socialism."[28] Consequently, Russell consistently challenged the assumptions of conservative eugenists that there was a *direct* biological correlation between wealth and intelligence, even though he never did give up on his belief that individuals of intellectual merit were disproportionately found in the upper classes.[29]

Moreover, Russell's thoughts on marriage and child-rearing, from their earliest formulation, were always connected to his views on eugenics and frequently carried a tinge of the duty that he believed high social class and ability carried with them. In 1893 he wrote for Alys a short composition on "Die Ehe" ("Marriage"), which he described as a "little essay on the immorality of not marrying if in any way above the average" (*Papers* 1: 62). This essay, ostensibly on the difficulties facing independent, public-minded "new women" like Alys, suggested that the first ten years of a woman's marriage ought to be given over to motherhood (rather than devoted to public service), since this would be repaid by a number of offspring who could multiply that public service in the long term ("Die Ehe", *Papers* 1: 69–71). Later, when arguing for the emancipation of women, Russell suggested the State should take on the role of assisting parents financially in the education and maintenance of children in order that meritorious women would be able to both serve the public good and raise children.[30] In 1907 he advocated direct payments from the State to desirable parents, a plan he mooted again—this time in the form of scholarships for education paid to desirable parents—in 1928.[31] Undesirable parents, on the other hand, ought to be discouraged from procreating, and no financial aid from the State provided to them to bring up their children.

Russell also surmised that part of the reason for the demographic differential lay in the fact that only the upper and middle ranks of society had sound knowledge of birth control: "the better members of Western communities limit their families and the worse do not; thus we have a grave source of evil, produced, and presumably removable, by

[28] Russell to Alys, 21 Sept. 1894 (RA1 710).

[29] "Russell Tells Why Eugenics Is Not Popular", *Jewish Daily Forward*, 13 Nov. 1927, pp. E1, E4.

[30] "The Status of Women", *Papers* 12: 263.

[31] "Politics of a Biologist", *Papers* 12: 372; "The Future of Science", *Papers* 10: 48.

economic causes."[32] While the middle and aristocratic classes had learned to have fewer children, the "feckless" and "ignorant" among the working classes continued to reproduce at an alarming rate.[33] Through a combination of better and more open access to birth control the more intelligent could be encouraged to breed more and the less intelligent to breed less, thereby reversing racial decline. Russell's commitment to making available birth-control information to the masses in the face of government hostility was apparent in his consistent advocacy of birth-control pioneers like Margaret Sanger and Marie Stopes throughout the 1920s. It needs to be stressed, however, that unlike many conservative eugenists, family limitation arguments for Russell were elements of broader social reform, not the justification for the substitution of social reform with eugenic proposals:

> The birth-rate among the better sections of society has declined in recent years because of voluntary limitation of families; and this in turn is due to the economic disadvantages of a large family. If these disadvantages were removed, the effect would cease with the cause. The problem then is essentially one of economic and social organization. ("Biology and Politics" [1908], *Papers* 12: 375)

The Great War, and Russell's reconsideration of liberalism during it, led to an evolution in Russell's thinking on marriage and the population question. Before 1914 Russell had remained within the progressive liberal fold; during the War he came to think liberalism outmoded. After all, liberalism had not prevented the catastrophe of the Great War. Traditional liberalism, Russell came to argue, was too focused on economic self-interest, individualism and naïve faith in rationality. In the circumstances of industrialized total war, Russell came to believe that human actions were driven by unconscious impulses. Within the capitalist system, the possessive impulse ruled and led to economic injustice and wars of aggression and greed. Only the move to a democratic socialism could save western societies—a socialism based, not on Marxian principles, but on freedom of conscience protected by a public commitment to civil liberties; economic and political democracy; and the acceptance of a

[32] "Politics of a Biologist", *Papers* 12: 368.
[33] "Marriage and the Population Question", in *PSR*.

scientific outlook to the problems of society.[34] Personally, too, Russell disavowed his puritan, academic, pre-war ways and sought to devote himself to the cause of intellectually rebuilding society.[35] Russell presented an outline of the kinds of social and economic organization that he came to favour in his *Principles of Social Reconstruction* and much of his writing in the 1920s and early 'thirties expanded on those themes.

"MARRIAGE AND MORALS" AND PROGRESSIVE SEXUAL REFORM

Marriage and Morals was thus part of this continuing exegesis of the need to reform society according to a more scientific outlook. In the book Russell presented a case for a new sexual morality and for better marital and sexual relationships. He did so by providing a synthesis of historical and anthropological work on the institution of marriage and the ideologies that created it.[36] Russell posited that there were three distinct stages to the evolving conception of marriage, all of which were connected to the role of the married couple in procreation: first, that which existed among uncivilized "savages" who did not know that human beings had human fathers; second, the development of an early patriarchal system when men came to realize the facts of paternity; and third, the era of organized religion (predictably, Russell concentrated on the Judeo-Christian tradition), which introduced the idea that there was something impure and indecent about sex. The discovery that men sired children gave them both power and a means to continue the memory of their achievements after death. The subjection of women to men was the only way to secure female virtue, deemed vital for both the continuation of male egoism and the economic system that it entailed: namely the transfer of wealth from father to son. Conventional marriage thus rested on an economic impulse—the father charged with the protection and rearing of children wanted an assurance that he was caring only for his own—and on the religious impulse about the nature of sex. The result

[34] See *PSR* and *Roads to Freedom* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1918).

[35] *Auto* 2: 38–9, and Russell to Colette O'Niel (Constance Malleson), 21 Aug. 1918 (RA3 REC. ACQ. 596).

[36] Russell drew mainly on the work of Bronislaw Malinowski, Margaret Mead, Johann Huizinga, W. E. H. Lecky and Edward Westermarck.

of these impulses was that the sexual fidelity of the wife became enshrined as the most important factor in the institution of marriage.

After exploring how and why the idea of marriage developed as it did, Russell attacked the institution as a whole, arguing that religious superstitions were breaking down under the weight of their own hypocrisy, that women were justifiably pushing for greater economic independence, and that the State was gradually relieving the father of his parental duties through providing free education and welfare provisions for children. Consequently, the economic reasons for a wife's faithfulness were rapidly being removed, leaving only the outdated religious sanctions. Due to the development of effective contraception, sex and procreation were now separated and the old concern with safeguarding biological paternity could be disregarded. Therefore the connection between sex and the institution of marriage could also be dissolved. Russell concluded that the need now was for a new sexual ethic to fit the conditions of modern society and to preserve the family. He argued that the family ought to be preserved in some amended form and that marriage ought to be retained, but only in order to facilitate the raising of children. If the family is not preserved, Russell warned, the State will take more and more control of the rearing of children, with the result of more virulent nationalistic indoctrination and a greater danger of war. Only under a world government—a consistent theme in Russell's social and political writing through the interwar years and beyond—should the State be allowed such power, because such a government could eliminate the dangers of militarist nationalism that Russell concluded had led to the First World War.

Recognizing how distant the world was from a single government, Russell's practical alternative for the meantime was a new morality of marriage premissed on the removal of the taboo on sex knowledge, on the minimum of social or legal interference with love—allowing for companionate or trial marriage until procreation occurred—and on the application of rational thinking to parental unions. Healthy adults should be free to love and live with whomever they pleased, in relationships that did not require social, religious or legal sanction. Only the arrival of children necessarily complicated such relationships, and only then should the relationship of adults be considered binding, and again, then only for the benefit of the relationship's offspring. It was in order to maintain a healthy environment for children—one free of parental dis-

cord—that Russell proposed his most controversial contention, that extra-marital sex was more desirable than the psychological damage to children that came with parental fighting and divorce. For the sake of the children within the union, Russell therefore advocated control of jealousy rather than of sexual desires:

> The doctrine that I wish to preach is not one of licence; it involves nearly as much self-control as is involved in the conventional doctrine. But self-control will be applied more to abstaining from interference with the freedom of others than to restraining one's own freedom.[37]

While Russell's conception in *Marriage and Morals* was characteristically bold and presented in engaging prose, it was neither unique to his pen, nor a new conception. It is, in fact, largely the exegesis and synthesis of views that had been evolving since the 1890s, with a few Russellian twists that were more the product of Russell's experience of the First World War than of his dysfunctional "modern" marriage with Dora. Russell's views on love, sex and companionship in marriage fit closely with those of a number of progressive reformers in Britain from the turn of the century. Indeed, a number of British social historians have identified a consensus among progressive marriage and sex reformers in this period: what Marcus Collins has labelled the desire for "mutuality" in gender relations.[38] "Mutualist" reformers agreed with feminists that there were problems with conventional Victorian sexual morals and marital customs, but their suggestions about what might be done to overcome these problems frequently differed from, and ultimately would supersede, those proposed by traditional social purity feminists.[39] Mu-

[37] Russell, *Marriage and Morals* [hereafter *MM*] (London: Allen and Unwin, 1929), p. 249; MM_3, p. 202. (I provide page references to the current Routledge edition, which was first published in 1976 by Unwin Paperbacks and is here designated MM_3.)

[38] The literature on this subject is large and steadily growing. See Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*; Michael Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1994); Angus McLaren, *The Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870–1930* (Chicago: Chicago U. P., 1997); Lesley Hall, *Sex, Gender and Social Change in Britain since 1880* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); Marcus Collins, *Modern Love* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003).

[39] Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880–1930* (New York: Pandora P., 1985); Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain, 1860–1914* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1987); Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and*

tualists suggested that "an intimate equality should be established between men and women through mixing, companionate marriage and shared sexual pleasure" in contrast to the ideal of "separate spheres" and outright patriarchy that typified Victorian society.[40] The ideal of separate spheres posited that men and women each had their own quite separate place within society: men operated in the public sphere of politics, civil society, business and the market place; women held sway over the domestic realm of the home, and managed family life, morals and spirituality. Husbands were to provide material support and physical safety for their dependents (wives and children); wives to provide emotional and spiritual support for the men. Prescriptive literature from the nineteenth century is filled with this rhetoric, and dictates of the ideology formed much of the basis for the anti-women's suffrage campaign of the Edwardian years.[41]

By shedding the pernicious dictates of separate spheres and its warping "differentiations", mutualist reformers hoped to create New Men who could join the New Women, in equal, humane and satisfying mutual relationships.[42] This view, first given a wide audience in Britain through Edward Carpenter's influential treatise, *Love's Coming of Age* (1896), would be debated and developed by Carpenter's associates in the "Fellowship of the New Life", most particularly by the famous sexologists Havelock and Edith Ellis, and eventually even by interwar Christian marriage reformers, like Edward Griffiths and Herbert Gray.[43]

Culture at the Fin de Siècle (New York: Viking, 1990); Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality, 1850–1940* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994); Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885–1914* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995); Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000).

[40] Collins, *Modern Love*, p. 4.

[41] See, for some examples, Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2000), p. 30. On the Edwardian anti-suffragists, see Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: the Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

[42] Collins, *Modern Love*, p. 19.

[43] On the wide influence of Carpenter and Ellis, see Sheila Rowbotham and Jeffrey Weeks, *Socialism and the New Life: the Personal and Sexual Politics of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis* (London: Pluto P., 1977); Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter, 1844–1929: Prophet of Human Fellowship* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1980); Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis* (London: Allen Lane, 1980); Tony Brown, ed., *Edward*

Russell was among the first wave of Carpenter's readers, and just as with his enthusiasm for eugenics, he debated these ideas with his first wife, Alys.[44] A key means of achieving the mutualist programme was the relaxed mixing of the sexes in a variety of institutional and civil settings to help destroy the pernicious legacy of separate spheres thinking. This invariably brought up the question of the proper rearing of children. Most mutualists promoted experiments in co-educational schooling, such as Bedales (which went co-ed in 1898), King Alfred's School in Hampstead in 1898, and at the Keswick School in 1899. Co-educated pupils were supposed to civilize one another, and break down the belief that the sexes could not mix outside of highly structured and chaperoned relationships. Russell supported this aim from the 1890s,[45] wrote about it consistently after the First World War and, with his second wife, Dora, experimented with co-educational mixing at their own school, Beacon Hill, from 1927. Co-educational mixing was directed mainly at supporting understanding between the sexes in preparation for healthy marriages.

Progressive calls for the harmonious cooperation between the sexes for the good of all society tended to be drowned out by the fury of the debates over women's enfranchisement before 1914. Russell stood as a women's suffrage candidate in 1907, but soon after moved to a position that embraced complete adult suffrage for the benefit of all society, the latter position more common to mutualists than to feminists.[46] As with other mutualists, in 1906 Russell argued "equality in marriage is

Carpenter and his Circle: Late Victorian Radicalism (London: Frank Cass, 1990); Ruth Brandon, *The New Women and the Old Men: Love, Sex and the Woman Question* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1990); Chris Nottingham, *The Pursuit of Serenity: Havelock Ellis and the New Politics* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam U. P., 1999). For the mutualist views of Christian marriage reformers, see Herbert Gray, *Successful Marriage* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1941), and Edward Fyfe Griffith, *Modern Marriage and Birth Control* (London: Gollancz, 1935) and *Morals in the Melting Pot* (London: Gollancz, 1938).

[44] See the extensive correspondence between Russell and Alys, 1894–95 (RA1 710, RA3 REC. ACQ. 434).

[45] Russell to Alys, 12 Sept. 1894 (RA1 710).

[46] For an excellent discussion of Russell's feminism, see Brian Harrison, "Bertrand Russell: the False Consciousness of a Feminist", in Margaret Moran and Carl Spadoni, eds., *Intellect and Social Conscience: Essays on Bertrand Russell's Early Work* (Hamilton, ON: McMaster U. Library P., 1984), pp. 157–205 (= *Russell*, n.s. 4 [1984]: 157–205).

more important than equality in any other relation; for marriage is the most intimate of all relations."[47] After the First World War, the mutualist cause gradually achieved ascendancy amongst progressives in British society. Although there were conspicuous differences between sexual libertarians on the one hand, and Christian mutualists and feminists with roots in the social purity movement on the other, there was nevertheless a widespread agreement amongst leading intellectuals by about 1930 that the artificial segregation of men and women was unhealthy, and that patriarchal marriages and sexual ignorance had no place in a "modern" society.[48] But the freedom to chose marriage partners regardless of the dictates of respectability, religion or other social sanction was a key demand for mutualists which also implied a profound responsibility for prospective parents. Indeed, mutualist reformers explicitly connected their programme of reform with eugenist arguments—most particularly the duty to mate in the best interests of the "race".

EUGENICS AND SEX REFORM IN "MARRIAGE AND MORALS"

Russell devoted two chapters (roughly ten percent of the book) to eugenics and related issues in *Marriage and Morals*, and did so in the context of the relationship between the State and the family given the reality of the demographic concerns that had exercised eugenists since the turn of the century. By the time Russell wrote the book, fear of the fertility differential was waning. The statistical evidence compiled by Carr Saunders[49] in *The Population Problem* (1922), in particular, did

[47] Russell, "On the Democratic Ideal", *Papers* 12: 253. Russell pursued this argument further in "The Status of Women" (*c*. 1906), *Papers* 12.

[48] Along with pioneers like Edward Carpenter, Olive Schreiner, Edith and Havelock Ellis and most of the Fabians, prominent early mutualists and advocates of a new form of companionate marriage in the interwar years included many members of the Bloomsbury set and the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals. Other prominent mutualist advocates were Sarah Grand, Walter Gallichan and his wife C. Gasquoine Hartley, Marie Stopes, Stella Browne, Dr. Elizabeth Sloan Chesser, Edward Westermarck, Victor Gollancz, W. F. Lofthouse, John Mcmurray, J. H. Bradley and J. J. Findlay, Jane E. Harrison, Bronislaw Malinowski, Helena Swanwick, and Maude Royden.

[49] Sir Alexander Morris Carr Saunders (1886–1966) was recognized as the leading British authority on population in the first half of the twentieth century. He served as

much to alleviate Russell's anxiety over differential birth rates. Russell commented in his chapter on population that the birth rates in different classes were now converging: "the birth-rate is still higher among the poor than among the well-to-do, but it is lower now in the poorest boroughs of London than it was ten years ago in the richest" (p. 194; MM_3, p. 159). This convergence was due to the increasingly widespread use of contraceptives, although it was still the case that "stupid people" because of their limited access to birth control had larger families, and when they did try to limit family size it was through abortion (p. 203; MM_3, p. 166). Russell argued that there was no need in England (or western Europe) for more population growth, as the population density was high enough, and suggested those that seek increased population growth do so for militaristic and nationalistic reasons. In a typically pithy comment aimed at social conservatives and both those feminists and anti-feminists who opposed birth control, Russell averred: "the position of these people is that it is better to restrict population by death on the battlefield than by contraceptives" (p. 195; MM_3, p. 160). But while the birth differential within Britain was declining, this development suggested another possibility, equally frightening to intellectuals like Russell: "It may easily go on until the population begins to diminish, and the ultimate result may, for aught we can tell, be a virtual extinction of the most civilized races" (p. 194; MM_3, p. 159). In the meantime, Russell concentrated on another facet of the population and eugenics question: the growth of State intervention.

Russell's concern in *Marriage and Morals* about increasing State intervention in family life and in the raising of children reflected the growing importance over the first decades of the century of pro-natalist advocates and the role of State-sponsored health professionals noted earlier.[50]

chairman of the Population Investigation Committee from 1936, and of the statistics committee of the Royal Commission on Population from 1944 to 1949; he was instrumental in establishing the study of demography, and despite early doubts, was unflagging in his leadership of the Eugenics Society, which awarded him its first Galton medal in 1946.

[50] Deborah Dwork, *War Is Good for Babies and Other Young Children: a History of the Infant and Child Welfare Movement in England, 1898–1918* (London: Tavistock, 1987), pp. 226–8; Sonya Michel and Seth Koven, "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origin of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States, 1880–1920", *American Historical Review*, 94 (1990): 1076–1108.

Alys Russell was an early advocate of "guiding" the working-classes in maternal care, and she had been responsible for setting up the first British School for Mothers at St. Pancras in 1907. At this clinic, advice was provided to working-class mothers on the feeding and proper care of their children, along with "prescription feeding", the gathering of statistical evidence on the infants seen, and the provision of medical care. Similar clinics sprang up all over the country, a process accelerated by the Great War: by 1920, there were 1,583 of them.[51] On the face of it, such institutions might be thought to be concerned strictly with infant "nurture", but, in fact, they and a whole host of other pro-natalist and infant welfare initiatives have been shown to have been underpinned by middle-class and elite fears of racial decline.[52] The rhetoric of "racial motherhood" bolstered ideas about mutuality and was widely taken up before and during the Great War. By 1917, surveys in Britain indicated that the three main reasons given for the importance of marriage were mutual comfort and support, the maintenance of social purity, and racial reproduction.[53]

Indeed, the idealization of motherhood and appropriate marriage practices were consistently at the core of eugenic discourse in the first three decades of the century. As pioneering mutualist sexologist Havelock Ellis put it: "Women's function in life can never be the same as man's, if only because women are the mothers of the race … the most vital problem before our civilisation today is the problem of motherhood, the question of creating human beings best suited for modern life."[54] Ellis connected marriage, social reform and eugenics in his concern to move society's concentration from the problems of production to the problems of reproduction; to, in his words, "the regulation of sexual selection between stocks and individuals as the prime condition of life."[55] The problem was how to induce in the population a sense of

[51] Searle, *Eugenics and Politics*, p. 379; Carol Dyhouse, "Working-Class Mothers and Infant Mortality in England, 1895–1914", in C. Webster, ed., *Biology, Medicine and Society, 1840–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1981), p. 77; Janet E. Lane-Claypon, *The Child Welfare Movement* (London: G. Bell, 1920), p. 6.

[52] Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood", *History Workshop Journal*, 5 (1978): 9–65; Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, pp. 110–37.

[53] Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society*, p. 126.

[54] Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene* (London: Constable, 1912), p. 186.

[55] Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Vol. 4: *Sex in Relation to Society*

"sexual responsibility" about natural selection, so as to ensure "racial" progress. For Ellis and other mutualists, a new sense of citizenship based on the rational planning of sexual behaviour was advocated, combined with the belief that science could improve the quality of the population. H. G. Wells argued that free love unions (by which he meant monogamous relationships based on love rather than religious or State sanction) would boost the birth rate—a transparent appeal to conservatives and eugenists who feared the differential birthrate—and Wells went so far to argue that "physical love without children is a little weak, timorous" even "more than a little shameful";[56] but Wells also wanted women who reared fit and healthy children to be rewarded by the State.[57]

Still, the growing emphasis on the maternal function of the female partner in marriage posed somewhat of a dilemma for sex reformers. For mutualists, sex was not just about procreation (or individual gratification), but also rather about harmony, unity and concord between man and woman. Ellis, for instance, wanted a reformed sexuality based on the exchange of intimacies.[58] Ellis was not trying to have it both ways: the rise of eugenic thinking and maternalism gave scientific justification to progressive mutualist ideas about sexuality. It had been the virtual absence of a respectable discourse on sexual intimacy during most of the nineteenth century that had given mutualist arguments about marriage reform at the end of the century their originality and moral force.[59] Public commentary in the nineteenth century had presented sexuality primarily as a problem or a danger.[60] By arguing that Victorian sexual mores had removed the element of natural sexual selection in human mating, thereby weakening the British race, Ellis, Wells and George Bernard Shaw could call for a new ethics, promising sexual liberation as a means to national and racial regeneration.[61] The institution of mar-

(New York: Random House, 1936; 1st edn., 1912), p. 582.

[56] H. G. Wells, *The New Machiavelli* (London: J. Lane, 1911), pp. 447–8.

[57] Jeanne Mackenzie, "Introduction" to H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* (London: Virago, 1980; 1st edn., 1909).

[58] Edith Ellis, *Essays* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Free Spirit P., 1924), p. 36; Havelock Ellis, *My Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), pp. 292–3.

[59] Collins, *Modern Love*, p. 226 n.25.

[60] Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago and London: Virago, 1992); Mason, *The Making of Victorian Sexuality*.

[61] George Robb, "The Way of all Flesh: Degeneration, Eugenics, and the Gospel of

riage itself was pointed to as an impediment to good breeding and "race regeneration" since the Victorian conception of marriage placed property, respectability, class and religion ahead of race reproduction—the proper concern from a eugenic perspective.

Given that eugenics was thought of as the science of human breeding, it really should be unsurprising that progressive sex and marriage reformers felt the need to take eugenic ideas seriously. Karl Pearson argued that Victorian sexual morals led to a deformation of natural "sexual selection". Science could bring social advancement but this required freer and more equal marriage relations between men and women.[62] Ellis even suggested that sexual attraction was essentially eugenic, and the substitution of sexual attraction for traditional morality was frequently dysgenic.[63] Feminist psychologist Stella Browne advocated free love using eugenic arguments, arguing that monogamous unions based on mutual affection, equality *and* "sexual compatibility" were an example of a higher morality, based as much in science as social values.[64] Mutualists supported the idea of sex education in the hope that an educated population would engage in eugenic relationships without State intervention. The early campaign for family planning in the interwar years witnessed eugenics-minded doctors and scientists in Great Britain and the United States trying to find the perfect contraceptive, as the eugenic benefits of birth control fascinated many biologists, geneticists, and charitable foundations.[65] The involvement of prominent feminists like Mary Scharlieb, Elizabeth Sloan Chesser, Catherine Gasquoine Hartley, Olive Schreiner and Stella Browne in the eugenics movement in the early twentieth century was also an attempt to shape programmes

Free Love", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 6 (1996): 589–603.

[62] *Ibid*., p. 592. On the gap between Pearson's ideas about sexual reform and the reality of his outlook, see Walkowitz's chapter on the "Men and Women's Club" in her *City of Dreadful Delight*, pp. 135–70.

[63] Havelock Ellis, "Eugenics and St. Valentine", *Nineteenth Century and After*, 49 (1906): 785–6.

[64] F. W. Stella Browne, *Sexual Variety and Variability among Women and Their Bearing upon Social Reconstruction* (London: British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, Publication no. 3, 1917).

[65] Richard Soloway, "'The Perfect Contraceptive': Eugenics and Birth Control Research in Britain and America in the Interwar Years", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 30 (1995): 637–64.

of action on eugenic principles along feminist lines that would help the advancement of women.[66] While the otherwise socially conservative Marie Stopes was frequently attacked for her theories on eugenics—in her wartime play, *The Race*, she advocated the union of unwed women with healthy soldiers, so that the British race did not lose its healthy stock if the soldiers were killed[67]—the cornerstone of the mothers' clinic movement she founded was her commitment to understanding the sexual and fertility problems women encountered that could be alleviated through access to birth control.[68]

In fact, during the 1920s many feminists used the concept of population quality to gain support for birth control, and reciprocated by publicly endorsing proposals for the voluntary sterilization of mentally "defective" individuals.[69] Eugenics provided the ideal creed for many of the "New Women" of the early twentieth century, as it gave scientific credence to their views on human sexuality. And since mutualists aimed to create "New Men" to partner the new women, mutualists tended to embrace eugenics wholeheartedly.

Russell too came to view sexual liberation as tied to national progress, a view he first made explicit in a somewhat different context in *Principles of Social Reconstruction* in 1916, but which was more obviously present in *Marriage and Morals.* Russell had connected the liberation of women to eugenics through government reform in those early letters to Alys in 1894. Citing Darwin's *Descent of Man*, Galton's *Hereditary Genius* and the "obvious argument of Karl Pearson in 'Socialism and Natural Selection'"[70] that for the "race" to survive "the vast majority of women must be mothers", Russell proposed that

[66] Greta Jones, "Women and Eugenics in Britain: the Case of Mary Scharlieb, Elizabeth Sloan Chesser, and Stella Browne", *Annals of Science*, 52 (1995): 481–502.

[67] Marie Stopes, *"Gold in the Wood" and "The Race"; Two New Plays of Life* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1918), p. 70.

[68] Deborah A. Cohen, "Private Lives in Public Spaces: Marie Stopes, the Mothers' Clinics and the Practice of Contraception", *History Workshop Journal*, 35 (1993): 95–116.

[69] Ann Taylor Allen, "Feminism and Eugenics in Germany and Britain, 1900–1940: a Comparative Perspective", *German Studies Review*, 23 (2000): 477–505.

[70] Russell to Alys, 20 Sept. 1894, *SLBR*, 1: 119–21. Russell read Darwin in September 1891 and Galton in September 1894 (see "What Shall I Read", *Papers* 1), and he read Pearson's essay in the *Fortnightly Review* in early July 1894 (see *SLBR*, 1: 96).

> … maternity is work for Society though not for any individual, i.e., no individual gets economic profit out of it—therefore Society ought to pay for child-bearing, and there is no other way of securing economic independence to the mass of women. (Russell to Alys, 2 Oct. 1894, *SLBR*, 1: 128)

Russell accepted that motherhood remained women's primary role, but he also suggested that the State should help mothers with child-rearing. By 1929 Russell was not only advocating that married mothers should get help from the State, on eugenic grounds, but unmarried mothers, too (p. 168; MM_3, p. 138). This view mirrored that of George Bernard Shaw, who in *Getting Married* in 1913 had argued that society should "prefer one healthy illegitimate child to ten rickety legitimate ones."[71] Moreover, as Russell came to write *Marriage and Morals*, his views on the applicability of Galton's ideas had softened and taken a less biologically determinist slant: "… I am quite convinced that family tradition plays a very considerable part in the phenomena which Galton and his disciples attribute to heredity" (p. 147; MM_3, p. 121). By the late 1920s, in fact, Russell's views perched uneasily between biological determinism and social and environmental constructivism, typified in his essentially utilitarian views on the what to do about the "feeble-minded".

RUSSELL AND THE STERILIZATION OF THE "FEEBLE-MINDED"

Monk fails to recognize that by supporting the sterilization of the "feeble-minded" Russell had not given up his role as defender of the individual against the power of the State, but rather sought to defend the individual's citizenship and freedom of expression, given the likely developments in the relationship between the biological sciences and the State: developments he could see already being played-out in 1920s Britain. In fact, Russell advocated a sterilization programme as a way of maximizing the possibilities of individual rights given the increasing likelihood of the State using scientific experts to determine biologically defective individuals. In preferring sterilization to institutionalization, Russell was deploying cold utilitarian logic to the problem of the use of science by the State. To explain how and why he came to this position

[71] George Bernard Shaw, *The Doctor's Dilemma; Getting Married; The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (London: Constable, 1913), p. 337.

we need to first provide what Monk does not consider—the context of debates about the feeble-minded in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

For the entirety of the period under discussion there was no clinical definition of "feeble-mindedness"; rather it was asserted with varying levels of confidence that the feeble-minded made up the bottom ten percent of the population on any "standard" intelligence scale. The Edwardians defined the "feeble-minded" as those individuals who, due to innately low intellectual capacity, lacked the ability to perform "duties as a member of society in the position of life to which he is born".[72] The "problem of feeble-mindedness" was first raised in British official circles in the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded in September 1904, a reaction to the unpalatable social facts thrown up by the recruitment efforts of the Boer War. Expert witnesses testified to the commission that a shockingly large number of "defectives" were not adequately dealt with by existing legislation and social infrastructure; that the weight of evidence suggested mental deficiency was inheritable; that the feeble-minded were abnormally fecund and prolific (that feeble-minded women, in particular, were promiscuous and oversexed); and that the feeble-minded as a group were implicated in most of the pressing social problems that afflicted Edwardian society.

In fact, much of the early twentieth-century discussion of feeble-mindedness was based on a variety of prejudices.[73] Unwed mothers among the working classes, for instance, were often suspected of being feeble-minded because of their situation; it was assumed (incorrectly) that the feeble-minded were more prone to promiscuous lifestyles and large numbers of illegitimate births. The commissioners tried to disentangle prejudice from science, but the commission's *Report* concluded that the threat posed by the feeble-minded to British society was indeed serious and had potentially calamitous consequences for the genetic quality of the population.[74] The *Report*'s conclusions became fodder

[72] P. Popenoe, "Feeblemindedness", *Journal of Heredity*, 6 (1915): 32–6.

[73] Mark Jackson, *The Borderland of Imbecility. Medicine, Society and the Fabrication of the Feeble Mind in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Manchester: Manchester U. P., 2000), p. 12.

[74] Great Britain, *Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded*, 8 vols. (London: HMSO, 1908); Barker, "The Biology of Stupidity", pp. 348–9.

for the Committee on Poor Law Reform of 1910, which contains many eugenist pedigree charts purporting to prove the hereditary basis of the feeble-minded and the connection between their mental state and their pauperism.[75] More significantly, the report was the basis for the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act, which moved to permanently segregate the feeble-minded from society by housing them in special institutions on the certification of two medical doctors.[76] In practice, only a small percentage of the number of feeble-minded believed to live in Britain were subjected to this legislation, because the Act had significant and worrisome consequences. In effect it suspended the political and civic liberties of those subject to its provisions, thereby effectively creating a biological definition of citizenship in which only those deemed mentally fit were entitled to basic civil and political rights. The problem of protecting the rights of the mentally deficient was thereafter frequently at the forefront of debates about the segregation or sterilization of the feeble-minded.[77]

While segregation was thus enacted in a limited way in Britain, many health experts, and especially eugenists, argued that this was insufficient: that given the inherited nature of feeble-mindedness, it would be a boon to humankind if hereditary feeble-mindedness were eliminated altogether through a programme of involuntary sterilization. This position was bolstered by American studies of family pedigrees like those of Henry H. Goddard, whose *The Kallikak Family* (1912) and *Feeble-Mindedness: Its Causes and Consequences* (1914) were based on Goddard's observations while Principal at the Vineland Training School in New Jersey.[78] Goddard's studies were popularized in Britain by respected geneticists like William Bateson,[79] which gave them more scientific

[75] Great Britain, *Poor Law Committee Report* (London: HMSO, 1910), no. 5, p. 182.

[76] E. J. Larson, "The Rhetoric of Eugenics: Expert Authority and the Mental Deficiency Bill", *British Journal of the History of Science*, 24 (1991): 45–60.

[77] See Searle, *Eugenics and Politics*; H. Simmons, "Explaining Social Policy: the English Mental Deficiency Act of 1913", *Journal of Social History*, 11 (1977–78): 387–403; Thomson, *The Problem of Mental Deficiency.*

[78] Henry H. Goddard, "The Heredity of Feeblemindedness", *Bulletin of the Eugenics Record Office*, 1 (1911): 1–14; *The Kallikak Family: a Study in the Heredity of Feeblemindedness* (New York: Macmillan, 1912); *Feeblemindedness: Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: Macmillan, 1914).

[79] C. B. Davenport, "The Inheritance of Physical and Mental Traits of Man and Their Application to Eugenics", in W. E. Castle, J. M. Coulter, C. B. Davenport, E. M. East and W. L. Tower, eds., *Heredity and Eugenics* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1912);

validity than they perhaps deserved, because Goddard claimed to base his study on the newly rediscovered Mendelian genetic principles that Bateson himself championed in Britain. Indeed, Goddard's work carried a surprising amount of authority until the late 1930s, despite serious methodological problems that were identified and published in early reviews.[80] Early twentieth-century scientists soon divided into three groups on the issue of feeble-mindedness: the majority who agreed entirely with Goddard's theory; another, smaller group, who agreed with his general conclusions but were less sure about the details; and the smallest group, those who recognized the theory's problems and tried to argue against it.[81] Goddard's theory became a touchstone in public debates about feeble-mindedness and a major prop for those advocating sterilization programmes, particularly for those within the British Eugenics Society.[82]

After the First World War, a campaign for the voluntary sterilization of the mentally defective was urged by an alliance of doctors, scientists and politicians, and relentlessly lobbied for by the Eugenics Society.[83] Calls for voluntary sterilization came from across the political spectrum: liberals and progressives like C. P. Blacker and Julian Huxley, both key figures in the Eugenics Society in the interwar years, sought to make available to the poor (at State expense) the same procedure already available to the middle class. Blacker went as far to maintain that there was a demand for sterilization amongst the non-segregated mentally deficient themselves: "there are large numbers of people who do not want large

R. C. Punnett, "Genetics and Eugenics", in *Problems in Eugenics, Papers Communicated to the First International Eugenics Congress Held at the University of London, July 24th to 30th*, Vol. 1 (London: Eugenics Education Society, 1912); William Bateson, "Address on Heredity", *British Medical Journal*, 2 (1913): 260.

[80] Pauline Mazumdar, *Eugenics, Human Genetics and Human Failings: the Eugenics Society, Its Sources and Its Critics in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 68; Hamish Spencer and Diane Paul, "The Failure of a Scientific Critique: David Heron, Karl Pearson and Mendelian Eugenics", *British Journal for the History of Science*, 31 (1998): 442.

[81] David Barker, "The Biology of Stupidity: Genetics, Eugenics and Mental Deficiency in the Interwar Years", *British Journal for the History of Science*, 22 (1989): 347–75.

[82] Barker, "How to Curb the Fertility of the Unfit: the Feeble-Minded in Edwardian Britain", *Oxford Review of Education*, 9 (1983): 201–5.

[83] John Macnicol, "The Voluntary Sterilization Campaign in Britain, 1918–39", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 2 (1992): 422–38.

families, especially those in the lower grades of society who cannot afford to bring up a number of children. The motive which lead these people to undergo sterilization is the desire to limit children."[84] Conservative advocates of the measure, like pioneering geneticist R. A. Fisher, had a more fundamentally ideological rationale: conservatives in the Eugenics Society spent most of the interwar years putting together extensive pedigree charts that purported to prove the connection between feeble-mindedness and pauperism and other social ills. They explicitly sought a biological solution to ongoing social problems. Despite their political differences, all found common cause in the Eugenics Society, and as a result of the Society's determined lobbying, the Conservative Government formed the 1924 Wood Committee in order to ascertain the number of mental defectives in Britain, if the number was increasing, and what should be done about the situation.

The Wood Committee reported its findings in 1929. Unsurprisingly, given that it was stacked with experts of eugenist tendencies, the committee concluded that the problem of feeble-mindedness remained greatest in the lowest levels of the socio-economic scale, and that the best way to deal with the problem would be through a voluntary sterilization programme.[85] What "voluntary" would have meant in practice is highly debatable, but on the basis of the Committee's findings, the Eugenics Society formed a Committee for Legalizing Eugenic Sterilization and drafted a private member's bill that was introduced to Parliament in 1931 by Labour Party MP C. P. Church. Despite the best propaganda efforts of the Eugenics Society, the bill was viewed as fundamentally anti-working class by its opponents. Despite the eminence of the scientists supporting the bill, the opposition argued the science was biased, not due to any inherent methodological problems (although there were in fact plenty of those), but because it seemed to propose draconian measures concentrated on a single-class of citizens: the lower rungs of the working classes. The Catholic Church, trade union and working-class leadership, and professional municipal health and social workers (the latter having

[84] National Archives (Great Britain), Kew, MH51/228 31100, Proceedings of the 17th Meeting of the Brock Committee, 3 April 1933, p. 6.

[85] *Report of the Mental Deficiency Committee* [The Wood Report] (London: HMSO, 1929); John Macnicol, "Eugenics and the Campaign for Voluntary Sterilization in Britain between the Wars", *Social History of Medicine*, 2 (1989): 147–70.

their own vested interest in denying anything but environmental causes to social problems) protested vigorously, and the request to introduce the bill was defeated 167 votes to 89.[86] Undaunted, the Eugenics Society continued to press for legislation throughout the 1930s, and secured the appointment of another government Committee on Sterilization, headed by Sir Laurence Brock, which reported in the late 1930s.

We know from his correspondence and journalism that Russell followed the Eugenic Society's campaign and the very public discussions over voluntary sterilization in the 1920s; indeed, he was personally acquainted with many of the key protagonists. In his articles, Russell typically fell between radical progressives who argued that nurture was all when it came to human abilities, and conservative eugenists that argued for the unyielding governance of nature. Russell consistently argued that both environment and heredity had to be considered when seeking the origins of intellectual ability.[87] But when it came to feeble-mindedness, Russell accepted the position of geneticists like Julian Huxley and J. B. S. Haldane who themselves followed Bateson and Goddard in believing that feeble-mindedness was solely hereditary. As Russell stated in 1927,

> When feeble-minded persons marry normal persons a large proportion of their children, though not all, are normal; but if two feeble-minded people marry their children will, on the average, be still more feeble-minded.[88]

This characterization was precisely that of Goddard's flawed pedigree charts. Russell allowed this premiss to guide his relentless logic: as feeble-mindedness could not be cured, and the afflicted tended to have more children than other people (a conclusion of the Royal Commission), it would be better to deal with the problem directly rather than to let the feeble-minded have more children. But even so, why did Russell side with those progressives who preferred the sterilization option to institutional separation?

[86] Great Britain, *House of Commons Debates*, 5th series, 255 (21 July 1931): cols. 1245–58. See Macnicol, "Eugenics and the Campaign for Voluntary Sterilization", for a general discussion of the Bill's reception.

[87] "Russell Tells Why Eugenics Is Not Popular"; "The Future of Science", *Papers* 10: 47–8; *MM*, pp. 200–2; MM_3, pp. 164–6.

[88] "The Babies Nobody Wants", *The Sunday Chronicle*, 8 May 1927, p. 3.

The answer lay in the fact that since the passing of the Mental Health Act in 1913, progressives had worried about the deprivation of civic and political rights that followed from the institutionalization of the feeble-minded. But once sterilized the vast majority of the feeble-minded would no longer need institutionalization and could therefore regain both liberty and their civic rights. Russell himself went further, and prophesied that since the definition of feeble-mindedness was so ill defined and elastic, it was practicably inevitable that governments would abuse the right to define someone as feeble-minded. He reasoned that because the State would try to police social and moral normalcy and political acceptability by having medical experts pronounce on suspect individuals' mental health, there was less danger to society in the State having the power to sterilize than there was in it having the right to compulsorily segregate the "unfit".

In his 1927 article, "Should We Let the Scientists Govern?", Russell pursued his argument to its logical limits. Echoing a theme found in many of his interwar pieces, Russell suggested that many humans abstain from actions that would be to their collective advantage through "ignorance, prejudice, short-sightedness and mere laziness". Dealing with the problem of feeble-mindedness was one of these circumstances. As Russell wrote:

> By sterilizing the feeble-minded of two generations, feeble-mindedness and idiocy could be almost stamped out; but here religious scruples intervene, and even humanitarian feelings which lead to the opinion that one man must be made to suffer for the good of others except as a punishment for sin. Scientifically-minded people naturally grow impatient of these restrictions upon their activities.

But, significantly, Russell was cautious about the scientifically minded, too, for they were "not so objective in their judgments as they like to pretend" and went on to argue against aristocratic utopias—even those based on science. For Russell, despite its imperfections, only democracy was a sure way to justice.[89]

Russell continued that individualists rightly feared doctors abusing

[89] "Should We Let the Scientists Govern?", *Jewish Daily Forward*, 2 Jan. 1927, pp. E1, E3; see also "The Future of Science", *Papers* 10: 48.

their powers, for as long as IQ could not be measured precisely there was always a danger of prejudice coming into their decisions. But it was this very imprecision and the possibility of the abuse of power latent in authority to designate someone as unfit for political or other reasons that caused Russell to prefer sterilization to any other means of dealing with the issue:

> To shut up political opponents in a lunatic asylum would be to inflict a very severe punishment, and one, moreover, which a certain kind of government might find tempting; but to sterilize a man without stopping his work would be a rather slight judgment, and in no way useful to the holders of power.

Thus, it would be better to have a policy of sterilization for all those designated feeble-minded by the authorities while also limiting the State's power to silence those who, for whatever reason, it deemed "unfit".[90] Sterilization thus offered a means to tackle a eugenic problem without extending the State's powers that it might be tempted to abuse.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps it is because Ray Monk judges Russell's social commentary as essentially worthless that he seems to believe it unnecessary to explore the full social and cultural context of Russell's non-philosophical writings. When properly contextualized, however, the place of eugenics within *Marriage and Morals*, and Russell's general concern with parenthood and for companionship in marriage, combined with his respect for sexual freedom in the book, are neither eccentric, nor the result of uniquely personal circumstances or of psychological demons. Rather, these views were largely consistent with the general framing of sexual ethics by progressive sex and moral reformers since the turn of the twentieth century, almost all of whom supported directly, or used, eugenic arguments in their calls for moral and sexual reform. Monk is guilty of ascribing to Russell views which he sees as inconsistent in today's world, rather than what was seen as perfectly compatible in the early twentieth century. And it is instructive to note that of the more than 110 reviews of *Marriage and Morals* that were published in 1929 and the early 'thirties,

[90] "The Babies Nobody Wants", p. 3.

some of which were very hostile, not one commented in a negative fashion on Russell's eugenic arguments. The issue of eugenics only starts to be commented on negatively in reviews of later editions in the 1950s; after, that is, the Nazi horrors had been revealed.

Similarly, while Monk's revulsion over Russell's views on eugenics is quite understandable, this nonetheless reflects a late twentieth-century perspective, and fails to investigate both the evolution of his position and the subtle distinctions that he made in his arguments. Russell never abandoned his libertarian concerns due to psychological fears of hereditary mental deficiency; in fact, in many ways he tried to preserve what he saw as key individual liberties given his perception of the increasing reliance on scientific authority by the State. We may disagree with his choices. On the face of it, there were some curious lapses in his reasoning. For instance, Russell rather uncritically accepted arguments about the hereditary nature of feeble-mindedness even though he acknowledged that there was no consensus on what made one feeble-minded. Similarly, he accepted the connections between the hereditary nature of genius and high social status suggested by Galton. But, of course, Russell was not a geneticist himself, and his own experience and family history probably inclined him to accept what was, after all, the consensus view of a majority of respectable scientists (of all political persuasions) who *were* more acquainted with the cutting-edge of genetics. From the turn of the century to the 1930s, eugenics was not just a movement popular on the political right, as is often assumed, but was a respectable position among a variety of Marxists, socialists, and Fabians: J. B. S. Haldane, G. B. Shaw, Havelock Ellis, H. J. Laski, Emma Goldman, C. P. Snow and Julian Huxley were only a few of the radical left-leaning thinkers who, sharing beliefs in the need for some form of a socialist social re-engineering to overcome inequality, saw eugenics as a promising possibility for progress and human liberation.[91] Indeed, for many British intellectuals across the political spectrum, eugenic views were attractive because Victorian social reform strategies seemed to have failed, or were at least insufficient by themselves, to bring about great improvements in

[91] Michael Freeden, "Eugenics and Progressive Thought: a Study in Ideological Affinity", *Historical Journal*, 22 (1979): 645–71; Greta Jones, "Eugenics and Social Policy between the Wars", *Historical Journal*, 25 (1982): 717–28; Diane Paul, "Eugenics and the Left", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45 (1984): 567–90.

society. Eugenics provided a "modern" way of talking about social problems that could be selectively appropriated by individuals and groups with very different goals and beliefs. Thus in different ways, eugenics gave scientific authority to both progressive agendas for social change and to conservative social fears and moral panics. For good or ill, the language of eugenics lent respectability to prescriptive claims about the social order, and a patina of objectivity grounded in the supposed workings of nature.[92] The fact that the scientific consensus on eugenics was unpopular with much if not most of British lay opinion—on religious and political rather than scientific grounds—perhaps also appealed to Russell's contrarian instincts. The fact that one of the most active opponents of eugenics in Britain was the Catholic Church certainly was not conducive to changing Russell's mind on the ultimate worth of the eugenic idea.

Moreover, it is clear that as his thought on the topic evolved, Russell came to question many of the premisses that underpinned much eugenics research—especially in the interwar years—and he rejected what he saw as the dangerous ideological connections commonly made between biology and socio-economic status by the more conservative enthusiasts of the Eugenics Society.[93] Indeed, Russell's doubts about the feasibility and desirability of eugenics increased over time, largely because of the social and political arguments that tended to frame them.[94] But like Julian Huxley and J. B. S. Haldane, Russell never gave up on the idea that if the ideological element could be removed from the application, the idea of improving the overall human condition through biological manipulation was sound.[95] And this is, after all, the premiss that underpins much of the more recent work in human genetics. The problem for Russell in the interwar years, however, was how to bring about the kind of society-wide reforms he thought necessary without strengthening the power of the State. The reforms of marriage Russell proposed in

[92] Frank Dikötter, "Race Culture: Recent Perspectives on the History of Eugenics", *American Historical Review*, 103 (1998): 467–78.

[93] Russell to Paul Smith, 6 June 1960 (RAI 720); Schiller to Russell, 6 Dec. 1925 (RAI 710.055574).

[94] Russell to Santayana, 23 July 1937 (RA3 REC. ACQ. 550). I'd like to thank Michael Stevenson for this reference.

[95] J. B. S. Haldane, *The Inequality of Man and Other Essays* (1932), quoted in Gary Werskey, *The Visible College* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), p. 97.

Marriage and Morals were thus about saving the institution in the face of growing State intervention in family life. As he noted at the end of 1926: "I have not enough faith in the State, in institutions, or in officials to believe that children confided wholly to the State would secure that degree of affection which is necessary for their physical and mental health."[96]

[96] "The Institution of Marriage Is Here to Stay", *Jewish Daily Forward*, 19 Dec. 1926, p. E1.