

## The Secret History of the Dismal Science. Part VI. Eugenics and the Amoralization of Economics

---

 [econlib.org/library/Columns/LevyPeartdismal6.html](https://econlib.org/library/Columns/LevyPeartdismal6.html)

### Introduction

---

“For the Eugenicists, Adam Smith’s sympathetic principle, the Christian Golden Rule, and the Utilitarian Greatest Happiness Principle were to be replaced with the imperative to create the new model person: bigger, better, whiter.”

We have alluded to the Eugenics movement earlier in our Secret History, so it will come as no surprise that we see a connection between the rise of Eugenics and the attacks on Classical Political Economy in the nineteenth century. In this column we explicate the connection, and we argue that the influence of Eugenics led to the removal of ethical norms from economics.

Eugenics was the biological counterpart to the remaking project proposed by John Ruskin, and as such it was fundamentally opposed to the Classical notion of abstract economic man. Critics of economics in the nineteenth century wished to see economic man transformed, by slavery, work, art, or breeding. As Ruskin claimed in a series of papers entitled *Unto This Last*, his “chemical” view of political economy compared favourably with the “mathematical” view of J. S. Mill. In Mill’s mathematical approach, the nature of man is fixed and social forces simply move the human from one point to another. The chemical approach emphasizes the transformative nature of such social forces:

But the disturbing elements in the social problem are not of the same nature as the constant one: they alter the essence of the creature under examination the moment they are added: they operate, not mathematically, but chemically, introducing conditions which render all our previous knowledge unavailable. Ruskin (1905, p. 26).

Early in his “Nature of the Gothic” Ruskin had criticized markets for taking people as they are

And the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blast, is all in very deed for this,—that we manufacture everything there except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to form a single living spirit, never enters into their estimate of advantages. (Ruskin 1925, volume 2, p. 151.)

We have already seen one transformation proposition—Carlyle’s idea that work humanizes [see [Column 2](#)].

But what if, instead, we could improve the “essence” of decision-makers biologically?

Pioneered at the end of the 19th century by Francis Galton and W. R. Greg, the Eugenics Movement held that, without intervention, the genetic stock of the nation would deteriorate, and proposed selective breeding—as well as immigration restrictions—in order to counter these supposed tendencies. See the [Eugenics Archive](#) and [Va. Apologizes To the Victims Of Sterilizations](#) in the *Washington Post*, May 3, 2002.

Those who were attracted to Ruskin's remaking methodology to “manufacture... men” might also have been attracted by the claim that society had the capacity and the moral authority to improve the genetic make-up of the race through selective breeding. The wide endorsement of such Eugenic thinking by economists late in the century and well into the twentieth century remains all too unknown. Post-classical economists embraced race or class theories of heterogeneous economic behaviour, and they broke substantively from their Classical predecessors.

“Nobody ever saw a dog make a fair and deliberate exchange of one bone for another with another dog. Nobody ever saw one animal by its gestures and natural cries signify to another, this is mine, that yours; I am willing to give this for that.”—From Adam Smith's *[Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations](#)*, par. I.2.2

We have seen that in such debates as the Governor Eyre controversy [see [Column 3](#)] the Classical economists sounded very much like their partners in the anti-slavery movement, the Christian evangelicals. There is a moral foundation to Classical economics because, as Adam Smith claimed, the concept of “fairness” is required for trade to take place. To trade we must recognize that the other has a moral standing equal to our own.

Thus, the role of theologians of such stature as Richard Whately in economics is not a coincidence. But in mainstream contemporary economics there is no moral foundation: all there is, is desires and constraints. How did we get from there to here? We will argue that the Eugenics Movement played a crucial role in this transformation.

## **The Beginning of Eugenics and the Attack on Homogeneity**

---

Darwin's theory of natural selection profoundly influenced early Eugenicists, and the admiration was mutual.<sup>1</sup> But there was a key difference between Darwinism and the “theory” put forward by early Eugenicists. Darwinism, applied to humans, predicted the fit would survive, *without intervention*, naturally. But A. R. Wallace made the case early on that the doctrine of natural selection did *not* apply to humans. Recognizing that humans could not *count* on such a tendency, Eugenicists recommended that human (State) action should be used to obtain it.

In 1864, Wallace argued that the doctrine of natural selection did not apply to humans because of ethical concerns generated by human sympathy. Our morals do not allow us to let the infirm perish. Wallace describes non-human animals and then turns to people:

But in man, as we now behold him, this is different. He is social and sympathetic. In the rudest tribes the sick are assisted at least with food; less robust health and vigour than the average does not entail death.... Some division of labour takes place... The action of natural selection is therefore checked..." Wallace, 1864, p. clxii.

W. R. Greg—whom we have on his belief in the racial inferiority of the Irish in Column 1—responded that sympathy blocked the “salutary” effects of the survival of the fittest, and therefore such sentiments should be suppressed:

My thesis is this: that the indisputable effect of the state of social progress and culture we have reached, of our high civilization in its present stage and actual form, is to *counteract and suspend* the operation of that righteous and salutary law of ‘natural selection’ in virtue of which the best specimens of the race—the strongest, the finest, the worthiest—are those which survive... and propagate an ever improving and perfecting type of humanity. (1875, p. 119)

In his *Enigmas of Life*, Greg attacked Malthus’ account of population growth. Malthus was concerned only that, on average, marriage be postponed (Greg 1875, p. 129). Greg emphasized a new law in opposition to Malthus:

... possibly the danger *ultimately* to be apprehended may be the very reverse of that which Malthus dreaded; that, in fact, when we have reached that point of universal plenty and universal cultivation to which human progress ought to bring us, the race will multiply too slowly rather than too fast. One such influence may be specified with considerable confidence,—namely, THE TENDENCY OF CEREBRAL DEVELOPMENT TO LESSEN FECUNDITY. Greg (1875, p. 103).

Galton’s criticism of Malthus’s views on human homogeneity was avowedly from the point of view of racial improvement:

The practical application of the doctrine of deferred marriage would therefore lead indirectly to most mischievous results, that were overlooked owing to the neglect of considerations bearing on race. (1907, p. 207)

“Let us bear in mind the words of Galton written almost in the last years of his life, words not of despair, but of wise caution: ‘When the desired fullness of information shall been acquired, then and not till then, will be the fit moment to proclaim a “Jehad” or Holy War against customs and prejudices that impair the physical and moral qualities of our race.’” (Pearson and Elderton, foreword, *Annals of Eugenics*, volume 1, 1925, p. 4).

Thus for Eugenicists, Adam Smith’s sympathetic principle, the Christian Golden Rule, and the Utilitarian Greatest Happiness Principle were to be replaced with the imperative to create the new model person: bigger, better, whiter. The post-classical economists’ involvement with Eugenics shows that the new economics was not a movement from moral philosophy to science but rather a replacement of morals of reciprocity among people of equal capacity with the pretension of the philosopher to

remake people better to serve the interests of the state.

Figure 1. George Cruikshank: Carousal and Plunder at the Palace of the Bishop of Ferns.

## ZOOM

It still sometimes comes as a surprise that nineteenth century arguments about racial superiority play out both in terms of the Irish and the former slaves in Jamaica (Curtis 1997); “race” is a rather ill-defined notion well into the twentieth century. But by 1870, two theories of racial hierarchy co-existed in the scientific community and the popular press. The more devastating view of the owner of the *Anthropological Review*, James Hunt, held that there were races whose physical development arrested prematurely, dead races incapable of elevation.



We now know it to be a patent fact that there are races existing which have no history, and that the Negro is one of these races. From the most remote antiquity the Negro race seems to have been what they are now. We may be pretty sure that the Negro race have been without a progressive history; and that they have been for thousands of years the uncivilized race they are at this moment. (Hunt 1864, 13).

The President of the Anthropological Society of London in 1870, John Beddoe, became well-known for developing an “Index of Nigrescence” that might be applied to Celtic “types”, as well as the racial category, “Africanoid Celts.” (Curtis 1997, p. 20, Beddoe 1870, pp. 212-13). Huxley takes issue with Beddoe over the question of whether the Irish were a separate race.

The second theory of race, which we call “parametric racism,” held that the inferior race differed from the superior (Anglo-Saxons) along some parameter(s). Greg co-founded the Eugenics movement with Galton, and he persistently attacked Classical political economy for its assumption that the Irishman is an “average human being,” rather than an “idiomatic” and an “idiosyncratic” man, prone to “idleness,” “ignorance,” “jollity” and “drink”. Cruikshank’s illustrations which accompany Maxwell’s *History of the Irish Rebellion* portray this Irishman repeatedly. That both types of accounts were applied to the Irish is evident from these remarks by Thomas Huxley in an 1870 address to the Anthropological Society:

If the writer means to be civil, the Celt is taken to be a charming person, full of wit and vivacity and kindness, but, unfortunately, thoughtless, impetuous, and unstable, and having standards of right and wrong so different from those of the Anglo-Saxon that it would be absurd, not to say cruel, to treat him in the same way. Or, if the instructor of the public is angry, he takes the Celt as if he were a kind of savage, out of whom no good ever has come or ever will come, and whose proper fate is to be kept as hewer of wood and a drawer of water for his Anglo-Saxon master. This is the picture of the lion by the man. (Huxley 1870, p. 197).2

Irving Fisher contrasts the “improvident” and weak willed Irish with the sober and “provident Scotch”: “A weak will usually goes with a weak intellect, though not necessarily, and not always. The effect of a weak will is similar to the effect of inferior foresight. Like those workmen who cannot carry their pay home Saturday night, but spend it in a grogshop on the way, many persons cannot deny themselves any present indulgence, even when they know definitely what the consequences will be in the future.” (1909, p. 376).

As both sorts of racial theories entered into economics in the decades that followed, the focus moved from physical differences stressed by the anthropologists—the shape or size of the skull—to differences in economic competence. Economists argued about whether the Irish or blacks in America were competent enough to decide how much and for whom to work, or to save for their old age. These accounts entered into economic thinking well into the twentieth century, in economists’ characterization of the family size choice, intertemporal decision making, and the consumption of “luxuries” and intoxicants.

### **Eugenicists Succeed**

---

Late in the century, economists embraced accounts of heterogeneity entailing different capacities for optimization, and often entailing racial hierarchy. To see this, consider the following table, which lists how the characterizations of race by anthropologists and eugenicists carried over to the economics literature after the demise of the Classical period.

**Post-Classical Economists on the “Lower Races”**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Characteristics of “Lower Races”</b>
Jevons 1869, 1870 & 1871	Intemperate, improvident, lacking foresight (1869, pp. 186-7); ignorant, careless, unsubdued, vicious, want of self-reliance (1870, pp. 196, 200).  “Questions of this kind [work effort] depend greatly upon the character of the race. Persons of an energetic disposition feel labour less painfully than their fellow-men, and, if they happen to be endowed with various and acute sensibilities, their desire of further acquisition never ceases. A man of lower race, a negro for instance, enjoys possession less, and loathes labour more; his exertions, therefore soon stop. A poor savage would be content to gather the almost gratuitous fruits of nature, if they were sufficient to give sustenance; it is only physical want which drives him to exertion.” (1871, pp. 182-83)

---

Marshall 1890	Savage life ruled by custom and impulse; never forecasting the distant future; seldom providing for near future; servitude to custom; fitful; governed by the fancy of the moment; incapable of steady work (p. 723); Anglo-Saxon are steadfast (p. 581); lack patience, self control, self discipline (p. 581); England peopled by the strongest members of the strongest races of northern Europe (p. 740); capital-labour division of labour characterizes English race/ modern civilization (p. 745); race of undertakers develops in England (p. 749)
Pigou 1907 & 1920	Feckless; high birth rates; (1907, pp. 364-5); faulty telescopic faculty; propagation untrammelled by economic considerations (1920, p. 123); lack initiative and understanding (p. 326); over-estimate chances of success (1920, p. 493)
Commons 1907	Impulsive, strong sexual passion, debauchery ; high birth rate; lack self-control, foresight, self-reliance, willpower, ingenuity; ignorant; indolent; improvident; superstitious; contented (pp. 39, 40, 49, 60, 212-13)
Fisher 1909 & 1930	Lack foresight and self-control; improvident (1930, p. 73; 1907, p. 94); impatience, weak wills, weak intellect
Webb 1910	Maximum birth rates; thriftless; idle; drunken; profligate; feeble- minded; unfit; lacking in self-respect and foresight
Fetter 1916	Defective mentally and physically, high birth rates (pp. 369, 375).

## Breeding Policy

The influence of Eugenicists on economics extended to policy. As economists came to accept accounts of economic behavior where economic competence varied systematically by race or class, they allowed that some among us are “unfit,” parasites who live off of the rest of society. They endorsed an elaborate remaking program—what Sydney Webb called “social engineering”—for inferior decision-makers (1910, p. 237). Biological remaking was designed to reduce the level of what Eugenicists called “parasitism” in society [see [Column 5](#)].

Figure 2. Some Untaxed Imports From Italy Who Wear an Unwonted Air of Gaiety Just Now.

### ZOOM

(*Punch*, November 18, 1903.)

Eugenicists—biologists and economists alike—urged that selective breeding be used to improve the genetic make up of the race. Those who endorsed eugenic policies made their case in explicit opposition to utilitarian economists of the nineteenth century for whom the happiness of one counts as that of another (Hankins 1923, p. 398), and in opposition to democratic theory:



Democracy is still the fundamental religion of the nation, but grave doubts begin to appear as to the speedy realization of the happy day-dreams of our fathers. The land is full of strangers of alien race and tradition; in spite of popular education and heroic efforts at social betterment objective inequality has increased so that the wilful unbeliever must now admit it. Class lines are appearing even in the democratic west; even class war stalks through the land in which our cant-mongering political orators and purblind newspaper editors say there are no classes (Hankins 1923, p. 395).<sup>3</sup>

The implications for national greatness and commercial superiority were stressed repeatedly.<sup>4</sup>

Among British post-classical economists, the argument was often that the Irish over-breed, while Anglo-Saxons reproduce at relatively low rates. In America, the Irish were frequently offered as an example of an “inferior” race, but the “negro” and “immigration problems” formed additional backdrops to discussions of Eugenic policies. Waves of immigration drawn predominantly from genetically inferior East European races are said to have reduced the genetic quality of the nation (Commons 1916, pp. 200ff). Since such immigrants—these “Untaxed Imports” (see illustration)—multiply at high rates, the deterioration would be ongoing.<sup>5</sup> The argument regarding relatively low fertility rates among the highly civilised became known as “race treason”.

Economists also came to fear the real effect of economic progress which improved the survival chances of parasites, would be to increase the proportion of “feeble and unfit” in the genetic pool. Marshall, for instance, wrote that

Thus there are increasing reasons for fearing, that while the progress of medical science and sanitation is saving from death a continually increasing number of the children of those who are feeble physically and mentally; many of those who are most thoughtful and best endowed with energy, enterprise and self- control are tending to defer their marriages and in other ways to limit the number of children whom they leave behind them. (p. 201; cf. Pigou 1907, p. 365).<sup>6</sup>

For economists, Eugenics provided the solution to the relative decrease of the “successful strains” of the population (see Pigou 1907, pp. 366, 368), as well as the racial mix of the existing population that resulted from immigration and, (in America), slavery, (Fetter 1916, p. 366). Three sets of Eugenics policies were proposed to improve the genetic make up of the economic unit (generally, in this context, the nation):<sup>7</sup>

1. 1) measures to encourage fertility among the “superior” genetic stock (Fisher 1909, p. 673);
2. 2) measures to reduce fertility among those of “inferior” natural abilities, including “permanent segregation” or sterilization (Pigou 1920, p. 112); and
3. 3) Fisher, Frank Fetter, and J. R. Commons each argued for selective restrictions on immigration.<sup>8</sup>

## Remaking in Classical Economics?

---

Is there any room for remaking in order to improve economic competence in the Classical period? How do people make themselves into competent optimizers when institutions which had ensured that habits of optimization were not formed change and markets are put into place instead? Mill tackled this hard problem in the context of the transition from slavery to markets. Emancipation is justified by the increase in human happiness rather than by any increase in material output. To civilize a man, one immerses him in material desires:

To civilize a savage, he must be inspired with new wants and desires, even if not of a very elevated kind, provided that their gratification can be a motive to steady and regular bodily and mental exertion. If the negroes of Jamaica and Demerara, after their emancipation, had contented themselves, as it was predicted they would do, with the necessities of life, and abandoned all labour beyond the little which in a tropical climate, with a thin population and abundance of the richest land, is sufficient to support existence, they would have sunk into a condition more barbarous, though less unhappy, than their previous state of slavery. (1965, p. 104).

While these material desires might not be approved in Mill's society, they are critical steps in the development of the capacity for self-reliance:

The motive which was most relied on for inducing them to work was their love of fine clothes and personal ornaments. No one will stand up for this taste as worthy of being cultivated, and in most societies its indulgence tends to impoverish rather than to enrich; but in the state of mind of the negroes it might have been the only incentive that could make them voluntarily undergo systematic labour, and so acquire or maintain habits of voluntary industry which may be converted to more valuable ends. (1965, pp. 104-5).

If one can become competent to govern oneself, can one not take the additional step toward concern for others? Acquisition of material goods is but one step towards such far-sighted competence.

Whether Mill succeeds or fails—authorities are divided—he points to a real difficulty in the transition between social states: habits which evolve for sensible reasons in one state might be counter-productive in another.

Conclusion: Fixed Human Nature is Revived at Chicago

But it would be foolhardy to presume that Eugenics has been completely discredited: “The eugenic case is made simply by looking at the pedigrees of the criminals who appear in court, and contrasting them with those of the judges. The overwhelming number of judges (however idiotic we may pretend they are) come from intelligent, decent families, and the overwhelming number of criminals come from stock that is violent and stupid.... in the future the state will decide [“eugenics”] is an inevitable

policy. Rather than building yet another prison, some Home Secretary will institute a system in which, after the second or third rape, mugging, or armed robbery, the perpetrator is sterilised.” (“Our Future Lies with Eugenics”, by AN Wilson, *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 March 2002.)

While Eugenics is now commonly understood to have been influential but mistaken policy, the tension between economists who presume that agents are equally able to optimize, and those who wish to improve the economic competence of various groups, has never been fully resolved.

Hierarchical, and sometimes racial, accounts won the day well into the twentieth century, but near the middle of the century the Classical tradition of equal competence (homogeneity) was revived at Chicago. Not surprisingly, given the racial characterization focused on intertemporal decision-making, time preference was central in the Chicago revival. In his 1931 review of Irving Fisher’s *Theory of Interest*, Frank Knight voiced his skepticism about the common link supposed in economists’ accounts between time preference and race. Knight, and after him George Stigler and Gary Becker, questioned myopic accounts of intertemporal decision making. As the Chicago school revived the Classical doctrine of homogeneity it also (and by no coincidence) revived the presumption of competence even in political activity. But while the Chicago school returned the homogeneity principle to economics, the fate of ethical norms—Smith’s sympathy and reciprocity—has been one of relative obscurity. Removed from economics so that Eugenical remaking might occur, sympathy and reciprocity have remained largely outside economics.

The anti-race argument was made even more emphatically, perhaps, by Ludwig von Mises:

“[The ethnologists] are utterly mistaken in contending that these other races have been guided in their activities by motives other than those which have actuated the white race. The Asiatics and the Africans no less than the peoples of European descent have been eager to struggle successfully for survival and to use reason as the foremost weapon in these endeavors.”

—*Human Action*, London, 1949, p. 85.

Perhaps the modern film version of H. G. Wells’ *Time Machine* with its eugenic message of how those who do as they like are bound to devolve into subhuman parasites fit for extermination, will provoke a much-needed discussion. It was Wells after all who wrote this about the relationship between the state and “nature” when he criticized Galton’s “positive eugenics”:

I believe that now and always the conscious selection of the best for reproduction will be impossible; that to propose it is to display a fundamental misunderstanding of what individuality implies. *The way of nature has always been to slay the hindmost*, and

there is still no other way, unless we can prevent those who would become the hindmost being born. It is in the sterilization of failure, and not in the selection of successes for breeding, that the possibility of an improvement of the human stock lies. (*American Journal of Sociology* 1904, vol 10, p. 11.) [emphasis added]

---

## Bibliography

Beddoe, John (1870) "Anthropology and Politics: Kelts and Saxons." *The Anthropological Review* viii: 211-213.

Commons, J. R. (1916) *Races and Immigration in America*. NY: Macmillan.

Curtis, L. P., Jr. (1997). *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*. Revised edition. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Darwin, Charles (1989) *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Volume 21 of *The Works of Charles Darwin*. Edited by Paul H. Barrett & R. B. Freeman. New York: New York University Press.

Fisher, Irving (1976 [1909]), *National Vitality, its Wastes and Conservation*. New York: Arno Press.

Fisher, Irving (1930) *Theory of Interest*. New York

Fetter, Frank A (1916) *Modern Economic Problems*. New York: The Century Co.

Galton, Francis (1904) "Note on the History of Sociology in Reply to Professor Karl Pearson" ( paper read to Sociological Society), 1904, *Sociological Papers*, London: Macmillan: 25-51.

Galton, Francis. (1907) *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*. London: John Dent.

[Greg, W. R.] (1866) "On the Failure of 'Natural Selection' in the Case of Man." *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* 78 (September): 353-62.

Greg, W. R. (1875) *Enigmas of Life*. Boston.

Hankins, F. H. (1923) "Individual Differences and Democratic Theory." *Political Science Quarterly*, pp. 388-412.

Hunt, James. (1864) *The Negro's Place in Nature*. New York.

Jevons, William Stanley (1869) "A Deduction from Darwin's Theory." *Nature* (December 30): 231-32.

Jevons, William Stanley (1870) "Opening Address of the President of Section F (Economic Science and Statistics), of the British Association for the Advancement of Science." *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society of London* 33:3 (September): 309-26.

Jevons, William Stanley (1871) *Theory of Political Economy* 4th ed. 1911, Macmillan. London.

Knight, Frank H. (1931) "Professor Fisher's Interest Theory: A Case in Point." *Journal of Political Economy* 39: 176-212.

Marshall, Alfred (1890) *Principles of Economics* [1930], 8th edition. London: Macmillan.

Maxwell, W. H. 1845. *History of the Irish Rebellion in 1798*. London.

Pearson, Karl and Ethel M. Elderton. 1925 "Forward." *The Annals of Eugenics* 1: 1-4.

Ruskin, John (1905) "Unto this Last." *The Works of John Ruskin*. Edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. Volume 17, pp. 1-114. London.

Ruskin, John 1921, 1925, *The Stones of Venice*. Volume 2. London: John Dent

Pigou, A. C. (1907) "Social Improvement and Modern Biology." *Economic Journal*, 17: 3: 358-69.

Pigou, A. C. (1920) *The Economics of Welfare*. 3rd edition. London: Macmillan.

Wallace, A. R. (1864) "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the Theory of 'Natural Selection.'" *Journal of the Anthropology Society* 2: clviii-cixx.

Webb, Sydney (1910) "Eugenics and the Poor Law: The Minority Report" *The Eugenics Review* 2:3 (November): 233-41.

Wells, H. G. "Comment on Francis Galton Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims" *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 10, No. 1. (Jul., 1904), pp. 10-11.

---

## Footnotes

### 1.

Darwin cites Galton and quotes Greg, being particularly taken with Greg's 1868 *Fraser's* "On the Failure of 'Natural Selection' in the Case of Man" (Darwin, 1989, pp. 138-39). He was particularly struck by Greg's characterization of the Irish: "The careless, squalid, unambitious Irishman, fed on potatoes, living in a pig-stye, doting on a superstition, multiply like rabbits or ephemera; and the frugal, foreseeing self-respecting, ambitious Scot, stern in his morality, spiritual in his faith, sagacious and disciplined in his intelligence, passes his best years in struggle and in celibacy, marries late, and leaves few behind him." Darwin (1989, p. 143) quoting Greg (1866, pp. 360-61).

### 2.

The context of the remarks is a debate over differences between the Celts and the Anglo-Saxons, which, Huxley asserted, amounted only to linguistic differences. That position was opposed by John Beddoe. (1870, pp. 212-213).

3.

The argument increasingly becomes recast in terms of “class”: low fertility rates among the “upper classes,” and high birth rates among the poor. In many cases, however, the racial element remains. Marshall, for instance, argued that historically, the intermixture of races that followed conquests led him to speculate that the lower races selected into the industrial classes (see 1890, p. 195). Elsewhere he used the more obvious eugenic phrase, referring to the tendency of the “higher strains of the population to marry later and to have fewer children than the lower” (1890, p. 203).

4.

As Galton put it: “There is strong reason for believing that national rise and decline is closely connected with this influence [“of the rates with which the various classes of society (classified according to civic usefulness) have contributed to the population”] (1904, p. 47).

5.

Marshall feared that such deterioration will also occur within cities. Here the argument is that the Irish form a relatively large and (due to high birth rates) growing constituency in cities (see Jevons 1870).

6.

“Again, on the Pacific Slope, there were at one time just grounds for fearing that all but highly skilled work would be left to the Chinese; and that the white men would live in an artificial way in which a family became a great expense. In this case Chinese lives would have been substituted for American, and the average quality of the human race would have been lowered.” (1890, p. 201 n1). The contention that, without sterilization or segregation, saving the “feeble” entails a reduction in genetic quality is common; see Fisher 1909; Webb 1910.

7.

Economists typically favoured a combination of eugenics and environmental policy. See Pigou 1907 and 1920, pp. 120-125.

8.

Commons 1916, pp. 198ff.

---

\*David M. Levy is associate professor of economics, George Mason University, and a research associate of the Center for the Study of Public Choice. His email address is DavidMLevy at aol.com.

\*Sandra J. Peart is associate professor of economics, Baldwin-Wallace College.

For more articles by David M. Levy and Sandra J. Peart, see the [Archive](#).