

Religion, Evolution and Heredity



Edited by
Marius Turda

Religion, Evolution and Heredity

Special Issue of
*The Journal of Religious History,
Literature and Culture*
2018

Edited by
MARIUS TURDA
Oxford Brookes University



Volume 4 November 2018 Number 2
UNIVERSITY OF WALES PRESS

<https://doi.org/10.16922/jrhlc.4.2>

Editors

Professor William Gibson, Oxford Brookes University
Dr John Morgan-Guy, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Assistant Editor

Dr Thomas W. Smith, University of Leeds

Reviews Editor

Dr Nicky Tsougarakis, Edge Hill University

Editorial Advisory Board

Professor David Bebbington, Stirling University
Professor Stewart J. Brown, University of Edinburgh
Dr James J. Caudle, Yale University
Dr Robert G. Ingram, Ohio University, USA
Professor Geraint Jenkins, Aberystwyth University
Dr David Ceri Jones, Aberystwyth University
Professor J. Gwynfor Jones, Cardiff University
Dr Frances Knight, University of Nottingham
Professor Kenneth E. Roxburgh, Samford University, USA
Dr Robert Pope, University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Professor Huw Pryce, Bangor University
Dr Eryn M. White, Aberystwyth University
Rt Revd and Rt Hon. Lord Williams of Oystermouth,
Magdalene College, Cambridge
Professor Jonathan Wooding, University of Sydney, Australia

Editorial Contacts

Professor William Gibson wgibson@brookes.ac.uk
Dr John Morgan-Guy j.morgan-guy@uwtsd.ac.uk
Dr Thomas W. Smith T.W.Smith@leeds.ac.uk
Dr Nicky Tsougarakis tsougarn@edgehill.ac.uk

Publishers and book reviewers with enquiries regarding reviews
should contact the journal's reviews editor, Dr Nicky Tsougarakis
tsougarn@edgehill.ac.uk

Cover illustration: adapted from the journal *Jó egészséget!* 3, 7 (July 1944).
Courtesy of the Széchényi National Library, Budapest (Hungary).

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	v
Contributors	vii
Scientific Calvinism: Eugenics as a Secular Religion <i>Marius Turda</i>	1
Squaring the Circle? Two Attempts to Reconcile Darwinism and Christianity in Late Victorian Britain <i>David Redvaldsen</i>	17
From Biopolitics to Eugenics: The Encyclical <i>Casti Connubii</i> <i>Emmanuel Betta</i>	39
Eugenics, Sex Reform, Religion and Anarchism in Portugal <i>Richard Cleminson</i>	61
Responsible Parenthood: Reproduction and Religion in Post-War Britain <i>Patrick T. Merricks</i>	85
Index	107

this page has been left intentionally blank

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This special issue on 'Religion, Evolution and Heredity' brings together papers presented at various workshops organised at Oxford Brookes University by the Centre for Medical Humanities and its Working Group on the History of Race and Eugenics, separately and in collaboration with the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History. One such event, organised on 8 November 2016, brought together members of two centres to discuss various aspects related to the history of medicine and religion. It is at the initiative of two participants, Professor William (Bill) Gibson and Dr John Morgan-Guy, that this special issue was commissioned for *The Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture*. I am indebted to both of them. To Bill, in particular, I am grateful not only for the original impetus of this project but also for his guidance, advice and generosity.

I was particularly delighted that two long-time collaborators and friends, Professor Richard Cleminson and Dr Emmanuel Betta, accepted my invitation to contribute to this special issue. To work with them and with the other two contributors, Drs David Redvaldsen and Patrick T. Merricks, was a rewarding experience.

I also want to express my gratitude to Professors Christiana Payne and Joanne Begiato for their support and encouragement. Finally, my thanks to Ross Brooks and Fiona Mann for reading and commenting on two articles included here.

Marius Turda

this page has been left intentionally blank

CONTRIBUTORS

Emmanuel Betta is Associate Professor, Sapienza University of Rome. He is the author of *L'autre genèse: Histoire de la fécondation artificielle* (2017).

Richard Cleminson is Professor of Hispanic Studies, University of Leeds. He is the author of *Catholicism, Race and Empire: Eugenics in Portugal, 1900–1950* (2014).

Patrick T. Merricks is the Undergraduate Officer, Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford. He is the author of *Religion and Racial Progress in Twentieth-Century Britain: Bishop Barnes of Birmingham* (2017).

David Redvaldsen is Associate Lecturer in History at Oxford Brookes University. He is the author of *The Labour Party in Britain and Norway: Elections and the Pursuit of Power between the World Wars* (2011).

Marius Turda is Reader in Biomedicine and Director of the Centre for Medical Humanities, Oxford Brookes University.

this page has been left intentionally blank

SCIENTIFIC CALVINISM: EUGENICS AS A SECULAR RELIGION

Marius Turda

The outbreak of the Great War in August 1914 found William Bateson (1861–1926), the celebrated English geneticist, lecturing and attending the meetings of the British Association in Melbourne and Sydney. After one such lecture, a Scottish soldier approached him and said: ‘Sir, what ye’re telling us is nothing but scientific Calvinism.’¹ The encounter made an impression on Bateson, who contemplated using *Scientific Calvinism* as a title for his Australian presidential addresses, and possibly for a collection of his popular writings on genetics.² He never did.³ Nor did he use ‘scientific Calvinism’ in connection with eugenics.⁴ But there were other scientists who did. The English geneticist J. B. S. Haldane (1892–1964) was one of them. He entitled an article that he wrote in 1929 for the October issue of *Harper’s Magazine* ‘Scientific Calvinism’, and republished it in his book *The Inequality of Man and Other Essays*, which appeared in 1932.⁵ ‘Will scientific Calvinism’, asked Haldane, ‘produce the same type of society and individual character as religious Calvinism? It is quite possible’, he believed. In order for this transformation to happen, however, the eugenicists – whom Haldane described as devoting ‘a large part of their energies to disapproving of their fellow-creatures’ – needed to gain the public and political influence that they so eagerly sought.⁶

Although it was popular journalism, the issues discussed in this article, particularly the idea of hereditary predestination, echoed widely among the supporters of eugenics, who, almost half a century after Francis Galton (1822–1911) coined the term,⁷ continued to be divided over which agency was the most important in shaping human improvement: the environment (nurture) or genetic inheritance (nature). Calvinism, as is known, promotes the idea of divine predestination. Similarly, eugenics is based on the premise that one’s heredity is *given* (predestined) not *made*. Although the individual may be able to correct certain ‘deficiencies’ through education and self-improvement, he or

she cannot escape the biological heritage bequeathed to him or her by parents and grandparents. Some hereditary legacies were more felicitous than others, eugenicists believed, but ultimately they were all *written* before the individual was born.

A year after the publication of Haldane's article, the question whether eugenics could be understood as 'scientific Calvinism' was put to three American eugenicists – Albert Edward Wiggam (1871–1957), Frederick Osborn (1889–1981) and Leon F. Whitney (1894–1973) – and their short answers were published in *Eugenics: A Journal of Race Betterment*.⁸ If Wiggam charged 'the fatalistic position of the environmental position and the freedom and optimism of the theory of the hereditarian basis of behaviour', Osborn chose not to endorse either position, stating instead that the 'indefinable spiritual quality [is what] enables the individual man to make the best of his opportunities and to overcome his limitations, whether of environment or of heredity'. It was Whitney, however, who engaged more directly with the question. It was 'possible', he noted, 'to argue that eugenics [. . .] be called "scientific Calvinism"'. Calvinism meant 'that a man's spiritual fate is foreordained', while eugenics presupposed 'that a man's quality and abilities [were] determined by hereditary endowment as acted upon by environment'.⁹

In their considerations of the importance of nature and nurture, these eugenicists found neither agency sufficiently stable to allow for a final pronouncement on whether eugenics was 'scientific Calvinism'. Galton himself would have rejected 'scientific Calvinism' as a description for his theory of eugenics. The question 'whether man possess[ed] any creative power of will at all, or whether his will is also predetermined by blind forces or by intelligent agencies' was unnecessary, and he deemed the 'unending argument' about predestination as detrimental to the 'practical side of eugenics'.¹⁰ In order for eugenics to 'be introduced into the national conscience, like a new religion' – as he put it in the paper that he read before the Sociological Society in May 1904¹¹ – there was need for an exploration of both morality and science, pursued simultaneously and without separating nature from nurture.¹² That is not to suggest that Galton saw eugenics as a modern secular surrogate for religion.¹³ Neither am I proposing a functionalist model that defines eugenics as a secular religion simply based on the premise that its ideological content was non-Christian or anti-Christian. Not only was eugenics rarely in open conflict with religion; it did not attempt to supplant it either. To be sure, eugenics vied with organised religion over the control of reproduction

and over the social and biological role of the family, but, in fact, the two had a common goal: to improve the health and morality of society. What I am offering here, moreover, is not a discussion of the relationship between religion and eugenics; others have achieved that very successfully.¹⁴ As one scholar aptly put it, 'It is rare for studies of eugenics not to mention the question of religion. The ethical issues surrounding eugenic theories raised questions for religious believers, and this subject has featured prominently in the existing historiography'.¹⁵ What I propose instead is to discuss eugenics as a moral philosophy concerned with the improvement of human life, with particular reference to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century contexts. For these reasons, this article stands askew relative to the more 'mainstream' scholarship on eugenics¹⁶ as well as the current debates on human enhancement, which, although purporting to discuss the ethical problems surrounding the legacy of eugenics, remain in large measure reticent about it.¹⁷

Any scientific movement is generally regarded as hostile to religion, but I do not believe that the terms 'science' and 'religion' are so mutually exclusive.¹⁸ In many respects, science and religion were not antithetical but complementary activities coupled in a synergetic relationship, and one upon which Galton's eugenic ideal was largely based. To be sure, eugenics teetered on religion in various ways. Importantly, eugenics (as the offspring of Darwinism and positivism) revised the traditional Platonic-Christian model of humanity's corporeality, in which the body was devalued as fallen and corrupt and ultimately dismissed as insignificant. The Christian condemnation of the body was certainly not as extreme as some nineteenth-century positivists and evolutionary scientists suggested it to be, but there is no doubt about the renewed importance that evolutionism and modern theories of heredity in general and eugenics in particular bestowed upon the body in the establishment of a new vision of humanity.¹⁹ Just as Darwinism may be seen as challenging the hegemonic role of religion²⁰ and the biological fixity of the human species, eugenics may be seen as supporting the very notion of humanity as defined in terms of a hierarchy of distinct social bodies, some better biologically equipped than others. But 'eugenic qualities', as Galton was keen to emphasise, were not just 'a sound mind and body' and 'an intelligence above the average' but also 'a natural capacity and zeal for work'.²¹ The healthy body and sound morals, which Galton deemed essential, needed to be accompanied by industriousness and social schemes for the betterment of men and women. In this, eugenics