



Eugenics, the Final Solution, Bioethics

Sheldon Ekland-Olson
and Julie Beicken



How Ethical Systems Change: Eugenics, the Final Solution, Bioethics

Sheldon Ekland-Olson and Julie Beicken

Mandatory sterilization laws enacted in dozens of states coast-to-coast and approved by the U.S. Supreme Court formed the initial pillar for what became the Final Solution. Following World War II, there was renewed interest in a more inclusive view of social worth and the autonomy of the individual. Social movements were launched to secure broad-based revisions in civil and human rights. This book is based on a hugely popular undergraduate course taught at The University of Texas, and is ideal for those interested in science-based policy, the social construction of social worth, social problems, and social movements.

Sheldon Ekland-Olson joined The University of Texas at Austin after completing his graduate work at the University of Washington in Seattle and Yale Law School. He is currently the Bernard and Audre Rapoport Centennial Professor of Liberal Arts. He served for five years as Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and then for eight years as Executive Vice President and Provost of the university. He has authored or co-authored several books and numerous articles on criminal justice, prison reform, and capital punishment. Widely recognized for his commitment to teaching undergraduates, he is the recipient of numerous teaching awards. His current interests are reflected in the book *Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Decides?* (Routledge, 2012).

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Series Foreword



The world in the early 21st century is beset with problems—a troubled economy, global warming, oil spills, religious and national conflict, poverty, HIV, health problems associated with sedentary lifestyles. Virtually no nation is exempt, and everyone, even in affluent countries, feels the impact of these global issues.

Since its inception in the 19th century, sociology has been the academic discipline dedicated to analyzing social problems. It is still so today. Sociologists offer not only diagnoses; they glimpse solutions, which they then offer to policy makers and citizens who work for a better world. Sociology played a major role in the civil rights movement during the 1960s in helping us to understand racial inequalities and prejudice, and it can play a major role today as we grapple with old and new issues.

This series builds on the giants of sociology, such as Weber, Durkheim, Marx, Parsons, Mills. It uses their frames, and newer ones, to focus on particular issues of contemporary concern. These books are about the nuts and bolts of social problems, but they are equally about the frames through which we analyze these problems. It is clear by now that there is no single correct way to view the world, but only paradigms, models, which function as lenses through which we peer. For example, in analyzing oil spills and environmental pollution, we can use a frame that views such outcomes as unfortunate results of a reasonable effort to harvest fossil fuels. “Drill, baby, drill” sometimes involves certain costs as pipelines rupture and oil spews forth. Or we could analyze these environmental crises as inevitable outcomes of our effort to dominate nature in the interest of profit. The first frame would solve oil spills with better environmental protection measures and clean-ups, while the second frame would attempt to prevent them altogether, perhaps shifting away from the use of petroleum and natural gas and toward alternative energies that are “green.”

These books introduce various frames such as these for viewing social problems. They also highlight debates between social scientists who frame problems differently. The books suggest solutions, both on the macro and micro levels. That is, they suggest what new policies might entail, and they also identify ways in which people, from the ground level, can work toward a better world, changing themselves and their lives and families and providing models of change for others.

Readers do not need an extensive background in academic sociology to benefit from these books. Each book is student-friendly in that we provide glossaries of terms for the uninitiated that are keyed to bolded terms in the text. Each chapter ends with questions for further thought and discussion. The level of each book is accessible to undergraduate students, even as these books offer sophisticated and innovative analyses.

Sheldon Ekland-Olson and his coauthors offer a fascinating four-volume analysis of the evolution of moral, ethical, and legal systems. In each volume, three themes reappear: there are important links between advances in science, technology, and evolving moral, ethical, and legal thinking; crystallizing events clarify issues and motivate reform; and boundaries of social worth are drawn when protecting and supporting life and when resolving dilemmas where the protection of life clashes with the alleviation of suffering.

In this book, Ekland-Olson and Julie Beicken trace how eugenic laws mandating that unfit individuals be prevented from having children were grounded in Darwin's theory of evolution and eventually legitimized by the U.S. Supreme Court. The U.S. eugenic legal template was used by Nazi Germany to implement their own eugenic sterilization program, and, by extension, medical experiments, practices of euthanasia, and eventually the Final Solution. Dramatic evidence of four similarly legitimized medical experiments in the United States following World War II eventually resulted in a thoroughgoing bioethics movement, grounded in principles of autonomy, beneficence, and justice.