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# Aaron Gillette , Eugenics and the Nature Nurture Debate in the Twentieth Century

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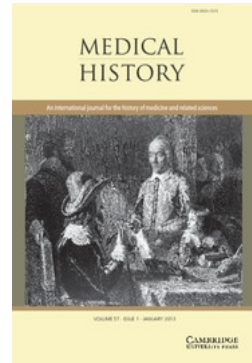
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**Gillette Aaron, *Eugenics and the Nature–Nurture Debate in the Twentieth Century*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Science and Technology [2007], digital reprint (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. ix, 239, index, £18.99, paperback, ISBN: 9780230108455.**

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health, Diana Riboli and Giannis Kyriakakis use their fieldwork in Malaysia and Ghana, respectively, to discuss populations outside the context of the Western tradition of medicine. In both chapters, anthropology intersects medical ecology in offering a holistic interpretation of the ways in which cultural, environmental, economic, political and sociological factors influence local understandings of health and disease.

The same empiricist methodology surfaces in Manos Savvakis and Eva Karatza's discussion of the relationship between medical training and the practical ways of dealing with disease and death in concrete situations. Important practical and theoretical issues relating to death are also analysed by Dimitris Magriplis in his chapter, while Dimitri Iliopoulos approaches the topic from the perspective of new technologies of biological and chemical welfare developed in the wake of increased uncertainty about global terrorism, war and epidemics. Advances in genetics and medicine notwithstanding, the cultural production of health remains ambiguous in areas that retained a strong religious character, as illustrated by Christina Veikou's chapter on popular therapeutic practices on the island of Lesbos. The enduring belief there is that placing a piece of garment worn by a sick person in a sacred place may contribute to that person's recovery and cure.

Apart from one, all contributions in this volume deal with current biomedical and health issues. In their contribution, Despina Karakatsani and Vassiliki Theodorou discuss the development of puériculture and eugenics in Greece in the period before World War II. It is illuminating to see that current concerns with care, regulation, discipline, improvement and shaping of individual bodies are not new. The chapter's greatest strength, moreover, is that it brings to life the writings and activities of a number of frequently neglected Greek paediatricians and eugenicists.

This volume succeeds in bringing together significant themes and developments in medicine as part of social history, political demography and cultural anthropology, which scholars in these various fields will find very useful. The fact that this edited volume is written in Greek and for a Greek audience may restrict its international reception. Be that as it may, the editors are to be commended for putting together a balanced combination of methodologies developed elsewhere and original Greek research in the history of health. It is a conceptual strategy that other medical historiographies in the region may find useful to emulate.

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**Aaron Gillette**, *Eugenics and the Nature–Nurture Debate in the Twentieth Century*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Science and Technology [2007], digital reprint (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. ix, 239, index, £18.99, paperback, ISBN: 9780230108455.

This book treats an important subject – the history of the nature–nurture debate (focused on the US but with references to European players and movements) – and its implications for current theories of evolutionary psychology. There is material here that has not been treated in standard studies of the history of eugenics, such as studies in the 1930s and 1940s on marriage choice and sexual selection, instinct theory, and the influence of behaviourism on the decline of eugenical theories. However, Gillette is so wholly

devoted to building a case for the importance of current sociobiology and its derivative, evolutionary psychology, that it produces a very skewed picture of a whole century of the nature–nurture debate, including the role of eugenics itself. I confess to having always been an outspoken sceptic of both sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, so for me the book was a particularly frustrating exercise. But even reading Gillette's narrative as much as possible in its own terms, numerous problems emerge that will make the book problematic for most historians of science.

The book is divided into three sections: (I) 'The Rebirth of Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology', which deals with the present versions of these theories; (II) 'The Birth of Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology', studies on instinct and the inheritance of behaviours in animals and humans in the period 1910–50; and (III) 'The Death of Sociobiology and Evolutionary Psychology', which details the demise of hereditarian theories in the period 1945–75). Chapters 1 and 2 of section I argue that sociobiology and evolutionary biology are now beginning to take their rightful place in understanding human behaviour after an eclipse due to the 'dogma' of behaviourism and modern sociological theory. In section II the author backtracks in time to the early twentieth century. Here the main topics are 'The Animal Nature of Humans', including claims for a wide range of human 'instincts' (chapter 3); 'Earlier Studies of Human Sexuality' focusing on studies in the 1920s–40s on the importance of sexual selection in human mate choice and marriage (chapter 4); and 'Evolution, Ethics and Culture' dealing with behaviours such as altruism, art, rape and religion, all implied to have a biological/genetic foundation (chapter 5). Section III deals with what the author sees as the demise of these early attempts at biologising human society due to the rise of the behaviourism of John Watson and B.F. Skinner on the one hand, and cultural anthropologists Franz Boas and his students (referred to as the 'Boasians') on the other (chapters 6–8). The 'Conclusion' (chapter 9) suggests that a new era is dawning in which a revived evolutionary psychology will finally hold sway and show us the true evolutionary foundations of our social, especially sexual, behaviour.

One of the problems I had with this book is its organisational structure. The topical orientation of most of the central, historical chapters (chapters 3–8) means that each chapter covers roughly the same period of time, from the 1910s through the 1950s, and thus to a repetitive re-introduction of people, ideas, or movements numerous times. For example, the rise of behaviourism in the 1920s is discussed in all the historical chapters, but nowhere is it analysed as an integrated movement with its own context rather than as a foil to eugenics. It would have been useful to show how much the behaviourist approach (however simplistic it was) represented a reaction against vague and speculative theories of 'mind' and took inspiration from the rise of experimentalism in biology in general, with its emphasis on quantitative measurement. Another problem that will vex historians even more is the author's insistence on applying the term 'evolutionary psychology' to all hereditarian studies of human and animal behaviour theories (including eugenics) throughout the whole of the twentieth century. This is anachronism at its worst, as the phrase was not used in the literature at all as far as I know prior to the 1970s or 1980s, and only gained currency in the 1990s in reference to a revised version of E.O. Wilson's sociobiology. While Darwin and others after him certainly saw the applicability of evolutionary theory to an understanding of behaviour and cognition in humans as well as other animals, their approaches and assumptions were not the same as those employed by modern-day advocates of evolutionary psychology. Gillette's insistence on this anachronism appears to arise from his desire to show that there was a 'good

baby' of evolutionary psychology in the early twentieth century that got thrown out with the 'bad bathwater' of eugenics and the fad of 'environmentalism' in the 1940s and later. The problem with this argument is that, in Gillette's narrative, most of the people interested in issues of animal or human behaviour in the first half of the century – Robert M. Yerkes, Samuel J. Holmes, Charles B. Davenport, Paul Popenoe, Roswell Johnson, William McDougall, Konrad Lorenz, to name only a few that Gillette discusses – were all eugenicists of one sort or another; there was no clear distinction made at the time between eugenics and other hereditarian arguments (such as instinct theory), and no clear demarcation between one as 'good' and the other 'bad' science.

More disturbing than any of the above, however, is that the author's agenda of resurrecting evolutionary psychology in its modern guise leads him to abandon almost all critical analysis of the earlier theories he wants to promote as *bona fide* scientific predecessors. One example will have to suffice: in the 1930s Samuel J. Holmes, a zoologist at the University of California, Berkeley, and a collaborator, C.E. Hatch, carried out a study of sexual selection in which three male 'judges' were asked to rate the beauty of 642 women students according to four categories: beautiful, good-looking, plain, or homely. The attractiveness ratings of the women were then compared to their marriage rates several years after graduation: as expected, the women rated most beautiful were married at a higher rate (34%) than the other three categories (28%, 15% or 11%, respectively). Holmes and Hatch concluded from these results that predictions based on sexual selection theory were verified, and thus that sexual selection worked in human populations as well as in other animals (pp. 88–9). With no critical analysis, Gillette presents a number of these sorts of studies (admittedly one of the more original parts of the book) as one of the 'remarkable' kinds of studies in 'evolutionary psychology' that was abandoned because of the rise of behaviourism (pp. 79–99).

The panoply of claims about the effects of sexual selection in human populations continues with a parade of all the western male–female behavioural stereotypes: we are told that men's military uniforms and medals (p. 108), as well as their creation of art, music and dance serve as 'elaborate courtship displays' (p. 31), that men build houses as a part of mating strategy like male birds build nests (p. 47) and, finally, that men's 'polygamous desires' and the occurrence of rape are all the result of the male animal's tendencies to spread their genes as widely as possible (pp. 37–8). While the author does not condone violence or rape, the implication is clear that these are evolutionarily ingrained traits that we must work hard to control.

In addition to the above, there are scholarly problems that also should make the reader wary. Many of the obvious secondary sources on the history of eugenics and animal behaviour are not mentioned at all: Kevles' *In the Name of Eugenics*, Diane Paul's *Controlling Human Heredity*, Donna Haraway's *Primate Visions* (on Yerkes and the origins of primatology), and Richard Burkhardt's *Patterns of Behaviour* (on Lorenz and Tinbergen), do not figure in what Gillette discusses. Eugenics is identified almost wholly with its most simplistic advocates (Charles B. Davenport, Madison Grant, William McDougall). The decline of hereditarian theories is attributed more to the rise of behaviourism and the bad reputation of eugenics after the war than to other sociological and economic factors (class interests, for example) connected with its funding.

On top of everything else, there are also numerous errors, both factual and typographical: Henry Pratt Fairchild was not President of the American Museum of Natural History (p. 12) in the early twentieth century (Henry Fairfield Osborn was); Clarence C. Little worked in Cold Spring Harbour from 1918–21 at the Station for

Experimental Evolution, not the Eugenics Record Office (p. 168); Chicago ecologist Warder Clyde Allee is referred to as Warner; Earnest A. Hooton is spelled as Hooten in two places but Hooton in a third; psychometrician Carl C. Brigham is referred to as Harold C. Brigham, and the Carnegie Institution of Washington (CIW) is referred to throughout as the Carnegie 'Institute'. And, to my knowledge, Thomas Hunt Morgan was never involved as part of a team to set up a dog breeding programme at the University of Iowa in the 1920s (p. 168).

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**Marc A. Rodwin**, *Conflicts of Interest and the Future of Medicine* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 384 pages, \$29.95/£18.99, hardback, ISBN: 978-0-975548-6.

Marc Rodwin is the author of *Medicine, Money and Morals: Physicians' Conflicts of Interest*, first published in 1993. At the time, conflict of interest was not the buzzword it has since become in debates about medical ethics, publication ethics, and health policy. His earlier book set a high standard for the discussion of the role of commercial pressures, ties, incentives and influences in shaping doctors' conduct towards their patients. It was deservedly widely noticed at the time, with considerable praise from influential voices in the medical community. The arrival of his new book, some eighteen years later, is a useful occasion for reflecting on what progress, if any, has been made in tackling the problem of conflict of interest.

As the subtitle indicates, this is a comparative study. Rodwin examines the different ways in which medical care is organised institutionally in three very different health systems in the developed world. He describes carefully the attempts made in each country since the nineteenth century to identify the nature of medical conflicts of interest, and to control such conflicts as they arise in each context. He shows in detail the interactions between the structural organisation of the profession, the policy of the regulatory and professional bodies, the economic organisation of health services, and business practices of professionals, commercial providers of goods and services instrumental to healthcare, and the ways in which conflicts are conceived, arise, and are managed.

I found the book a wearying read. This is not because the author has a difficult prose style – he writes lucidly and for a general readership. The accumulation of detail and the winding path through each country's difficulties is impressive. But it is a profoundly pessimistic book. At each turn, a measure to contain or control conflicts is introduced; it fails; the very mechanism introduced itself becomes a vehicle for conflicts in a fresh form. There is neither a 'land of lost content' to frame the story's beginning, nor much prospect of a 'reformed medicine' at the end, nor indeed any putative location of which we might say 'they do it better elsewhere'. There is just difference.

From a historical point of view, and from a historiographical point of view, this is unsurprising, perhaps. However, from a normative or practical policy-making point of view, it would be useful to know what our expectations of doctors, and healthcare systems, should be, and how they could better be enforced. The concluding pages of the book do offer some proposals, but they involve better ethics statements, more continuing