

“Hopelessly Entangled in Nordic Pre-suppositions”: Catholic Participation in the American Eugenics Society in the 1920s

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ABSTRACT. While American Catholics stand out as some of the few voices of cultural opposition to the eugenics movement in the United States, Catholics and eugenicists actively engaged in conversational exchanges during the late 1920s. In association with the Committee on Cooperation with Clergymen of the American Eugenics Society, John A. Ryan and John Montgomery Cooper engaged in a process that Sander Gilman and Nancy Leys Stepan call “recontextualization,” whereby they challenged the social and scientific basis for eugenics policy initiatives while constantly urging American eugenicists to rid their movement of racial and class prejudice. In the process, they participated in a revealing debate on immigration restriction, charity, racial hierarchies, feminism, birth control, and sterilization that points to both the instances of convergence and divergence of Catholic and eugenic visions for the national community.

KEYWORDS: Catholicism, eugenics, John A. Ryan, John Montgomery Cooper, Paul Popenoe, Leon Whitney, American Eugenics Society, Committee on Cooperation with Clergymen, *Casti Connubii*.



HISTORIAN John Higham has aptly named the decade after World War I the “Tribal Twenties.” This moniker indicates the atomized and contentious atmosphere in American society as the nation attempted to recover from the war effort. In addition to the economic difficulties of returning to a peacetime economy, the national community experienced a dramatic rise in xenophobia and entered into a wave of anticommunist

paranoia. Fears about foreigners and radicals as well as radical foreigners fueled much of the public conversation about the nation's future. At the same time, the crisis surrounding gender roles that had begun during the progressive era only escalated, with renewed assertions of women's independence and calls for readily available contraceptive information. Alarm about deteriorating family structures and rebellious women caused a conservative backlash among those who feared that the nation would crumble as a result of changing relations between the sexes. In the midst of this highly contentious, atomized environment, new organizations developed to engage in the public conversation about the future of the nation and the people who composed it.

Included among these new organizations was the first national body concerned with the eugenics movement. The foundation of the American Eugenics Society (AES) in the early 1920s marked an effort to develop and institute a comprehensive social ideology based on eugenic principles.¹ While the various factions involved in the Tribal Twenties debates often concerned themselves only with individual and particular issues, the newly organized eugenics movement addressed a whole host of national and local, legislative and educational, proscriptive and popular issues in their attempt to sculpt the national population. This effort drew together disparate voices and local conversations about immigration restriction, popular eugenics, sterilization, birth control, and welfare policy.

The 1920s proved to be the period of greatest institutional energy for the AES. During that period the organization successfully supported and encouraged federal immigration restrictions and numerous state sterilization and marriage restrictions based on the eugenics ideology that the race could be improved through selective breeding. Despite this flurry of activity, the Great Depression took its toll on the organization, pushing the AES into debt. By the early 1930s membership was on the decline and would not begin to pick up again until 1936.² However in the heyday of the 1920s, with such a wide-ranging

1. For historical surveys of eugenics in the United States, see Mark Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963); Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity, 1865 to the Present* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 1998).

2. Barry Mehler, "A History of the American Eugenics Society, 1921–1940." (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1988), p. 110.

array of issues on their agenda, the leaders of the AES needed to develop strategies to address their opponents and to convert those who had not yet decided to endorse eugenics as a comprehensive underpinning for national development. In this way they engaged in a process of coalition building that reinforced their sociopolitical salience and ensured that eugenics philosophies would influence a wide range of public policy decisions throughout the decade.

Part of the effort to win converts and address opponents involved a full-scale effort at popular education, including the establishment of a Committee on Cooperation with Clergymen (CCC). Though eugenicists experienced growing resistance from Catholics on the local and national levels to their efforts to pass and implement sterilization statutes during the decade before Pope Pius XI issued his 1930 condemnation of those measures in *Casti connubii*,³ representatives of the movement specifically and directly engaged key Catholic thinkers in conversation about the eugenics agenda through the CCC and the eugenics press. These conversations vividly illustrate the positions of prominent Catholic intellectuals on a cluster of issues associated with eugenics, including immigration, birth control, feminism, and sterilization. In reading these interactions, it becomes clear the degree to which the Catholics involved with the movement embraced the goals of positive eugenics, which promoted marriage and reproduction of “superior” types through popular education and state-sponsored welfare programs. Though they disagreed with eugenicists’ methods of distinguishing between superior and inferior persons, they wholeheartedly endorsed measures that echoed the Church’s teaching on the centrality of the stable nuclear family and the importance of virtue and sound morality to the survival of that unit.

Though the Catholic members of the CCC tended to concur with the pronatalist elements of positive eugenics, they parted company with the movement on negative eugenics policies that forcibly discouraged the reproduction of certain groups, such as the dissemination of birth control for the poor, immigration restriction based on national origin, and sterilization of the “unfit.” Operating in an arena

3. The resistance of Catholics in a number of states and at the national level through the various organizations associated with the NCWC is discussed fully in Sharon M. Leon, “Before *Casti connubii*: Early Catholic Responses to the Eugenics Movement in the United States,” Working Papers Series, The Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, 2000, 32, 1–41.

where positivist scientific data and theories were viewed as value-free and objective, Catholic moral and theological arguments about reproductive politics were often unconvincing to the non-Catholic public because they appeared to be subjective and arbitrary. Hence, Catholics interacting with the AES frequently engaged eugenicists on the terrain of science itself, questioning the theories, methods, and conclusions of the movement, which relied so heavily on biological determinism. In seeking to challenge eugenicists on their science, these Catholics engaged in a process that Sander Gilman and Nancy Leys Stepan have called recontextualization. One of a number of rhetorical strategies by which minority targets of scientific racism resisted that discourse, recontextualization involves two processes: "First, the tools of science were used either to prove that the supposed factual data upon which the stereotypes of racial inferiority were based were wrong, or to generate new 'facts' on which different claims could be made. Second, scientific reasoning was used to question the *explanation* of the facts."⁴ Challenging eugenicists on their theories and methods, Catholics concerned about eugenics continually questioned the data and the conclusions that eugenicists drew from that data. More often than not, they argued that the data from eugenics studies was inconclusive and that eugenicists had failed to adequately consider environmental factors in their analysis of social conditions.

The results of the interaction between eugenicists and the Catholics involved with the movement, which appear mostly in the pages of *Eugenical News* and *Eugenics*, suggest that those Catholics mostly rejected negative eugenic policy initiatives and that eugenicists found Catholic moral reasoning unconvincing. These interactions centered around contested notions of scientific methodology and conclusions. Though the leadership of the AES was not wrong to hope that they could find common ground with Catholics in their selective pronatalist stance, the overwhelming bulk of the eugenics social ideology was incompatible with Catholic teachings about race, reproduction, and social welfare. Subsequently, even though a number of Catholics engaged in dialogue with elements of organized eugenics in the United States, they never fully embraced the movement's agenda.

4. Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman, "Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism," in *The Bounds of Race: Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance*, ed. Dominick LaCapra (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 73–103, p. 94.

THE CCC

The organization that would eventually become the American Eugenics Society was founded in 1921 at the Second International Congress of Eugenics, which was held in New York City. Truly a gathering of international leaders in the movement to scientifically improve the population, the meeting's presenters hailed from all over the world, including Western Europe, Scandinavia, South America, and Japan. In recognition of the existing work on and support of eugenics in the United States, Irving Fisher proposed that a committee be formed to oversee the creation of a national eugenics society for America. Although the organization went through a handful of name changes in its earlier years, the society had an orientation toward political and educational goals from the beginning, which allowed it to complement the already established research components of the eugenics movement in the United States: the Eugenics Research Association and the Eugenics Records Office. The initial advisory council, consisting of ninety-nine members, included a host of well-known biologists, physicians, clergymen, and philanthropists. According to the most comprehensive history of the society, most were Republicans and liberal Protestants. Between February 1923 and 1930, the eugenics society's membership grew from 100 persons to 1,200 persons. From the beginning, a number of prominent scientists working on issues of heredity, such as Thomas Hunt Morgan and Raymond Pearl, rejected the racist assumptions of the leadership of the AES and provided a counterpoint to the majority of the group's membership, which consisted of the most dedicated and conservative promoters of the movement in the United States at that time.⁵

With the establishment of the AES in the early 1920s, eugenicists immediately and successfully dedicated themselves to addressing legislative matters regarding immigration restriction and other public policy initiatives that embodied their commitment to a comprehensive social policy, including sterilization legislation and antimiscegenation statutes. In the process of building a coalition of support for those policy measures, they quickly recognized the importance of

5. Mehler, "American Eugenics Society, 1921-1940," pp. 34-37, 61, 67-68. Eugenics drew a significantly larger radical following in England than it did in the United States. For more on liberal eugenicists, see Diane B. Paul, "Eugenics and the Left," *J. Hist. Ideas*, 1984, 45, 567-90.

reaching out to multiple components of American society. To facilitate the full acceptance and implementation of the eugenics social ideology, they needed the support not only of biologists, anthropologists, and politicians but also of persons who worked in social services and health care. Most of the elements of the AES agenda called for lobbying on the local level to change state marriage statutes, to institute provisions for the sterilization of the unfit, and to provide for the distribution of contraceptive information. Such local and state efforts required the support of churches and civic groups. By October 1923 the members of the Advisory Council had voted to establish three new committees: the Committee on Cooperation with Physicians, the Committee on Cooperation with Social Workers, and the CCC.⁶

Despite the early recognition of a need for dialogue with the religious community, the CCC did not fully take shape until March 1925. With Reverend Henry S. Huntington (brother of prominent eugenicist and geologist Ellsworth Huntington) as the chairman of the committee, plans were laid for a small executive committee and a larger general committee of forty persons. The executive committee would be responsible for generating initial plans and then submitting them to the larger clommittee for feedback. Included among the prominent Protestant members were Rev. Charles Clayton Morrison, a minister of the Disciples of Christ Church and the editor of the *Christian Century*, and two presidents of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America: Rev. S. Parkes Cadman and Methodist Episcopal Bishop Francis John McConnell. Additionally, seven of the Protestant members were named *Christian Century* American Pulpit Leaders in 1925. Of the original forty members, the committee included two Reform rabbis, Louis Mann and David de Sola Pool, and two Catholic priests, John A. Ryan and John Montgomery Cooper. Hence, the bulk of the CCC membership consisted of Protestant luminaries.⁷

Though for the most part, nominal Protestants populated the eugenics movement, the members of the executive committee could

6. Eugenics Committee Minutes (26 October 1923), American Eugenics Society Papers (henceforth AES Papers), American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (henceforth APS).

7. For a summary of the composition of the CCC, see Christine Alison Stolba, "‘A Corrupt Tree Bringeth Forth Evil Fruit’: Religion and the American Eugenics Movement" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1999), pp. 230–35.

not ignore the powerful place that the Roman Catholic Church held in American society by the middle of the 1920s. In addition to dominating urban politics in a number of significant cities, the sheer numbers of Catholics in the population made them a force to contend with. In 1920 the U.S. Census reported that the national population stood at just over 105 million persons. By 1930 that population had ballooned to over 122 million. In the midst of that dramatic increase the 1926 Census of Religious Bodies found that Catholics constituted 18.6 million of the national population, with 9.28 million of those persons concentrated in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Illinois.⁸ While this does not seem like an enormous number in comparison with the total population, this concentration of Catholics was lodged firmly in the areas of the country where the most prominent eugenicists lived and worked at the major private museums, colleges, research institutes, and universities.⁹

In addition to being populated with eugenicists and an extremely diverse Catholic community, these areas were also home to the most outspoken and powerful members of the Catholic hierarchy, including Cardinals Hayes of New York, Gibbons of Boston, and Mundelein of Chicago. During the height of immigration in the late nineteenth century, the leaders of the church in the United States worked diligently to centralize their power. The resultant hierarchical system allowed them to deal with the vast ethnic diversity of their dioceses and the variety of organizations under their jurisdiction.¹⁰ From this position of leadership, the bishops oversaw the efforts of the clergy and lay social activists to deal with the major controversial issues that confronted the church in the 1920s, such as accommodating ethnic diversity, structuring and sustaining social provisions for the disadvantaged,

8. *Religious Bodies: 1926, Volume II, Separate Denominations* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1929), pp. 1255–1257.

9. This geographic convergence is significant given Elazar Barkan's comments in his discussion of scientific racism: "The core of the discipline [study of race] was determined largely by geographical proximity to major academic centers. Distance and lack of communication continuously frustrated close interaction. Geography in and of itself was important; New York was the center of racial discourse in the United States. California was too far away from the center for even the most prominent of its scientists to participate in the national scientific-intellectual discourse on race." Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 9.

10. Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), pp. 191–92.

promoting institutional growth, and contending with temperance and birth control movements. Given this range of public activity, eugenicists were well aware of the ability of these church leaders to muster support or opposition for whatever issues to which they turned their attention.

Accordingly, the AES executive committee strategically included two priests among the names on the list of nominees for the CCC who were recognized both within and outside of the Catholic community as being interested in social policy and public welfare. Two colleagues at the Catholic University of America, Ryan, a moral theologian concerned with public policy, and Cooper, an accomplished anthropologist and religious educator, were prominent members of a generation of Catholic social thinkers who struggled with negotiating the proper fit of Catholicism to American conditions in the wake of the 1907 papal condemnation of modernism.¹¹ To some degree, this condemnation had a stifling effect on Catholic intellectual life in the United States. However, a handful of individuals committed to the methodologies of the newly emerging social sciences continued to attempt to reconcile their faith with their intellectual pursuits. A commitment to this particular blend of newly developing scientific methodologies and a deep concern about social issues made Ryan and Cooper well suited to engage with the American eugenics movement, with its emphasis on scientific solutions to social problems. However, unlike their counterparts in the eugenics movement who fell back on a positivist biological determinism to develop their social policies, Ryan and Cooper continually pointed to environmental factors as both the cause of and solution to social problems.

Ryan was the most prominent social thinker of the period to try to bridge the gap between Catholic social teaching and progressive reform movements. Heavily influenced by Thomas Aquinas's writing and Pope Leo XIII's labor encyclical *Rerum novarum* [On the Conditions of Work], Ryan shaped much of Catholic thinking on economic issues in the United States through his own works. Born and raised in Minnesota, Ryan grew up under the influence of the

11. A most helpful discussion of the chilling effect in the sciences of the condemnation of modernism is found in R. Scott Appleby, "Exposing Darwin's 'Hidden Agenda': Roman Catholic Responses to Evolution, 1875-1925," in *Disseminating Darwinism: The Role of Place, Race, Religion, and Gender*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers and John Stenhouse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 173-208.

labor politics of the Knights of Labor and Edward McGlynn. After entering the seminary in St. Paul, Ryan went to the Catholic University of America to complete his graduate degree in sacred theology, with a concentration on ethics and economics. There he produced a dissertation that would become the foundational text for twentieth-century Catholic engagement with labor issues. *A Living Wage* (1906) argued from the stance articulated in *Rerum novarum* that wages should not be treated as a bargaining issue between worker and employer, but rather that each working man has a natural right to a living, personal, and family wage.¹² Ryan's vision of economic justice through the family wage was based on the patriarchal family structure. With a male-headed household as the ideal, Catholics would support social reforms that affirmed that ideal, while rejecting progressive initiatives that would undermine the patriarchal family structure. This position on labor and social questions placed Ryan in constant contact with the various flavors of the progressive movement in the United States, where they reached common ground on many economic issues but strongly diverged on issues such as birth control, divorce, and many aspects of the eugenics movement.¹³

As a moral theologian who was deeply concerned with the intersection of public policy and Catholic social teaching, Ryan played an integral part in the articulation of that social teaching in the United States after World War I. In drafting the Bishops' Program on Social Reconstruction, which was adopted and issued by the administrative committee of the national organization of bishops in 1919 as a response to the social problems associated with industrialization, Ryan exhibited his progressive optimism by crafting a proposal that envisioned a unified people working to transform the social order. In addition to expressing support for the National Labor Relations Board, the plan called for fair wages, housing for the working class, social insurance, a role for labor in industrial management, vocational education, and an end to child labor. Additionally, it criticized the economic system in the United States as being inefficient and creating extreme inequalities between workers and capitalists. The plan called for the capitalist to "cultivate and

12. John A. Ryan, *A Living Wage: Its Ethical and Economic Aspects* (New York: Macmillan, 1906).

13. Francis L. Broderick, *Right Reverend New Dealer: John A. Ryan* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), pp. 27-47.

strengthen within his mind...that the laborer's right to a decent livelihood is the first moral charge of industry."¹⁴

In addition to making this enduring mark on the Catholic approach to social problems following the war, Ryan participated in the planning meetings that moved to create a national body to continue the efforts of the National Catholic War Council, the organization that oversaw Catholic war work. Alarmed by the move toward temperance legislation and school reform, certain members of the hierarchy were convinced that U.S. Catholics needed an organization to voice the position of the hierarchy on such issues. The result was the eventual establishment of the National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC) in September 1919. Though the NCWC was dogged by jurisdictional conflict involving various members of the hierarchy for the first ten years of its existence, the organization, composed of an administrative committee of seven bishops that oversaw the work of a number of departments and committees, voiced the position of the hierarchy on both controversial and mundane matters.¹⁵ Ryan was named codirector of the first of five departments established by the NCWC, the Social Action Department, which dealt with the promotion of citizenship, industrial relations, and charitable organizations.¹⁶ From this position, he was available to comment on pressing social issues. Hence, he played a prominent role in efforts of the NCWC to construct a response to the eugenics movement in the 1920s and 1930s. In the latter part of the 1920s, the NCWC published his pamphlet *Human Sterilization*, which laid out Catholic social and moral positions on eugenic sterilization. Additionally, Ryan participated in the organization of the NCWC pamphlet series "Problems of Mental Deficiency," to which he contributed *Moral Aspects of Sterilization*.¹⁷

14. John A. Ryan, "Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction," issued 12 February 1919 by the Administrative Committee of the National Catholic War Council, reprinted in John Tracy Ellis, ed., *Documents of American Catholic History*, 2 vols. (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987) II, pp. 589–607, p. 607. On Ryan and Progressivism, see Joseph M. McShane, S.J., "Sufficiently Radical": *Catholicism, Progressivism, and the Bishops' Program of 1919* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1986).

15. Douglas Slawson, *The Foundation and First Decade of the National Catholic Welfare Council* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1992), pp. 62–69. On the National Catholic War Council, see Elizabeth McKeown, *War and Welfare: American Catholics and World War I* (New York: Garland, 1988).

16. Slawson, *The Foundation and First Decade*, pp. 72–79.

17. John A. Ryan, *Human Sterilization* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1927), and idem., *Moral Aspects of Sterilization* (Washington, D.C.: National

Whereas Ryan was directly associated with the work of the NCWC, Cooper's dual career as an anthropologist and a religious educator also placed him in direct contact with eugenics enthusiasts. A descendant of English Quakers, Cooper was born in Montgomery County, Maryland, and grew up in Baltimore. Educated at the North American College, Cooper completed his Ph.D. and doctorate of sacred theology by his ordination in 1905. By 1920 he was a full-time faculty member at the Catholic University of America as Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Sociology and eventually in the Department of Religious Education. In 1934 he established and headed the Department of Anthropology. Dedicated to fieldwork, Cooper based his career as an anthropologist on his trips to the Tête de Boule, the Ojibwa, the James Bay Cree, the Montagnais, and the Gros Ventre.

In addition to his work as an anthropologist, during World War I Cooper's position as the Secretary of the Women's Committee of the National Catholic War Council placed him in contact with a number of public social and reform organizations, such as the American Social Hygiene Association. These interactions caused him to deal with the moral questions associated with prostitution, birth control, eugenics, and sex education and brought him into contact with Mary Ware Dennett, Margaret Sanger, and David Starr Jordan.¹⁸ During his work in the American Social Hygiene Association, Cooper developed a friendship with the association's executive secretary, Paul Popenoe. Popenoe went on to be a prominent figure in the eugenics movement, coauthoring a popular eugenics textbook, championing eugenic sterilization in California with his work at the Human Betterment Association, and emerging as the nation's first marriage counselor. In his work as a marriage counselor, Popenoe wrote a number of marriage guides that championed positive eugenics by encouraging eugenically sound matches and abundant reproduction among "superior" couples.¹⁹ Popenoe's interest in marriage and

Catholic Welfare Conference, 1930). For more on the planning of the pamphlet series, see Leon, "Before *Casti connubii*."

18. Elizabeth McKeown, "From *Pascendi* to *Primitive Man*: The Apologetics and Anthropology of John Montgomery Cooper," *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 1995, 13:2, 1-22.

19. Paul Bowman Popenoe, *Modern Marriage: A Handbook* (New York: Macmillan, 1925); idem., *Conservation of the Family* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1926); idem. and Roswell Johnson, *Applied Eugenics* (New York: Macmillan, rev. ed. 1933). On Popenoe's career in

family life attracted the attention of Cooper, and the two shared their views on the subject throughout the 1920s.²⁰

Cooper's role as a leader in Catholic religious education and his training as an anthropologist allowed him to address the quandaries presented by contemporary social issues with his students. He urged the students in his religious education classes to take an inductive approach to Catholic moral theology—beginning with their own experiences. From this perspective he dealt with relationships, sex, marriage, and the family. Cooper's innovative approach to religious education resulted in the production of a collection of texts, titled *Religion Outlines for Colleges*, which became a standard text for Catholic students who did not intend to pursue the priesthood.²¹ Composed of four volumes, the series presented students with outlines and questions that were essential to their religious training as laypersons. Hence, the volumes dealt not only with theological principles, virtues, and practices but also with concrete daily experience—lived religion. The first volume included passages that explain the social significance of marriage and parenthood to personal development and the survival of the "race." Cooper explained: "Just as death is, humanly speaking, the greatest harm that can befall the individual, so death is, humanly speaking, the greatest harm that could befall the race. And were no more children born, the race would die. Love of neighbor, therefore, in its Christian and Catholic sense, is deeply interested in birth."²²

This pronatalist message was followed in subsequent volumes with a more developed view of marriage and family life that

eugenics, see Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Eugenics, Sterilisation and Modern Marriage in the USA: The Strange Career of Paul Popenoe," *Gender & History*, 2001, 13, 298–327, and Sharon M. Leon, "Promoting Wise Marriages: Paul Popenoe, Eugenics and Marriage Guides for Men in the 1920s," paper presented at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, Montreal, 29 October 1999.

20. See the Cooper-Popenoe correspondence in the John Montgomery Cooper Papers (henceforth Cooper Papers), Archives of the Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. (henceforth ACUA). The exchange of letters began when the two worked together in 1920 for the American Social Hygiene Association and continued through 1926, addressing marriage, birth control, divorce, evolution, and sterilization. In addition to these friendly discussions, Cooper responded favorably to Popenoe's manuscript for *Conservation of the Family*, calling the text "a remarkably fine and original and fresh approach to a subject calling for the most resourceful and balanced thinking" (Cooper to Popenoe, 24 July 1925).

21. John Montgomery Cooper, *Religion Outlines for Colleges*, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1924–1930), I–IV.

22. Cooper, *Religion Outlines for Colleges: Course I, The Catholic Ideal of Life*, 2nd rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Education Press, 1937), p. 154.

included a consideration of health and heredity. Most significantly, the fourth volume, subtitled "Life Problems," was based on concerns that Cooper's students had raised in his fifteen years of teaching religion. Among these questions, Cooper addressed the topic of finding a mate by dealing with such issues as wealth, moral character, compatibility, and health. With regard to health and the eugenics movement, Cooper instructed his readers: "While the Catholic may and does disagree with some of the proposals made in the name of eugenics by the radical left wing of the eugenics movement, he may and should be in hearty sympathy with conservative and scientific eugenics as such." He continued to counsel his students to marry into hearty, long-lived families, and to avoid families that exhibit frequent feeble-mindedness, insanity, or emotional instability. In suggesting further reading on the topic, Cooper recommended Popenoe's *Modern Marriage* as a trustworthy non-Catholic source.²³ Thus, while his tone was one of cautious reserve, Cooper expressed an affinity with certain goals of the eugenics movement, most prominently the positive side of the agenda that promoted marriage and parenthood under sound social and moral conditions. Claiming this stake in the eugenics movement, Cooper engaged with eugenicists willingly and civilly about the goals, methodologies, and future of the movement during his tenure as a member of the AES Advisory Committee and the CCC.

As social scientists without individual parishes of their own, Ryan and Cooper were not typical of the clergy members who the AES hoped to court through the CCC. Rather, they were looking for a way to connect with the citizens in the nation's parishes, synagogues, and meetinghouses through their priests, rabbis, and pastors. Although the CCC was interested in educating clergymen to the benefits of a eugenically conscious and structured society, their real goal was to convert the hearts and minds of congregations all over the United States. This effort at public education was waged in the service of coalition building. By garnering the support of the nation's religiously devout citizens, the leaders of the eugenics movement stood a much better chance of mustering widespread local backing for their social policies. Hence, the activities of the

23. Cooper, *Religion Outlines for Colleges: Course IV, Life Problems* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Education Press, 1928), pp. 61–93, p. 68.

CCC worked hand in hand with the initiatives of other AES committees that focused on public education. In addition to encouraging the establishment of eugenics as a formal topic of study in public schools, colleges, and universities, they pursued the goals of popular education through Fitter Families Contests at state and county fairs, and a barrage of public lectures at women's clubs and civic organizations.²⁴ To these efforts, the CCC added a series of sermon contests beginning in March 1926.

Announced in the *Eugenical News*, the sermon contest offered cash prizes for the best sermon delivered on eugenics by 1 July 1926. The CCC sent the call for participants to 180 religious publications, and by April the committee reported that they had received 145 requests for the contest rules, as well as the *Brief Bibliography of Eugenics* and the *Eugenics Catechism*. Though the denominational affiliation of the respondents was somewhat indeterminate, no Catholics were listed among those requesting information.²⁵ The three winning sermons from the 1926 contest all came from Protestants, with "The Refiner's Fire," the sermon of Rev. Phillips E. Osgood, of St. Mark's Church in Minneapolis, taking first place.²⁶ Osgood's sermon was a seamless blend of Christian exhortation and eugenics ideology. Urging his congregation to adopt eugenics to guide their thinking on marriage and childbearing, Osgood exclaimed:

We must hallow the thought of reproduction. Biologically and sociologically and in the name of religion it is iniquitous to bind on our descendents "heavy burdens and grievous to be borne," which we ourselves cannot move with one of our fingers once it is too late. The Refiner of humanity claims our cooperation. The dross must be purged out; the pure gold of well-born generations is the goal of the process.²⁷

By employing this rhetoric, Osgood achieved the goal of the sermon contest by inextricably linking the perfectionist slant of eugenics ideology to the dominant millennialism of many Protestant theologies. The appeal of this rhetoric to middle-class Anglo-Protestants was clear

24. For a treatment of the popular and educational efforts of the eugenics movement, see Steven Selden, *Inheriting Shame: The Story of Eugenics and Racism in America* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), pp. 39–83.

25. "Prizes for Sermons on Eugenics," *Eugenical News*, 1926, 11:3, 48, and "Sermons on Eugenics," *Eugenical News*, 1926, 11:4, 56.

26. Phillips E. Osgood, "The Refiner's Fire," *Eugenics*, 1928, 1:3, 10–15.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

in that it emphasized prudence, hard work, and self-improvement. Also, it was a perfect fit for the linear progressivism that dominated Anglo-Protestant sociopolitical philosophy during the period.

The Sermon Contests between 1926 and 1930 and the issues of *Eugenics* that published their results constitute the main official efforts of the AES to garner the support of the clergy. Looking to capitalize on the appeal of the messages contained in the responses, the AES Board of Directors suggested that at the end of the 1930 contest the CCC collect the ten best sermons and combine them with excerpts from previous winners to be submitted for publication by the Galton Publishing Company. They also suggested that the CCC consult with the Federal Council of Churches about the best way to distribute and publicize the collection.²⁸

These efforts to recruit clergy to the eugenics movement failed completely with Catholics. In the three-term duration of the Sermon Contests, there is no evidence that any Catholic priests submitted sermons or surveys. One reason for the lack of response from Catholic clergy lay in the status of the sermon in Catholic liturgy. Since the mid-nineteenth century, priests often only preached one sermon a Sunday at the central mass, with only brief statements for the other masses. By the twentieth century, not much had changed in Catholic preaching. Most priests were not known to be talented preachers, and they primarily focused their attention on doctrinal matters.²⁹ In addition to the marginal role of the sermon in the liturgy, members of the clergy were getting the message from NCWC publications and Catholic press editorials that there were reasons for them to actively resist the eugenics projects.³⁰

This general sense of resistance was not lost on ministers from other denominations. For example, to illustrate that many church officials misunderstood and opposed the work of eugenicists, one entrant in the 1926 Sermon Contest told his congregation that "Cardinal Hayes' explosion against the International Conference of Eugenicists in New York City last year reminds us of how they are regarded by large sections of our people."³¹ Similarly, by suggesting

28. Minutes of the Board of Directors of the American Eugenics Society, 16 November 1929, AES Papers.

29. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, pp. 245, 392.

30. See Ryan, *Human Sterilization*.

31. "Sermon #3," Sermon Contest, 1926, AES Papers.

that the CCC consult the Federal Council of Churches about the best way to publicize the results of the 1930 Sermon Contest, the AES Board of Directors implicitly recognized that they would not get much of a hearing among Catholics. That fact became abundantly clear when in 1930 Msgr. Thomas McLaughlin at Seton Hall College in New Jersey caustically refused to post the call for sermons, stating: "We shall do nothing towards advancing the purposes of this Society, which we consider out of harmony with the teachings of Almighty God."³² Though he anticipated the message contained in *Casti connubii*, Msgr. McLaughlin echoed the growing sentiment of the Catholic press, members of the hierarchy, and leading intellectuals in the United States in the aftermath of the *Buck v. Bell* Supreme Court decision, which upheld the constitutionality of forced sterilization in 1927. In the wake of that decision the Catholic press and prominent individuals began to more strongly voice their opposition to many components of the eugenics policy agenda.³³ The attempts of the CCC simply failed to drown out all of the negative messages in Catholic circles associating eugenics with nativism, prejudice, materialism, and birth control.

THE IMAGE OF CATHOLICS IN THE EUGENICS PRESS

Neither the members of the CCC nor the Advisory Council of the AES should have been surprised by the tendency of Catholic clergymen to ignore or reject their efforts to popularize eugenics through the pulpits. In addition to the unfavorable treatment in Catholic periodicals of initial eugenic efforts and the growing hostility toward the movement after the *Buck v. Bell* decision, the eugenicists themselves bore some direct responsibility for the antipathy between the two groups. For years eugenics publications took a stance of disdain when they carried any commentary either on events involving Catholics or on publications produced by Catholics. This commentary often depicted Catholics in a number of negatively stereotypical ways, even as it exhibited a repressed appreciation for the vigorous birth rate in Catholic communities. First, it characterized Catholics as a group that held peculiar views on the significance of racial differences in society.

32. "Refusal, Seton Hall College," *Eugenics*, 1930, 3:4, 155.

33. See for example "A New Issue," *Catholic Universe Bulletin* (6 May 1927), p. 16; "Unjustified Sterilization," *America* (14 May 1927), p. 102; and Francis S. Betten, S.J., "Sterilization Banned by Natural Law, Says Jesuit," *Catholic Universe Bulletin* (20 May 1927), p. 8.

Second, it assumed that the Catholic lay population was completely intellectually dominated by the hierarchy, exhibiting no rational or scientific thought of their own. Finally, it perceived Catholic moral theology as mired in medieval methodology and antimodern rationales. Together these stereotypes left readers with the impression that Catholics lingered in a mindless state of unenlightenment. Despite the generally negative picture of Catholics that the eugenic press painted, the editors of those journals and leading figures in the AES did not abandon their attempts to engage Catholics in conversation about a host of issues related to the eugenics agenda, even if they held little hope of fully winning them over to the movement.

Frequently, the editors of the eugenics press turned to Ryan and Cooper for commentary on the Catholic perspective on social issues related to eugenics. At times they participated readily, and at other times they declined requests for a variety of reasons having to do with their schedules and their areas of expertise. Ryan was clearly more hostile to the eugenics agenda and frequently claimed that he had little to add to the discussion at hand, commenting only briefly. Ryan's tendency to succinctly state his assessment of a situation, leaving no room for debate or discussion, was balanced by Cooper's willingness to enter into open dialogue with eugenicists, if not in the press, in personal correspondence. Though Cooper never compromised his dedication to Catholic moral principles, he frequently engaged eugenicists on the methodological underpinnings of their proposals. As both an anthropologist and an apologist, Cooper was in a unique position to communicate Catholic social teachings while honoring the experimental and statistical methods of both the social and natural sciences. Together Ryan and Cooper represented two of the most socially engaged, thoughtful, and well-educated Catholic public intellectuals of that generation. Their interaction with eugenics advocates in *Eugenics* symposia reveals a great deal about the conflict and convergence between Catholic social teachings and eugenics ideology with respect to several key issues, including charity, racial prejudice, immigration, feminism, and birth control.

The tendency of mainstream eugenicists to characterize Catholics generally as being steeped in traditional practices and medieval thinking often clouded their reception of work by individual Catholic writers and thinkers. Non-Catholic eugenicists generally exhibited surprise at the fact that Catholic social workers employed scientific

methods to reach their conclusions. While most eugenicists relied almost wholly on biological explanations to justify their public policy agenda, Catholic social workers, social scientists, and activists tended to point to the environment and personal choice in a moral framework as the major factors at work in the social world. For example, in 1927 Charles Davenport, a man considered by most scholars as the founding force behind organized eugenics in the United States, reviewed E. J. Cooley's *Probation and Delinquency*, which was published under the auspices of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York. Much to his surprise, Davenport discovered that Cooley took contemporary theories about heredity and crime into account in determining his conclusions in the book. Davenport opened his commentary on the book by stating: "Usually we do not expect anything scientific to come out of the Catholic Hierarchy and so we are not prepared for much of value from this book, even if it is by the Chief Probation Officer, Court of General Sessions, New York City." Despite Cooley's position as a municipal official, his status as a Catholic made his judgment questionable and produced results that were "what we would expect from the Catholic Hierarchy." Nonetheless, Davenport was pleased by the text, even though "the conclusion is drawn that the criminal 'did not inherit any criminal instincts from their parents.'"³⁴ In his willingness to read Cooley's statement as indicative of the position of the "Catholic Hierarchy," Davenport reproduced long-standing assumptions that Catholic laypersons failed to engage in critical thought and empirical research but simply reproduced the positions taken by the bishops and archbishops on all social issues. The mix of scientific theory and Catholic teaching that infused Cooley's account of criminology could do nothing but confuse eugenicists, because they continued to assume that the two modes of thinking about social problems were antithetical. Needless to say, this confusion was not limited to questions of criminology.

In fact, such confusion was indicative of a more fundamental difference in philosophy that becomes more clear with an interrogation of the divergent attitudes of eugenicists and Catholics about Christian morality and charity. For example, Harry F. Ward,

34. Charles B. Davenport Papers, APS, and "How Probation Works," *Eugenical News*, 1929, 12, 132.

professor of Christian ethics at the Union Theological Seminary, opined in the pages of *Eugenics* that Christianity “makes for the elimination of the weak, not their perpetuation, and this it accomplishes by making them strong and by preventing their production, through both breeding and environment.” Like other non-Catholic thinkers on the issue, Ward assumed that weakness was a trait to be eliminated and minimized.³⁵ Ryan, on the other hand, put forth a completely divergent interpretation of the question. Rather than argue that the weak needed to be eliminated, Ryan explained that “to subordinate the weaker groups to the welfare of society means simply that some human beings are to be made instruments to other human beings. . . . One who does not identify right with might can produce no cogent reason for treating the weak as of less intrinsic worth than the strong, even though the former may be in the minority.” Ryan also argued the logical practical implication of this position: philosophies that hierarchically rank human beings leave open the possibility of the ever-increasing category of inferior, to the service of the few powerful supermen who control the system of assigning value.³⁶

The difference of perspective displayed in these two statements about charity and unfitness stemmed from the contradictions between two more fundamental differences. Mainstream eugenicists, on one hand, believed that all social problems trace their cause to a biological defect that could be eliminated, thus solving the problem. Catholics, on the other hand, maintained a belief that moral choice making among all persons, even non-Catholics, took place within a universe bounded by discernible and unchanging natural laws. This notion of an all-encompassing moral universe necessitated that those persons involved in social policy planning give due attention to environmental issues as they effected the individual in society—issues that eugenicists in the 1920s tended to discount as merely surface manifestations of underlying biological realities. Catholic social provision revolved around the notion that the clients of those services always had the possibility of reforming their behavior and changing their circumstances, even if such alterations required significant assistance

35. Harry F. Ward, “Is Christian Morality Harmful? Over-Charitable to the Unfit?” *Eugenics*, 1928, 1:3, 20–21, p. 20.

36. John A. Ryan, “Is Christian Morality Harmful?”, p. 21.

from the church's charitable institutions.³⁷ Hence, when in their effort to discuss the relationship of Christian morality to the eugenics agenda, committed eugenicists, even those who were clergymen, were bound to find their thoughts on the issue at odds with those of Catholics. Additionally, Ryan's argument about the inherent value of even the weakest members of society forms the basis for many of the objections that Catholics waged against most negative eugenics policies. Ryan articulated a moral vision of the community based on natural law principles that called for society to work to fully develop and protect each individual human person. Such a vision called for a balancing of the needs of the community and the individual—all individuals.³⁸ Any plan that hierarchically ranked the value of human lives violated the central tenets of this Catholic worldview. The Catholic attention to the importance of human dignity and integrity within the social order was in distinct contrast with the vision of those supporters of eugenics reform, who, in the words of historian Daniel Kevles, tended "to put the welfare of the group over and above that of the individual."³⁹

RACE AND IMMIGRATION

Hence, although supporters of the eugenics agenda in the United States tended to focus on preserving the racial integrity of "superior" types, Catholics demonstrated a vastly different understanding of racial difference and social hierarchy. In addition to the lessons presented by the everyday lived experiences of the diverse American Catholic population, the church's teaching maintained that Catholics were united through their commitment to a common faith and a sacramental theology, regardless of racial and ethnic differences.⁴⁰ The authors and editors of the eugenics press reported on this understanding of difference with a good deal of curiosity. For example, in discussing eugenics in South America in 1922, Reginald Harris, a eugenics field worker, explained the reasons for a lack of prejudice based on skin color: "It is probably that there are no deep-lying national prejudices

37. For more on Catholic social provision, see Dorothy M. Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, *The Poor Belong to Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

38. Richard R. Gaillardetz, "John A. Ryan: An Early Revisionist," *J. Rel. Ethics*, 1990, 18, 110–17.

39. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, p. 74.

40. Dealing with tremendous diversity due to the immigration of the nineteenth century,

against colored skin among the Portuguese and Spanish. On the other hand, the religious barrier against interbreeding is certainly much stronger among Latins than among Teutons. When, however, the religious hindrance is removed, when Indian and Negro became confirmed in the Catholic faith, then they are of one body with the Caucasian Catholics."⁴¹ Harris's observations pointed to an element that was key to understanding the way that the Roman Catholic Church functioned around the world. Ideally, acceptance of the Catholic faith and teachings made all other differences of race and ethnicity meaningless. This, of course, was not the reality on the ground in all situations and by no means indicates that the church failed to recognize such differences, especially those of custom and culture. Rather, it suggests that at least theoretically salvation was far more important than incidental differences of skin color. More important, however, is the fact that Harris observed the unity achieved through conversion to Catholicism and interpreted it as reflecting negatively on the Catholic understanding of race, biology, and society.⁴²

The perspective on racial identity that Harris discovered in South America differed drastically from the perspective of eugenicists in

Catholic bishops allowed the establishment of national parishes that recognized the authenticity of distinct and traditional styles of worship and that worked to preserve the ethnicity of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. Instead of forcing new immigrants to adopt the worship styles and culture of the predominantly Irish and German hierarchy, the existence of national parishes allowed them to participate in the life of the church without compromising their ethnic heritage. This is not to say that there were not serious instances of conflict among ethnic groups in Catholic urban centers, but the establishment of national parishes theoretically accommodated difference more than they discouraged it. This accommodation of difference was possible only because regardless of ethnic or racial background, the individuals who populated those congregations shared a common commitment to the core elements of the Catholic faith and were united by a sacramental theology that centered on the Eucharist. This unity through faith and ritual extended not only to the new immigrants, but also to the small numbers of professing African American Catholics. However, just as with all other Euro-Americans, Catholics participated in varying degrees in the oppression of African Americans, from the slaveholding practices of the Maryland Jesuits in the seventeenth century to the battles over neighborhood desegregation in the twentieth century. The key texts on these complicated issues are as follows: R. Emmett Curran, "Splendid Poverty: Jesuit Slave-Holding in Maryland, 1805-1838," in Randall Miller and Jon Waklyn, eds., *Catholics in the Old South: Essays in Church and Culture* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983), pp. 125-46; Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroads, 1990); John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and David W. Southern, *John LaFarge and the Limits of Catholic Interracialism, 1911-1963* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

41. Reginald G. Harris, "Eugenics in South America," *Eugenical News*, 1922, 7:3, 29-30.

42. While Harris's article referred to the ways that South Americans understood skin color and racial hierarchy, the work of Nancy Leys Stepan demonstrates that within Latin

the United States. These differences appear more sharply when the statement is juxtaposed with the frequent and favorable reviews of works such as Earnest Sevier Cox's *White America*. In the review, Charles Davenport extolled not only Cox's book but also the author himself, who was instrumental in securing the passage of Virginia's landmark 1924 antimiscegenation statute, the Racial Integrity Act. Davenport gushed, "America is still worth saving for the white race and it can be done. If Mr. E. S. Cox can bring it about he will be a greater savior of his country than George Washington. We wish him, his book and his 'White America Society' godspeed."⁴³ Clearly, this is not the perspective of a man who would accept that membership in the same faith community would transcend perceived racial differences. Davenport's thinking can be taken as representative of the leadership of organized eugenics. The AES promoted a social ideology that was dominated by a very specific and well-defined racial nationalism that prized middle-class Anglo-Protestants above all others and made the universalist tendencies in Catholic teaching and practice almost incomprehensible.

Throughout the 1920s, the editors of *Eugenical News* periodically reported instances in which Catholics outspokenly professed their solidarity with non-Anglo peoples. These pronouncements often contained a muffled critique of Anglo-Protestant nationalism and imperialism that baffled the writers at the journal. For instance, the editors were incredulous of their motives when in 1930 Catholics expressed their opinion that the United States should leave the Philippines. They sarcastically reported that "at the National Eucharistic Congress of the Philippines, where 40,000 gathered in Manila last month, a resolution was adopted asking all delegates to pray for the freedom of the country from American control (which means the probable restoration of the former control by the friars)."⁴⁴ The editors simply could not comprehend that Catholics would advocate for Filipino self-determination. In the eugenicists' eyes, the only

America, a softer eugenics prevailed than which took hold in the United States, England, and Northern Europe. She attributes this difference both to cultural ties with France, where neo-Lamarckian thought held some sway, and to religious (Catholic) objections to human sterilization. See Stepan, *"The Hour of Eugenics": Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991).

43. "White America," *Eugenical News*, 1924, 9, 3. A copy of the review is also located in the Davenport Papers.

44. "A Free Hand in the Philippines," *Eugenical News*, 1930, 15:5, 70.

logical motivation for the statement would be to garner an increase in ecclesiastical control over the population, who were assumed to be constitutionally incapable of self-government.

The stark difference in perspective of Catholic teaching and eugenics social ideology on questions related to race transcended the casual observances of the eugenics press. Rather, it became a point of contention for Catholics interested in progressivism and the eugenics social agenda. Time and again, eugenicists approached Ryan and Cooper about racial issues related to eugenics, and Ryan and Cooper repeatedly rejected the premises of the eugenics racial hierarchy as unscientific. In the process, they participated in a process of recontextualization in which they questioned both the methodology used to derive eugenics data and the framework used to interpret it. This process placed them in a position to reject the majority of negative eugenics policies even while they continued to support the idea of social reforms that fostered strong, healthy families.

Rather than positioning himself as an outsider to the eugenics movement, Cooper consistently counted himself as a critical voice within the movement. When asked by the editors of *Eugenics* to respond to the accusation that eugenics ideology was based on “racial snobbery,” he responded directly and critically. Cooper explained that the organized eugenics movement, in fact, did promote the “doctrine of superior races,” particularly the superiority of Nordics. He argued that this position caused “many convinced American eugenicists” to avoid affiliation with the institutional structures of the movement. Hence, dedication to the ideology of racial superiority presented a roadblock to the progress of the movement, and, more important, it undermined the claims that eugenics was a valid applied science. Attacking the veracity of the facts supporting the notion of racial superiority, Cooper argued, “Neither the cultural nor the psychological evidence, as it stands today, is, when submitted to detailed critical analysis, sufficient or even near-sufficient to establish with any scientific probability the superiority of Nordics or of any other racial group.”⁴⁵ Significantly, in his assault on the veracity of eugenic claims of superiority, Cooper did not mention biology, only culture and psychology, both factors that could be strongly influenced by environment.

45. John Montgomery Cooper, “Is Eugenics Racial Snobbery?” *Eugenics*, 1929, 2:2, 20–21, p. 20.

These issues of racial difference—biological, cultural, and psychological—provided the premise for negative eugenics policy initiatives. The constellation of policy initiatives that developed out of this racism included strenuous advocacy of immigration restrictions and antimiscegenation statutes, both of which were intended to protect the racial integrity of the “superior” race. The state and federal governments passed landmark legislation in these areas—the 1924 Johnson Reed Immigration Restriction and the prototypical 1924 Virginia Racial Integrity Act—earlier in the decade. Having successfully promoted this legislation, eugenicists pressed on in their concerns about racial contamination throughout the decade, focusing on those groups that had not been included in those restrictions, who hailed from areas in the Americas and U.S. protectorates.

As a community composed of immigrants and the children of immigrants, Catholics in the United States were sensitive to plans for immigration restriction based on national origin. Though prominent Catholic public figures, including Ryan and Bruce Mohler, the director of the NCWC Bureau of Immigration, supported the idea of immigration restriction for economic reasons and as the rightful jurisdiction of the federal government, they resisted the notion that any discriminatory principle should be employed in choosing the persons constituting the numbers who were allowed entrance to the country. The 1924 immigration restriction limited the numbers of persons entering the United States from Southern and Eastern Europe, persons who were more than likely Roman Catholic or Jewish. Additionally, the immigration issue tapped into a long-standing cultural memory in the Catholic community of nativism and xenophobia that stretched back through the nineteenth century to the Know Nothing Party in the Civil War era, the American Protection Association and the Immigration Restriction League in the 1890s, and the second Ku Klux Klan.⁴⁶ Hence, Catholics were predisposed to reject legislation they perceived as discriminatory.

By the time that Catholic voices arose within organized eugenics and the debates that took place in the pages of the eugenics press, the landmark legislation of 1924 was a fact of life. The National Origins

46. On anti-Catholic nativism and xenophobia, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* [1955] (New York: Atheneum, 1975) and Donald L. Kinzer, *An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1964).

Act stemmed the tide of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe, but included no provisions for the Americas or U.S. colonies. When asked in 1929 to comment on the eugenic benefits of immigration restriction in the pages of *Eugenics*, Ryan replied:

I have decided that I am unable to comply with the invitation; for I regard the project of picking out immigrants on the basis of eugenic guess-working theories as not only futile but positively harmful. Aside from the obvious physical tests and tests to determine insanity or a pronounced degree of feeble-mindedness, there are, in my opinion, no scientific tests of fitness that could or should be applied to the members of any race seeking admission to the United States. I do not think that we should expose prospective immigrants to the standards and prejudices of pseudo-science.⁴⁷

Ryan's words strongly express his dismay at the notion of racially based immigration quotas. The guise of science could not veil the prejudices that motivated immigration restrictions championed by the AES.

Despite this pointedly antiracist response to the invitation from *Eugenics* to discuss immigration laws, C. P. Ives, the editor, again approached Ryan for a comment on a similar topic later that year. Concern about immigration from Mexico and the racial differences of Filipinos caused the editor to solicit Ryan's opinion on the racial effects of intermarriage between these groups and "the superior race." Even though Ives flattered Ryan, calling him a "nationally eminent scholar," the priest refused to participate in the symposium based on his lack of expertise. Ryan claimed to have "no views on the subject that are worth presenting to the public."⁴⁸ These refusals guaranteed that Ryan would only be asked to participate in the conversations that took place on the pages of *Eugenics* a finite number of times. After voicing his opinions on the "prejudices of pseudo-science" undergirding the eugenics campaign for immigration restriction, Ryan's views on eugenics did not appear in the pages of the eugenics press again.

While Ryan's exchanges with Ives about the discussions concerning race, immigration, and miscegenation shed light on the public stance of Catholics on these issues, the staff at the AES also dealt

47. Ives to Ryan, 13 May 1929; Ryan to Ives, 18 May 1929; Ives to Ryan, 20 May 1929; Ryan to Ives, 23 May 1929, John A. Ryan Papers (henceforth Ryan Papers), ACUA. The symposium appeared as "Personal Factors in Immigration: Should They Get More Attention?" *Eugenics*, 1929, 2:7, 18–20.

48. Ives to Ryan, 9 December 1929, and Ryan to Ives, 17 December 1929, Ryan Papers.

with Ryan's and Cooper's opinions within the more private, inner workings of the organization. Maintaining his stance as a eugenics insider, Cooper rarely passed up a chance to share his views with the key players in the organization. As a member of the Advisory Committee for the AES, Cooper had the chance to review official statements and committee platforms that represented the guiding ideology for the American eugenics movement, frequently affording him a chance to comment on the conflict between valid scientific methods and subjective prejudice. In his interaction with the AES in this capacity, he continued to sound a consistent voice of criticism when presented with issues addressing immigration and differential racial characteristics.

Cooper frequently explained to AES Executive Secretary Leon Whitney that the racism implied in the majority of the organization's agenda was unscientific and repellant to those who wanted to place eugenics on a sound scientific footing. For example, on 8 September 1930, Whitney forwarded a copy of the Committee on Selective Immigration's program to each of the members of the advisory counsel. The program included an endorsement of the National Origins Act principles and called for an extension of that system to include the countries of the Western Hemisphere, as well as a request for adequate funds to provide for the registration of aliens and the deportation of all "deportable aliens." Additionally, to secure the quality of the population further, the committee proposed overseas medical examinations for immigrants to weed out the undesirable before they reached America. Finally, the program called for an admissions standard that only welcomed those immigrants "who are superior to the median American in intelligence tests."⁴⁹

Cooper's response to the Committee on Selective Immigration's comprehensive plan to protect and improve the American racial stock was less than supportive. Even though Cooper supported restriction in general, he was convinced that the AES plan was "hopelessly entangled in Nordic pre-suppositions." Invoking the memory of the Red Scare following World War I, he informed Whitney that he was doubtful "in view of the quite possible tyrannies and injustices regarding the policy of registering alien populations." But more than his concern for the rights of noncitizens, Cooper focused on the "emotion

49. Whitney to Cooper, 8 September 1930, Cooper Papers.

and chauvinism” that formed the foundation of the immigration program. He frankly explained to Whitney: “I am profoundly convinced that so long as the pro-Nordic element so largely controls the broad policies of the Society, we cannot save face in American scientific circles. We shall continually be a society based on unconsidered propaganda motives instead of upon established scientific facts. In other words so long as the Nordics are in control, we shall lack status among thinking people.”⁵⁰ Using his status as an anthropologist, Cooper continually recontextualized the terms of the eugenics conversation by reminding his colleagues at the AES that the principles of rigorous scientific method required them to provide empirical data to support their policy initiatives. Without such data, their proposals were simply prejudice masquerading as science.

Eugenic immigration policy was not the only area in which Cooper felt that the representatives of the AES suffered from a lack of scientific perspective. Dedicated as he was to placing eugenics on a solid experimental scientific foundation, Cooper resisted the tendency of eugenicists to bring issues into their purview that could not be addressed with verifiable empirical data. For example, in responding to Roswell Johnson’s “An Ethical Code of Eugenics,” which dealt with hygiene, marriage, reproduction, and divorce, Cooper tersely wrote: “If our American Eugenics Society considers its work in life as that of irresponsible propaganda I should be in favor by all means of the Society publishing Dr. Johnson’s code. If on the other hand our American Eugenics Society looks upon its aims and methods as primarily falling within the scientific field, I should consider the publication of this half digested, rambling and unscientific ethical code as entirely out of place.”⁵¹ Cooper’s comments on Johnson’s code indicate the degree to which he felt personally invested in the eugenics movement and its future. His continual pointing to the unscientific nature of many “official” eugenics positions and platforms demonstrated his wish to reform the movement in hopes that it might further the goals that he felt justifiably belonged to the scientific realm.

There is little evidence that either Ryan’s blunt rejection of “pseudo-scientific prejudice” and “eugenic guess-work” or Cooper’s

50. Cooper to Whitney, 19 September 1930, Cooper Papers.

51. Whitney to Cooper, 23 August 1929, and Cooper to Whitney, 27 August 1929, Cooper Papers.

warnings about the undermining influence of “the pro-Nordic element” had any influence on the policy agenda of organized eugenics during the late 1920s. More often than not, their views were published and discussed in the eugenics press as a point of contrast with the dominant philosophies of the eugenics movement. As supporters of a social ideology supposedly founded on the “concrete” scientific understanding of heredity and race, eugenicists could hardly be expected to take seriously the objections of two priests, who, because of their dedication to a religious institution that based its authority on the notion of eternal truths, did not appear (at least in the eyes of mainstream eugenicists) sufficiently versed in science to question the scope and methodology of the movement. Despite the existence of a number of respected scientists who resisted and criticized the racial presuppositions of the eugenics ideology, such presuppositions dictated the tone of the eugenics press and the national organization. Though Ryan’s and Cooper’s responses to the leadership of the AES echoed those of Raymond Pearl and Herbert Spencer Jennings, both Johns Hopkins scientists and eugenics supporters who waged critiques on the dominant methodologies during the 1920s, their cautions about race and heredity appear to have fallen on deaf ears. By the middle of the 1930s the critiques of racist tendencies in the national organization by eugenics supporters combined with developments in anthropology and psychology to force the core of the movement to reconsider the relationship between race and heredity, but in the late 1920s Ryan and Cooper definitely voiced a minority perspective.⁵²

BIRTH RATES, BIRTH CONTROL, AND FEMINISM

Significantly, although eugenicists were somewhat confused by the curious tendency of Catholic teaching to put religion ahead of racial difference, they held a quiet appreciation for the way in which Catholics appeared to maintain a high birth rate and adhere to the norms of the traditional patriarchal nuclear family structure. In this confusing and contradictory nexus of race and reproduction, members of the AES envisioned a possible point of commonality

52. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, 129–75; Herbert Spencer Jennings, “Undesirable Aliens,” *Survey*, 1923, 51, 309–12, 364; and Raymond Pearl, “The Biology of Superiority,” *Am. Mercury*, 1927, 12, 260.

between their philosophies and Catholic teaching. For instance, in 1928 Archbishop Hanna of Los Angeles discussed the influx of Mexicans and persons of Latin descent and culture as presaging “the peaceful entrance during the generations to come into the possession of this fair land.” The editors of *Eugenical News* agreed with the archbishop’s prediction, if not his enthusiasm about it, because “of the fact that home-loving, prolific peoples, among whom motherhood still remains in honor, are in the presence of a race that are permitting the home to crumble about them, who shrink from the duty of child-bearing, and who are raising a generation of weaklings by showering sickly sentimentality upon carefully limited families of pampered darlings.”⁵³ Into that one sentence, the editors crammed a whole slate of negative gender stereotypes about middle-class Anglo-Protestant women. The implication was that, on one hand, women were being dissuaded from fulfilling their racial duty by the illusive claims of feminism. In the words of Theodore Roosevelt, they were being seduced to commit “race suicide.”⁵⁴ On the other hand, those women who were having children were guilty of what Philip Wiley later termed “momism” by dominating and smothering the few children whom they did condescend to raise—a practice that was certain to produce a generation of pathological and emasculated males because it robbed boys of the chance to develop their own sense of rugged individualism.⁵⁵ Grudgingly, the editors suggested that by clinging to traditional cultural patterns, these racially inferior peoples—the “sons of Italy and Portugal and Mexico”—avoided the pitfalls of modernity that were so disruptive of gender norms and so threatening to racial perfectionism.

Implied in this commentary on Catholic birth rates was an appreciation of a shared perspective on questions of feminism and the

53. “The New Conquest of California,” *Eugenical News*, 1928, 13, 31.

54. For more on “race suicide,” see Thomas G. Dyer, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), pp. 143–67; Linda Gordon, *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right: Birth Control in America* (New York: Penguin, 1990), pp. 137–41; Miriam King and Steven Ruggles, “American Immigration, Fertility, and Race Suicide at the Turn of the Century,” *J. Interdisciplinary Hist.*, 1990, 20, 347–69; Elaine Tyler May, *Barren in the Promised Land: Childless Americans and the Pursuit of Happiness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 61–95.

55. For more on momism, see Paula J. Caplan, “Mother-Blaming,” and Jennifer Terry “‘Momism’ and the Making of Treasonous Homosexuals,” in Molly Ladd-Taylor and Lauri Umansky, eds., *“Bad” Mothers: The Politics of Blame in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 127–44, 169–90.

"New Woman." Many Catholics and eugenicists were concerned about the implications of shifting gender roles for society. Not surprisingly, their responses to the challenges posed by feminism were marked by a pronounced degree of ambivalence. Associated with the birth control movement, as well as campaigns for suffrage, the Equal Rights Amendment, and sufficient educational and career opportunities, feminism proved problematic for Catholics and eugenicists because of the ways that the movement threatened to alter the dynamics of gender relations and the centrality of the nuclear family. For conservative American eugenicists, feminism held the threat that "superior" women would eschew their reproductive duties in favor of careers, reducing the numbers of worthy offspring. For example, Edwin Grant Conklin told the readers of *Eugenics* that "If only by some means the better half of all women could be made to realize that the most important social service they could render to the human race would be to have seven or eight children each and at the same time the poorer half could be induced to adopt and practice this new freedom from reproduction, the problem of eugenics would be solved." Conklin's perspective reflected the investment of the AES in promoting positive eugenics policies that would encourage "superior" women to have large families, in spite of the feminist notions about independence and education for women.⁵⁶

Of course, the question of the relationship between feminism and eugenics was not easy for feminists, either. Significantly, female eugenics supporters often echoed the pronatalist stance of male eugenicists, arguing that increased access to appropriate education, such as courses on child development and eugenics, would encourage both women and men to perform their reproductive duty by getting married and having children.⁵⁷ In taking this position, the women replicated the tendency of some first-wave feminists to adopt a position of social motherhood and pronatalism to support their claims for equal rights. This dangerous association also led them to participate with and endorse the agenda of the eugenics movement because it reinforced their cultural power by prizing both social and actual motherhood among middle-class Anglo-Protestants.⁵⁸

56. Edwin Grant Conklin, "Feminism and the 'New Woman': Their Eugenic Significances," *Eugenics*, 1930, 3:8, 302-4, p. 304.

57. Ibid.

58. On feminism and social motherhood, see Peter Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Gender Identities*

For Catholics, feminism threatened to destabilize the traditional patriarchal family unit and undermine a universal pronatalism. In addressing such concerns, Cooper proposed that affectively and socially, the women who embraced education and careers instead of motherhood might have made the correct decision for society. Though his tone was skeptical and critical, Cooper speculated that “should it turn out that those who are assumedly making the great refusal are doing so out of selfish unwillingness to accept the responsibilities and sacrifices of motherhood, then perhaps the race is just as well or better off if they fail to bear and rear offspring.”⁵⁹ In this less than profeminist response—he offered no alternative motives for choosing childlessness other than selfishness—Cooper succeeded in reminding the readers of *Eugenics* that they needed to be concerned with more than just biology; they needed to be concerned with social dynamics and social roles. Of course, this reminder came couched in the traditional Catholic pronatalist stance on reproduction, but it did suggest that there might be valid (though limited) reasons for choosing a life path that did not include motherhood.

Though Catholic teaching and eugenics ideology shared a pronatalist stance to a certain degree, they differed distinctly when eugenicists encouraged birth control for the unfit. Catholic opponents of the eugenics movement were suspicious that eugenics proposals were primarily campaigns for widespread distribution of contraceptive information and technology, because so few of their coreligionists fit the profile of citizens at whom eugenicists targeted their positive eugenics plans. Work by Catholic theologians linking eugenics and birth control reinforced the connection in the minds of the clergy and the laity. Charles Bruehl’s text, *Birth Control and Eugenics, in Light of Fundamental Ethical Principles* (1928), was the most prominent of these, because it sprang from a series of articles in the *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (1926–27), which was widely read by the clergy before the book was published.⁶⁰ However, similar views had been expressed by Thomas Gerrard in 1912, Ryan in 1916, and Henry

in *Modern America*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 42–59. For a specific treatment of pronatalism and eugenics see May, *Barren in the Promised Land*, pp. 61–95.

59. Cooper, “Feminism and the ‘New Woman,’” 302–4.

60. The book emerged out of a twelve-part series by Charles Bruehl, D.D., in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, June 1926 through May 1927 (vols. 26, 27).

Somerville in 1917, all of whom wrote pieces in the Catholic press linking the eugenics and birth control movements in their propensity toward ethnic and class discrimination.⁶¹

In fact, the association between eugenics and birth control was not totally without foundation or some degree of ambivalence. The initial program published by the Program Committee for the AES in 1923 called for an end to laws that restricted the distribution of contraceptive information. Additionally, during the 1920s prominent birth control advocates began to frame their discussions of the social and political importance of unrestricted contraceptive information in the language of eugenic progress. For instance, in her text *The Pivot of Civilization* (1922), Margaret Sanger argued that “the complex problem of the feeble-minded, and the menace of the moron to human society” illustrated “the actual harvest of reliance upon traditional morality, and upon Biblical injunction to increase and multiply, a policy still taught by politician, priest and militarist.” Sanger’s solution to that “harvest” was the adoption of a scientific program of birth control.⁶² Once more conservative eugenicists reconciled their concerns about birth rates among middle-class women and the larger goals of the movement to dissuade the “unfit” from reproducing, the alliance between eugenicists and birth controllers only grew stronger in the public eye as the decade wore on.⁶³ At the same time, Catholic opposition to the birth control movement took on a more vociferous tone as individual priests and bishops clashed with birth control advocates in New York, Connecticut, and a host of other states.⁶⁴

Needless to say, eugenicists failed to exhibit much appreciation for or understanding of the principles guiding Catholic moral opposition

61. Thomas J. Gerrard, “Eugenics and Catholic Teaching,” *Catholic World*, 1912, 95, 289–304; John A. Ryan, “The Church and Birth Control,” in *Family Limitation and The Church and Birth Control* (New York: Paulist Press, 1916), pp. 17–23; and Henry Somerville, “Eugenics and the Feeble-minded,” *Catholic World*, 1917, 105, 209–18.

62. Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* [1922] (London: J. Cape, 1923), p. 40.

63. Daniel Kevles aptly explains this transition: “Stripped of its assertive feminism, contraception became acceptable to conservative eugenicists, for there was natural harmony between their social predilections and the pro-birth-control rational advanced by Havelock Ellis: ‘The superficially sympathetic man flings a coin to the beggar; the more deeply sympathetic man builds and almshouse for him so that he need no longer beg; but perhaps the most radically sympathetic of all is the man who arranges that the beggar shall not be born.’” Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics*, pp. 88–90, p. 90.

64. The ongoing controversy between Catholics and birth controllers from 1914 through the 1960s has been well documented. For example see Ellen Chesler, *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America* (New York: Anchor Books, 1992).

to either eugenics or birth control. One apt example of the perspectival differences between Catholics and eugenicists was the unfavorable review in *Eugenics* of Bruehl's *Birth Control and Eugenics, in Light of Fundamental Ethical Principles* by zoologist and author of eugenics texts, Samuel Holmes. The review expressed the fundamental differences between the natural law principles of Catholic moral theology and the reasoning behind eugenics social policy initiatives. A theologian at Overbrook Seminary in Pennsylvania, Bruehl posed an argument against birth control and sterilization that predictably reiterated the classic natural law principles offered by many Catholic theologians before him: birth control is a frustration of nature and sterilization is a mutilation that constitutes a violation of bodily integrity.⁶⁵ Nullifying Bruehl's sources, Holmes retorted: "Just how the good fathers who are so liberally quoted are able to deduce moral laws from the course of nature I have never been able to understand."⁶⁶ Hence, Holmes utterly rejected the possibility of natural law as a basis for moral reasoning.

In addition to his difficulties with natural law, Holmes appeared baffled by the fact that a moral system that would reject birth control and sterilization could simultaneously argue for a full range of positive eugenics measures based on "moral persuasion," such as care in the choice of a marriage partner and the elimination of alcohol abuse and venereal disease. This seemingly strange combination of opposition and support led Holmes to conclude his assessment of Bruehl's work by stating: "We hope that his book will do something toward persuading the great institution he represents to do at least as far as he recommends in the promotion of race improvement. Unfortunately

65. Taking this perspective, Bruehl participated in the revival of scholasticism that Pope Leo XIII called for among Catholics in his 1879 encyclical *Aeterni patris*. Based on the work of thirteenth-century theologians and philosophers, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, Roger Bacon, and St. Bonaventure, neoscholasticism maintained that truth could be arrived at only through a synthesis of revealed truth and reason, of faith and reason. The result was a completely comprehensive philosophical system that professed to contain and explain all of the elements of the human condition, uniting the natural and the supernatural in to one unified whole. Neoscholastics used natural law to analyze the conditions of modern industrial society and to provide moral guidance in dealing with those conditions. For a summary see "Scholasticism," *New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XII (Qat-Ser)* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1967), pp. 1153-70. On the impact of neoscholasticism in the United States, see Philip Gleason, "The Search for Unity and Its Sequel," in *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism, Past and Present* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 136-51.

66. Samuel J. Holmes, "The Catholic View," *Eugenics*, 1928, 1:2, 37-38.

his method of tackling problems of morals is still that of the Medieval Church.”⁶⁷ Like so many Catholics before him, Bruehl accepted the notions of social improvement in eugenics philosophies and recommended the environmental and behavioral changes that would be necessary to bring about such changes because they reflected the majority of Catholic teachings on morality and virtue. Negative eugenics measures removed the means of self-improvement from the control of the individual will and represented an invasion of the state into the realm of the individual and the family. Such measures were, therefore, unacceptable in light of Catholic moral teaching—which inevitably lead to some conflict between Catholics and eugenicists.

Occasionally, the passion surrounding these conflicts prompted individuals not as obviously scientifically inclined as Cooper to enter the fray with the eugenicists. For example, in January 1929, Dr. C. C. Little, then the president of the American Eugenics Society, gave an address to the AES and the Eugenics Research Association at Battle Creek, Michigan, titled “Some Obstacles to Eugenic Progress,” which included a section on birth control. His remarks prompted John A. McClorey, S.J., of the St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Detroit, to comment in a press interview that the use of birth control had the potential to limit the number of geniuses born while reducing the number of defectives. McClorey’s comments to the press encouraged C. P. Ives, managing editor of *Eugenics*, to put together a symposium on the subject in which McClorey elaborated on his views and was joined by a variety of birth control advocates who also supported the eugenics movement. In his statement for the symposium, McClorey questioned the certainty of eugenicists that so-called defectives would produce defective offspring. In his words, “Geniuses as well as imbeciles have descended from mad parents. Saints as well as sinners have sprung from vicious forbears.” Furthermore, McClorey pointed to the connection between genius and epilepsy, using Pascal, Poe, and Byron as examples of artists with neurological and/or psychiatric problems. Finally, McClorey disputed the viability of Malthusian population theories. Despite this diffuse attack on the potential pitfalls of the use of birth control as a eugenic tool, McClorey’s fellow respondents were surprisingly unified in their answers. They all argued that the use of the safe period

67. Ibid., 38.

(approved by the Catholic Church for spacing pregnancy) and clerical celibacy provided the same chance of reducing the production of genius as using artificial forms of contraception.⁶⁸

Even though the exchange was more stereotypical and predictable than it was informative, according to the editor, Ives, it generated a vigorous response from *Eugenics* readers. In fact, the response was so great that shortly after the publication of the first symposium, Ives set out to arrange a sequel. This time he approached Cooper to provide the Catholic perspective.⁶⁹ Cooper was the author of a monograph on birth control published in 1923 that was well received by *Eugenical News*, whose editors explained that “Dr. Cooper takes a partisan stand, but, at the same time, he has outlined the view of those who definitely take the other side.” Hence, he could be expected to provide a thoughtful and considered opinion.⁷⁰ Additionally, Cooper repeatedly discussed the birth control issue in personal correspondence with Whitney and Popenoe, both of whom trusted him as a careful thinker.⁷¹

As had come to be his practice in such matters, Cooper questioned whether any sufficient scientific facts existed to even allow anyone to engage in a discussion of birth control and eugenics. In the cover letter to his piece, he explained to Ives, “My own very strong opinion is that we really don’t know anything about it, an opinion impressed on me still more deeply by the recent discussion that appeared in the March issue. Not one of the writers really had or appeared to have any detailed knowledge of the few facts we have in the field and these are not much.”⁷² Cooper’s tone suggested that he thought that the rhetoric in the initial exchange set up a situation in which Catholic teaching on birth control and its relationship to questions of eugenics could only look foolish if they engaged in further debate, superficially pitting religion and science against one another. Thus in concluding his contribution to the discussion,

68. C. C. Little, Margaret Sanger, and Hannah M. Stone, “The Reproduction Rate of Genius: Will Birth Control Diminish It?” *Eugenics*, 1929, 2:3, 22–24.

69. Ives to Cooper, 27 March 1929, Cooper Papers.

70. “News and Notes,” *Eugenical News*, 1925, 10:3, 36.

71. Whitney to Cooper, 7 March 1929; Cooper to Whitney, 12 March 1929; Whitney to Cooper, 10 June 1930; Cooper to Whitney, 12 June 1930; Whitney to Cooper, 16 June 1930; Popenoe to Cooper, 23 October 1923; Popenoe to Cooper, 25 July 1925; Whitney to Cooper, 16 January 1925; Cooper to Whitney, 20 January 1925; Whitney to Cooper, 23 March 1925; and Whitney to Cooper, 7 May 1925, Cooper Papers.

72. Cooper to Ives, 1 April 1929, Cooper Papers.

Cooper returned to his typical refrain with respect to eugenics: "Maybe, perhaps, possibly, probably, if—that is about all we can say. We do not know much about it. . . . A few more facts, scientifically established, will help much more than all our wordy views and inconclusive guesses—including this one."⁷³ Hence, Cooper provided an opinion on whether such a question could be scientifically answered without even entering into the realm of Catholic moral teaching on contraception.

In contrast to this measured response, Edward M. East's contribution to the second symposium constituted a full-scale attack on the Catholic Church that incidentally dealt with birth control in relation to eugenics. As a well-respected Harvard biologist, East played a prominent role in the eugenics movement, serving on the AES Advisory Committee from 1923 to 1935. One would assume that given his background in the natural sciences, East would have addressed the question of birth control and genius with statistical material on birth rates, genetics, and intelligence testing; however, that was not the case. Instead, East focused on what he saw as duplicity in Catholic doctrine and politics. For example, he contrasted Alfred E. Smith's claims that the Church would not influence his political positions in the 1928 presidential election with the lobbying effort of the church to prevent the passage of the 1929 birth control bill in the New York State legislature. In a parallel series of contrasts, he cited as further evidence of Catholic double standards: an unmarried priesthood and unrestricted reproduction among laypersons; and objections to the sterilization of the unfit and a willingness to castrate "thousands of healthy boys to furnish sopranos" for choirs. In the process of pointing out those contrasts, East demonstrated the degree of antagonism generated by the pitched battles between Catholics and birth controllers over contraceptive legislation. Structured in this way, East's piece did little to extricate the discussion of birth control and eugenics from what Cooper referred to as "wordy views and inconclusive guesses." What East's response did do was emphasize the degree of animosity that punctuated most encounters between many Catholics and birth control supporters.⁷⁴

73. Cooper, "The Birth Rate of Genius: Does Contraception Curb It?" *Eugenics*, 1929, 2:5, 18.

74. Edward M. East, "The Birth Rate of Genius: Does Contraception Curb It?" *Eugenics*, 1929, 2:5, 19.

Despite the caustic nature of the exchange on birth control, and the contributions of Ryan on immigration, the appearances of Ryan and Cooper in the pages of the eugenics press succeeded in delineating the areas of conflict and common ground that could exist for Catholics and advocates of the eugenics movement. Those areas of divergence and overlap illustrate the inextricable connection between issues of race and reproduction in all segments of American culture. Cultural critic Richard Dyer has insightfully explained that “all concepts of race are always concepts of the body and also of heterosexuality. Race is a means of categorizing different types of human bodies which reproduce themselves. Heterosexuality is the means of ensuring, but also the site of endangering, the reproduction of these differences.”⁷⁵

As comprehensive worldviews, Catholicism and eugenics provided their adherents with tools for conceptualizing about categorizing human beings and governing gender relations and reproductive choices. During the late 1920s, at the height of the eugenics movement fervor, eugenics advocates discovered that the possibility existed for them to claim some common ground with Catholics on a handful of issues. The most prominent of those issues was the unbending pronatalism of the American hierarchy. Staunch in their opposition to artificial contraception, prominent spokespersons for the Church shared eugenicists’ concerns about “race suicide,” even as they differed in their opinions on which social groups were at risk for extinction. Similarly, the work of social scientists and moral theologians occasionally surprised eugenicists in its employment of scientific method and its general support of positive eugenics measures. However, even in those instances when eugenicists found something positive about Catholic social scientists, such as pronatalist stances or advocacy of positive eugenics, eugenicists tended to combine their recognition of that common ground with one of a handful of negative stereotypes based on Catholics’ use of natural law in moral reasoning and their privileging religious commonality over racial difference. Those negative stereotypes reinforced the image of Catholics as backward-looking antimodernists who failed to recognize the necessity for vigilance in the preservation of racial purity. After having absorbed these messages, the readers of eugenics

75. Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 20.

journals such as *Eugenics* and the *Eugenical News* would not have assumed that adherents of the Roman Catholic faith would be fellow foot soldiers in the battle to improve the race.

Sterilization and the Continued Search for Catholic Support

Despite the wide-ranging exchange of opinions that took place in the *Eugenics* forums, eugenicists entered the 1930s convinced that they had as of yet failed to win the support of U.S. Catholics. Though Cooper and Ryan appeared to have some limited affinity for the movement, more often than not they objected to the direction of eugenics policy initiatives from immigration restriction to the distribution of birth control among the poor. Cooper's writings clearly demonstrate his support for eugenics or positive eugenics, but the question of negative eugenic measures failed to draw his support in the years prior to the official papal condemnation of eugenic sterilization in *Casti connubii* (31 December 1930). That is not to say, of course, that the issue was not debated in Catholic circles. The conversation among Catholic moral theologians between 1910 and 1912 in the pages of the *Ecclesiastical Review* clearly demonstrated that a difference of opinion existed with regard to sterilization for criminals.⁷⁶

At large, however, Whitney's correspondence with Cooper indicates that from his perspective, many Catholics in the United States supported the sentiments expressed by Msgr. Thomas McLaughlin of Seton Hall when he refused to advertise the 1930 AES Sermon Contest, stating that he considered eugenics "out of harmony with the teachings of Almighty God." Msgr. McLaughlin's response alarmed Whitney because it suggested the utter failure of the eugenics movement to educate the greater population of U.S. Catholics as to the benefits of eugenic social policy. Having developed a congenial relationship with Cooper, Whitney approached the anthropologist in hopes of rectifying the misunderstanding. Forwarding a copy of McLaughlin's response, Whitney explained to Cooper: "We continually

76. Austin O'Malley, "Vasectomy in Defectives," *Am. Ecclesiastical Rev.*, 1911, 44, 684-705; "The Morality and the Lawfulness of Vasectomy," *Am. Ecclesiastical Rev.*, 1911, 45, 71-77; Steven [Samuel] M. Donovan, "Summing up the Discussion on Vasectomy," *Am. Ecclesiastical Rev.*, 1911, 45, 313-19; Theodore Labouré, "One Last Remark on Vasectomy," *Am. Ecclesiastical Rev.*, 1911, 45, 355-59; "P. Schmitt on the Gravity of the Mutilation Involved in Vasectomy," *Am. Ecclesiastical Rev.*, 1911, 45, 360-62.

get letters from Catholic priests and Catholic laymen who seem to have an entirely erroneous idea of what eugenics is. I wonder if you would not like to write an article for the *Eugenics* magazine showing how eugenics is in general in harmony with Catholicism [*sic*] (except perhaps for contraception), so that we may have reprints of it struck off and sent to the Catholic institutions throughout the country.”⁷⁷

Though Cooper was not opposed to the motivation behind Whitney’s request, he felt compelled to clarify the reasons why so many Catholics took a stance of opposition to eugenics. Cooper maintained that the agenda of the AES itself turned away those unfamiliar with the movement and even some of those who were sympathetic to eugenics. Stating the issue in his usual direct style of prose, Cooper told Whitney,

Quite aside from the question of birth control, for which in the main the Society gives its approval, there are a few other highly debatable points of program which it has advocated, namely, Nordicism and sterilization. Furthermore, a good deal of its work has been characterized by a very loose number of inferences which do not seem to be justified by the data at hand. The injection however implicit of the Nordic bias into the Society’s immigration propaganda and policies appears to practically all of us in the anthropological field as unwarranted scientifically. The implicit and at times explicit approval of some of the “wild” state sterilization measures appears equally unscientific, and moreover against public welfare.⁷⁸

Reiterating his position on race and science, Cooper maintained an interest in eugenics as a tool of social welfare while rejecting the majority of the public policy initiatives for which the AES actively lobbied in the 1920s, particularly sterilization.

Despite his objections to the unscientific nature of much of the eugenics work, and the prejudice involved in eugenics racial politics, Cooper did not reject Whitney’s proposal to address Catholics specifically. However, due to personal events he had decided not to take on any more work. Rather than pursuing the project himself, Cooper suggested that Whitney use an article about Roman Catholicism and eugenics by the German Catholic priest, Joseph Mayer, which Popenoe had translated for the February 1930 issue of *Eugenics*.⁷⁹

77. Whitney to Cooper, 27 March 1930, Cooper Papers.

78. *Ibid.*

79. Cooper to Whitney, 8 April 1930, Cooper Papers.

In suggesting that Whitney use Mayer's piece, he identified one of the few Catholic theologians who was recognized as supporting the majority of eugenics policy initiatives.⁸⁰

Beginning in the 1920s, Mayer, who was a moral theologian at the Paderborn Academy in Germany, argued that according to his interpretation of Catholic teaching sterilization was morally permissible in the abstract but concretely unwarranted by the present state of heredity. Popenoe favorably reviewed his 1927 book *Gesetzliche Unfruchtbarmachung Geisteskranken* [The Legal Sterilization of the Mentally Diseased] in the *Journal of Social Hygiene*.⁸¹ Popenoe found Mayer's argument promising and convincing in its support for eugenics. Clearly, given his enthusiastic review, Popenoe understood that Mayer's text could potentially be a valuable tool in winning over skeptical Catholics to the eugenics movement.

Undaunted by Mayer's conditional rejection of current sterilization programs, Popenoe continued to be intrigued by Mayer's endorsement of sterilization as a tool to ensure social health and welfare. In February 1930, Popenoe provided a translation of Mayer's article "Eugenics in Roman Catholic Literature" for *Eugenics*, which ran as the lead article in that issue.⁸² The piece traversed the history of Catholic theology from biblical times through the sixteenth century, stating that "it would be a break with the whole past history, if the Catholic church of the present day should ignore the newly posed problems of eugenics or oppose the most thorough investigations of

80. For English-language accounts of Mayer's thought on eugenics, sterilization, and euthanasia, see Donald J. Dietrich, "Catholic Eugenics in Germany, 1920–1945: Hermann Muckermann, S.J. and Joseph Mayer," *J. Church and State*, 1992, 34, 575–600, and Robert Graham, "The 'Right to Kill' in the Third Reich: Prelude to Genocide," *Catholic Historical Rev.*, 1976, 62, 56–76.

81. Paul Popenoe, "A Roman Catholic View of Sterilization," *J. Social Hygiene*, 1928, 14, reprinted in E. S. Gosney and Paul Popenoe, eds., *Sterilization for Human Betterment* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 186–91.

82. Popenoe's translation of Mayer's work is just one indication of the close ties between the proponents of the eugenics movement in the United States and their counterparts in Germany. Though negative eugenics policies were implemented in Europe, South America, and Asia, the most virulent manifestations of those policies arose in Germany and the United States. For nationally comparative work on eugenics see Mark B. Adams, ed., *The Well-Born Science: Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Gunnar Broberg and Nils Roll-Hansen, eds., *Eugenics and the Welfare State: Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999); and Stepan, "The Hour of Eugenics". For more on the connection between the U.S. and German eugenics movements, see Stefan Kühl, *The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

the laws of nature and of life.”⁸³ Mayer also addressed the work of contemporary theologians with respect to eugenics and sterilization. Drawing his inspiration from the work of Dr. Fritz Tillman, Mayer then developed his own theoretical justification “for official restraint of the blind and irresponsible propagation of hereditarily defective, anti-social criminals and also asocial psychopaths.”⁸⁴

Mayer’s theory found a warm reception among a number of German moral theorists, but it also faced some criticism. He concluded of that criticism, however, that “it is usually on the ground of doubt whether sterilization is a practicable measure, without any overcompensating drawbacks, to meet the needs of the present.”⁸⁵ Others, to whom he paid little attention, concluded that the moral justification for sterilization had not been adequately proven using scholastic methods. For the most part, Mayer was much more concerned with those whom he could count as allies than those he could count as critics in his attempt to convince Catholics that sterilization was morally permissible. In listing the host of eminent theologians who shared his interest in—if not his position on—eugenical questions, Mayer point out that much of his thought had been presented to the readers of the *Central-Blatt and Social Justice*, the major conservative German American Catholic periodical.

Significantly, Mayer praised Ryan’s *Human Sterilization* as “a mature and informative pamphlet.”⁸⁶ Although Mayer said little about Ryan’s pamphlet in his actual text, in a lengthy note, the translator, Popenoe, seized upon Mayer’s reference to Ryan as a chance to highlight a seemingly favorable view of sterilization from a prominent American Catholic. Popenoe explained that while Ryan, whom he described as “one of the official spokesmen of the Roman Catholic church in the United States,” “is not convinced that the present compulsory sterilization laws are desirable, he appears to accept the principle in about the same way that Dr. Mayer does.”⁸⁷ Popenoe’s note reveals his motivation in providing this translation for the *Eugenics* audience; he was able to use Mayer’s comments to suggest that Ryan considered eugenic sterilization a

83. Joseph Mayer, “Eugenics in Roman Catholic Literature,” *Eugenics*, 1930, 3:2, 44.

84. *Ibid.*, 46.

85. *Ibid.*, 47.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*

morally permissible course of action in the pursuit of communal welfare. Similarly, Mayer's article allowed Popenoe to familiarize the non-Catholic readership of *Eugenics* with a handful of seemingly respected Catholic theologians, albeit in Germany, who supported the mission of the AES.

Notably, Popenoe's conclusions about Ryan's position in *Human Sterilization* failed to represent the full spirit of Ryan's piece. Quoting from an early portion of the pamphlet, in which Ryan reviewed the relevant Catholic positions on sterilization, Popenoe zeroed in on the criterion by which a number of Catholic theologians would deem compulsory sterilization a responsible and necessary function of the state. By 1928, there had been no official teaching from the magisterium on the issue of eugenic sterilization. However, in the late 1920s both the editors of the Jesuit magazine *America* and moral theologian Charles Bruehl argued that the presence of two specific conditions would justify eugenic sterilization. First, the population of unfit persons had to be so high as to constitute an imminent danger to the public welfare. Second, the state had to have exhausted all other feasible methods of dealing with the situation. While Ryan laid out these conditions, he (and those individuals whom he cited) argued in no uncertain terms that the conditions for such drastic measures did not exist in the United States. In this sense, he echoed some of Mayer's work. However, rather than encouraging sterilization as a viable tool of social policy, Ryan used his pamphlet to encourage Catholics to resist the implementation of sterilization statutes in their states. In discussing the Supreme Court ruling in the *Buck v. Bell* case, Ryan explained that despite its immorality, if the decision succeeded in "arousing Catholics to the necessity of actively opposing such dangerous measures as sterilization before they have taken shape in statutes, it will prove to that extent a blessing."⁸⁸ Such a message was far from an endorsement of eugenic sterilization as public policy.

From the point of view of a non-Catholic reader of *Eugenics*, Popenoe, as the translator, and Ives, as the editor, would have undoubtedly accomplished their goal of exhibiting Catholic support for eugenics social ideology and policy with the Mayer article. In

88. John A. Ryan, *Human Sterilization* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1927), pp. 2 and 9, p. 9.

fact, a Catholic layperson, unaware of the opposition of many theologians and Catholic intellectuals in the United States to negative eugenics practices could have been convinced that such tactics were morally permissible in light of Catholic social teaching. Of course, this confusion would be cleared up just a few months later when at the close of 1930 Pope Pius XI issued his encyclical on marriage, which, among other things, condemned eugenic sterilization. But in the late summer of 1930, the question was still open for discussion among Catholic theologians. Therefore, the AES and its supporters continued to hold out hope that they might win over Catholics to their social ideology.

Hence, with compulsory sterilization of the unfit as the centerpiece of the eugenics platform, the editors of *Eugenics* put together a forum aimed specifically at creating a dialogue involving Catholics. Running in the May 1930 issue, the forum dealing with sterilization, which was subtitled "A Catholic, Some Eugenicians Speak," included prominent eugenicians Popenoe, Roswell Johnson, Charles B. Davenport, and finally, Samuel M. Donovan, a Catholic priest and one of the participants in the original exchange about sterilization carried by the *Ecclesiastical Review* in 1910.⁸⁹ Although the other participants in the panel used their space to argue for voluntary sterilization statutes as part of a social welfare plan, Donovan focused on the current field of Catholic thought on the issue. In the initial 1910 *Ecclesiastical Review* discussion, Donovan had speculated that compulsory sterilization might be considered lawful under Catholic moral teaching. However, by 1930 Donovan was convinced of only two things: first, that the Vatican had as of yet not intervened in the question, and second, that Catholic theologians were split in their judgment, though they leaned slightly toward disavowing sterilization. He claimed the only instance in which a sterilization policy would be justifiable would be one in which the public welfare, or "the common good of the state," could be preserved only by preventing the unfit from reproducing. Lawfulness was Donovan's primary concern. He explained that "what is forbidden by the law of God is wrong and may not therefore be done, however desirable it may otherwise seem to be." In spite of sterilization's popularity as a

89. Roswell Johnson worked at the University of Pittsburgh and was Popenoe's couthor on the most widely used eugenics textbook, *Applied Eugenics*.

policy measure, Donovan predicted that eventually Catholic theologians would come to the consensus that sterilization was a violation of the moral law.⁹⁰

Catholics and the AES after Casti connubii

Donovan was correct in his prediction that eventually theologians would deem sterilization unacceptable in light of Catholic moral teaching. Just seven months after the publication of his segment of the *Eugenics* forum, the Vatican released Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Casti connubii*, which explained that representatives of the state "can never directly harm, or tamper with the integrity of the body, either for the reasons of eugenics or for any other reason."⁹¹ Drafted by prominent European theologians, Arthur Vermeersch, S.J., and Franz Hurth, S.J., this statement effectively settled the question of eugenic sterilization for Catholics.⁹² In the United States, the clergy and the hierarchy came into line with the letter's teaching right away. The result was that shortly after the encyclical both Ryan and Cooper resigned from their positions at the AES. Their methods for tendering those resignations reflect their distinct relationships to the organization and the eugenics movement as a whole.

As the head of the Social Action Department of the NCWC, Ryan took the opportunity to make a very public statement with his resignation from the AES. He released a copy of his resignation letter to the Catholic press. In that letter, he informed Whitney that he assumed that his membership in the organization had lapsed because he had not paid his dues in a number of years and was no longer receiving their journals. The arrival of a copy of the society's platform, "Organized Eugenics," prompted him to write to clarify the situation. In reviewing the platform, he explained that the society's endorsement of "compulsory legal sterilization, the dissemination of birth control information and the practice of birth control for certain classes, and an increase in the number of legal grounds for divorce" were to him "abhorrent for religious, moral and social reasons." On

90. Samuel M. Donovan, "Sterilization: Its Legality, Need; A Catholic and Some Eugenists Speak," *Eugenics*, 1930, 3:5, 180–81.

91. *Casti connubii*, paragraph 71. "*Casti connubii*: Encyclical of Pope Pius XI, On Christian Marriage, December 31, 1930, 208" in Claudia Carlen, ed., *The Papal Encyclicals, 1903–1939* (Raleigh: Pierian Press, 1990), pp. 391–414, p. 402.

92. John T. Noonan, *Contraception: A History of Its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists* [1965] (New York: Mentor-Omega, New American Library, 1967), pp. 511–12.

top of those grounds, clearly rooted in the teachings of *Casti connubii*, Ryan attacked the scientific aspects of the organization and its policies.⁹³

Whitney was displeased both with the tone of Ryan's resignation and with the fact that the text of the letter appeared in Catholic newspapers. His response to Ryan reflected his irritation. Whitney explained to Ryan,

I can fully appreciate your not wishing to be a member of our Clergyman's Committee of the Society when several of its proposals are contrary to your beliefs. For the same reason I should not care to be a member of the Roman Catholic Church, but your church is founded upon authority and eugenics upon scientific fact, insofar as it is ascertainable. And there is a wide difference. Your church quotes authorities who bolster up the beliefs you wish to hold, while eugenics wants the truth. So we shall warmly welcome any proof from you or anyone else that anything we advocate is untrue.

Whitney's response clearly illustrates the positivist position that scientific inquiry provides access to objective truth, while other types of reasoning only present subjective views of the world. Significantly, however, he continued his attack on Roman Catholicism with a value-laden diatribe about celibacy and birth control, arguing that "the Roman Catholic Church is breeding in the worst way—exactng celibacy from its best and urging its people to have large families, which only the least intelligent at present attend to, with the result that your policy is making your people worse genetically every generation."⁹⁴

On the same day that Ryan wrote his resignation letter to Whitney, Cooper also drafted his letter, admitting in the text that he had conferred with Ryan about the material contained in "Organized Eugenics." Though the tone of Cooper's letter was much more friendly than Ryan's, he succeeded in delivering a final statement of his concerns about the unscientific tendencies of the organization. Cooper explained his reasons for resigning as follows:

For the last decade I have kept up hope that our eugenics organization would in the end come around to a program in conformity with the scientific knowledge we possess and with social welfare as we understand it. Time

93. Clipping of newspaper article, 18 April 1931, and Ryan to Whitney, 9 April 1931, Ryan Papers.

94. Whitney to Ryan, 17 April 1931, Ryan Papers.

and again during the formative period of this program I have as a member of the Advisory Committee urged, and given my rational grounds therefore, a program more in conformity with scientific and social standards. In no case that I can recall has such urging been of any practical avail.⁹⁵

In this statement, Cooper claimed his investment in a eugenics program but not in the standard eugenics policies advocated by American eugenicists. His investment in the AES is clear, as is his understanding of himself as a critical voice within that organization.

Given their genial correspondence through the years, Whitney was much sadder to see Cooper go than Ryan. In his response to Cooper's resignation he even commented on the fact that Ryan wrote what he considered "a really nasty letter." Rather than disputing Cooper's points, Whitney informed him: "Your suggestions have been most helpful. I hope you will never feel that anything you have written in the way of advice as a member of the Advisory Council has been disregarded. In fact I can assure you that it has been given much more weight than a great many of the suggestions from other members, especially when you found cause to dissent from the majority opinion." Despite his assurances that Cooper's objections had always been taken seriously by the Advisory Committee, Whitney went on to explain that he did not feel that the eugenics movement was unscientific. Such statements utterly dismissed the bulk of Cooper's arguments with the AES.⁹⁶

The exchanges surrounding these two resignations represent the closing of the chapter of direct participation of Catholics in the AES. The interaction of Ryan and Cooper with eugenicists during the late 1920s was indicative of their dedication to social welfare questions and their willingness to interact with reform movements outside of the Catholic Church. The two-pronged nature of the eugenics movement—with positive eugenics promoting motherhood, and social welfare programs that encouraged healthy families on one hand, and with negative eugenics promoting sterilization and birth control for the unfit, as well as immigration restriction on the other hand—suggested that Catholics and eugenicists could achieve some cooperation. In an effort to broaden the popular support for eugenics policy initiatives, the AES attempted to recruit clergy to spread the

95. Cooper to Whitney, 9 April 1931, Cooper Papers.

96. Whitney to Cooper, 21 April 1931, Cooper Papers.

eugenics message, including Catholic clergy. However, the negative elements of the eugenics policy agenda made the alliances between Catholic intellectuals and eugenicists tenuous and temporary. While Ryan and Cooper rejected the negative elements of the eugenics agenda, many eugenicists rejected Catholic moral reasoning. In the process all of the parties involved suggested that the positions with which they disagreed lacked scientific foundation. In accusing the eugenicists of being unscientific, the Ryan and Cooper engaged in a classic demonstration of the use of recontextualization to combat the negative impact of scientific racism. The conflicts represented in the pages of the *Eugenics* symposiums would continue to play out in local legislative battles around the country for the next two decades as increasing numbers of Catholic clergy and laypersons raised their voices in opposition to negative eugenics policies.

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