

Huxley and Eugenics

Over the course of his lifetime, Julian Huxley developed a multifaceted position regarding eugenics, the applied science of improving the genetic composition of the human population. Eugenacists sought to achieve this goal through both encouraging reproduction among fit individuals and discouraging breeding among unfit populations.

Huxley's position on eugenics is detailed below in an analysis of several of his most influential publications on eugenics, education, and race: his 1933 paper entitled "The Vital Importance of Eugenics," his 1946 publication of the goals of UNESCO after becoming the organization's first director-general, the UNESCO 1951 "Statement on Race," and his 1962 Galton Memorial Lecture to the British Eugenics Society. Contradictions abound between, and even within, several of these publications, but each address adds a specific dimension to Huxley's overall position on eugenics, and together these sources detail the evolution of his stance on human biological inequality, education, and eugenic reform throughout the course of his career.

"The Vital Importance of Eugenics" (1933)

Sterilization of the unfit and identification of carriers of defective genotypes

Huxley argued that the principle goal of eugenics in the short term should be to ensure that mentally defective individuals cease having children. He advocated in particular for:

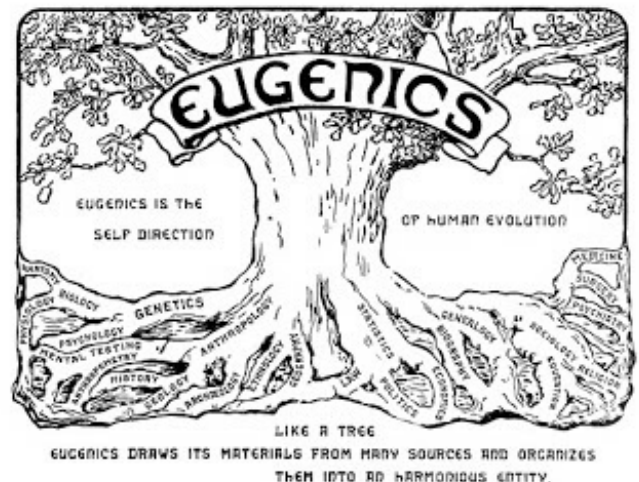
- Prohibition of marriage of the unfit
- Segregation of institutions containing degenerate individuals
- Sterilization of the unfit

However, Huxley was not particularly concerned with the specifics of how short-range eugenics were implemented, so long as degenerate individuals were stopped from reproducing as quickly as possible.

He additionally lamented that the process of eliminating feeble-mindedness from the population would be a particularly difficult task, due to the recessive nature of certain genes coding for mental defects. Therefore, he proposed that one of the long-term goals of eugenics should be the discovery of a method through which carriers of genes for mental deficiency could be accurately diagnosed, though these individuals do not exhibit defective traits themselves. If carriers could be identified before they reproduced, Huxley argued, then eugenicists would have yet another tool at their disposal with which to stop degenerate germ plasm from infiltrating future generations (Huxley, 1933: 325).

Importance of diversity and selection of desirable human traits

Huxley argued simultaneously for the preservation of human diversity, insisting that no one eugenicist was in the position to determine which particular group of individuals should reproduce above the rest. Rather, he



contended, “it takes all kinds to make the world,” a point that he claimed anyone familiar with the facts of evolution should understand (Huxley, 1933: 330). Rather than calling for the elimination of a specific group of the population over another, Huxley asserted that certain traits of individuals should be encouraged. Among these, he listed:

- Physical and mental health
- Administrative genius
- Poetry
- Leadership
- Perseverance,
- Manual dexterity
- Humor
- Adaptability
- Beauty



Huxley acknowledged that, as few individuals possess all of the above qualities, the goal of eugenics should be to encourage the breeding of individuals who possess at least some of the aforementioned characteristics, even if these people may also be defective with regards to certain other desirable traits (Huxley, 1933: 331).

“UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy” (1946)

After becoming the first director-general of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1945, Huxley published “UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy.” This manifesto outlined both the broad goals of this newly established organization and Huxley’s stance on how UNESCO should attempt to address them. More telling, however, was the degree to which Huxley’s publication reflected his views on eugenics.



He contended, in the 1946 publication, that UNESCO’s goals included “international peace and security, collaboration among the nations, and human welfare” as well as “The furtherance of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, as well as respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms affirmed in the Charter of the United Nations” (Huxley, 1946).

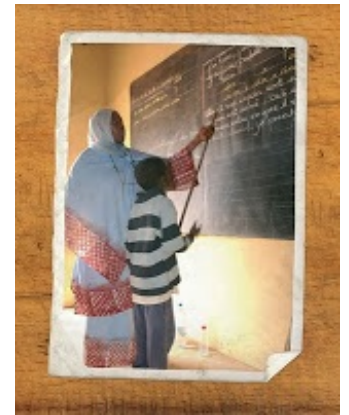
Huxley put a uniquely eugenic spin on these goals, however, arguing that true human welfare could only be accomplished if individuals pursued *the most desirable direction in human evolution*. He argued that in particular that, in addition to educational reform, UNESCO’s key goals should be to promote population control and *‘the eugenic problem’* (Toye, 2010: 327).

UNESCO educational policy goals:

To ensure that all people have equal opportunities for education and equal protection under the law

To lay the foundations for world political unity

Huxley argued that a common fundamental education is necessary for global unity to occur, and advocated for improved education among underprivileged populations whose educational systems were lacking:



“Unesco should devote special attention to the leveling up of educational, scientific and cultural facilities in all backward sectors where these are below the average, whether these be geographical regions, or underprivileged sections of a population. To use another metaphor, it must attempt to let in light on the world’s dark areas... Thus mass campaigns against illiteracy and for a common fundamental education must form part of Unesco’s programme” (Huxley, 1946: 17).

Huxley argued that education should be an ongoing process, and that intelligence was not fixed from birth but, on the contrary, the human mind had a great capacity to grow throughout life (Huxley, 1946: 30). This position is particularly interesting when juxtaposed with his 1962 Galton Memorial Lecture, in which he advocates for improving the human race through artificial insemination rather than educational measures, suggesting that Huxley may not have been as much of an environmentalist as his UNESCO publication initially seemed to indicate. Furthermore, Huxley’s call for improved education stands almost in direct opposition to his insistence on biological inequality between people, also detailed in his 1946 UNESCO manifesto.

The principle of equality versus the “reality of biological inequality”

Despite calling for UNESCO to uphold the democratic principle of equality and facilitate education for people from all walks of life, Huxley was adamant that, due to our biological inequality, not all people would benefit equally from improved education. Though less adamant about the genetic basis of intelligence than the more staunch biological determinists, Huxley argued that we can be “reasonably sure” that cognitive ability had a firm biological basis.

“The principle of equality of opportunity must be amended to read 'equality of opportunity within the limits of aptitude.' Thus it is a fact, however disagreeable, that a considerable percentage of the population is not capable of profiting from higher education” (Huxley, 1946: 18).

“Human beings are not equal in respect of various desirable qualities. Some are strong, others weak; some healthy, others chronic invalids; some long-lived, others short-lived; some bright, others dull; some of high, others of low intelligence; some mathematically gifted, others very much the reverse; some kind and good, others cruel and selfish” (Huxley, 1946: 19).

Structuring society to address fundamental biological inequality

Huxley contended that understanding biological inequality was important for ensuring that all individuals find their proper fit in society; because humans are not all equal in terms of intellectual ability, he argued, to train those who were unfit at the university level was a waste of both their time and of everyone else’s investment

in their progress.

“[UNESCO] should encourage all studies and all methods which can be used to ensure that men find the right jobs and are kept away from the wrong jobs-to ensure that individuals find outlets satisfying to their temperament, and work appropriate to their talents, while at the same time ensuring that society is not overburdened with people in positions for which they are inadequate or, still worse, which they are likely to abuse” (Huxley, 1946: 62).

“Those who can profit by working for a university degree of the present type constitute only a proportion of the population, whether the proportion be 20 or 40 or even 60 per cent; for the remainder to attempt it is waste of their own youth, of the time and talents of university teachers, and of public money” (Huxley, 1946: 62).

Opposition to racially-based eugenics

However, Huxley did not argue that biological inequality automatically translated into inequality between racial groups; rather, he came out in vehement opposition to negative, racially based eugenics, arguing instead that UNESCO’s goal should be to protect human diversity.

“It is therefore of the greatest importance to preserve human variety: all attempts at reducing it, whether by attempting to obtain greater 'purity' and therefore uniformity within a so-called race or a national group, or by attempting to exterminate any of the broad racial groups which give our species its major variety, are scientifically incorrect and opposed to long-run human progress. On the contrary, Unesco should aim at securing the fullest contribution to the common pool from racial groups which, owing to their remoteness or their backwardness, have so far had little share in it” (Huxley, 1946: 19).

UNESCO Statement on Race (1951)

Huxley's opposition to racist policies is further exemplified by UNESCO's 1951 Statement on Race that was published during his tenure as director. In this progressive statement, UNESCO argued that there is inadequate evidence to conclude that racial groups are based in inherited genetic differences. Rather, the statement contended that differences within racial groups typically exceed differences between racial categories, and that perceived differences in intelligence between groups are actually minimal if individual educational opportunity is taken into account (UNESCO, 1951: 3).



The statement further contended that not only are racial groups nearly impossible to classify but in no way can one group be said to be superior to another. Furthermore, the statement condemned the idea that so-called "pure" races exist, and argued that there is no logical basis for opposing mixed race relations (UNESCO, 1951: 4).

UNESCO's statement summarized the organization's stance on race with the following arguments:

- Only physical characteristics can be effectively used by anthropologists as a method of differentiating between racial groups
- There is no scientific basis for believing that racial groups differ in innate intellectual capacity
- Biological differences between individuals within a single race may be as great as biological differences between racial groups
- Historical evidence suggests that genetic differences have little effect in determining the social and cultural differences between different groups
- There is no evidence that race mixture produces detrimental effects from a biological perspective (UNESCO, 1951: 5)

Galton Memorial Lecture (1962)

By 1962, when he delivered the Galton Memorial Lecture to the British Eugenics Society for the second time, Huxley had developed an increasingly complex position on eugenics that focused on both the evolutionary origins of the human degeneration problem and on practical methods through which fit populations could increase their differential effective fertility. However, in his discussion of which traits we should selectively breed for, as well as his argument for stopping breeding among degenerate populations before all else, it is clear that certain aspects of Huxley's position on eugenics remained constant throughout most of his career.



Evolutionary explanation for human degeneration:

Huxley believed that the social organization of early humans, which he viewed to be small, competitive groups, would have fostered traits such as social intelligence, particularly the ability to communicate and cooperate, and manual dexterity. He lamented that intra-group selection had become less effective as the number of competing social groups has diminished, which has allowed defective genes to survive to subsequent generations.

Methods of implementing eugenic change

“We can be sure that the general level of human performance and genetic capacity could be markedly raised if we rely on our knowledge of human evolution and plant and animal breeding” (Huxley, 1962).

Huxley argued that social change was needed to improve human intellectual capacity, and that this change could be obtained through improved education, persuasion, and effective leadership as well as by encouraging the differential reproduction of human beings exhibiting “generally desirable characteristics such as health, physical beauty, manual dexterity, longevity, athletic ability, general mental ability, mathematical, aesthetic and other special aptitudes, and capacity for leadership and for cooperative effort” (Huxley, 1962). Besides these forms of positive eugenics, Huxley also advocated for several methods of negative eugenics in order to prevent the degeneration of the human stock.

Negative eugenics:

Huxley argued that, before embarking on a full-scale positive eugenic program, the first step to improving the human population was the implementation on negative eugenics to control what he felt to be an excessive

population increase. In particular, he advocated for:

- An amendment to taxation and family allowance systems in order to discourage excessive reproduction
- Simple, safe methods of contraception

Positive eugenics:

Despite his earlier declaration of the importance of education in his 1946 proclamation of the goals of UNESCO, Huxley clearly did not believe education alone had the potential to improve the population. Opting for a far more biologically deterministic position, Huxley believed that once the overall population increase was under control, gametes of fit individuals could be collected and used to improve the overall fitness of the population, as long as enlightened individuals were willing to participate. Specifically, Huxley called for:

- Artificial insemination from donor males
- Deep-freezing mammalian sperm for indefinite periods for its preservation
- Eventually, freezing female germ cells to insure long term supply of female gametes

All these methods facilitated what Huxley termed “Euteleogenesis,” in which a couple elects to be artificial inseminated by an “admirable” donor (Huxley, 1962). This process, he argued, would improve the germ plasm of subsequent generations.

"It is frequently objected that such practices will never be generally adopted as they run counter to deep-seated human 'instincts'. I do not believe this. Certainly, there will at first be widespread and often violent opposition, just as there has been to birth control and to legal reforms concerning homosexuality. But the opposition will spring from tradition and prejudice, not from instinct" (Huxley, 1962).

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