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Introduction

Science and social cohesion

The rise of science during the nineteenth century was associated with liberal values of education, intellectual freedom and humanitarianism. These values were incorporated into medicine, as it developed as a scientifically based profession with the humanitarian task of the relief of suffering. The health of the individual and family were regarded as the basis of personal well-being and prosperity, and of a civilized and productive society. A progressive and educated society was to be sustained by free trade, manufacturing and technical progress. Advances in science and medicine were synonymous with social progress.

In addition to their instrumental roles in improving health and harnessing the powers of nature, science and medicine served to define the social status of intellectual elites. Scientifically educated experts acquired a directing role as prescribers of social policies and personal lifestyle. The scientific creeds of Social Darwinism and eugenics offered general models for constructing an ordered and developing society. As such, science and medicine provided an alternative to party politics, by forming a basis for collectivist social policies to remedy social ills. Whereas the state was reluctant to intervene in industry and commerce in order to limit the ill-effects of industrialization, eugenicists planned intervention in family life and sexuality. The concept of a fit and healthy social organism provided a means for realizing renewed stability, social integration and national power. The achievements of German unification were considered to be threatened by the fragmentation of economic competition, class conflict, the rise of industrial technologies, concentrations of the poor in factories and insanitary tenement blocks, and declining family size. Health was not only an ideology of national integration at a time of rapid social change, but it also could ensure national unity through a uniform life style in everyday life. Scientific medicine thus defined an elite profession which would take a leading role in consolidating national unification.

Party politics in Imperial Germany was exceptionally narrow because of restrictive suffrage for state legislatures and a distinctive disdain of party political machinations. During the 1870s liberal convictions were on the wane among university

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academics who became sceptical of party politics as divisive and partisan and as lacking in an impartial concern for the national interest. The liberal political inputs into the sciences weakened, and science itself became regarded as the basis for authoritative pronouncements on social ills. To understand processes of decision-making in the sphere of social reforms, one has to look beyond the political parties to interest groups, administrators and elite groups of notables or *Honoratioren* in Imperial Germany. These joined the emergent professions in participating in health and welfare organizations as part of a broad movement of social imperialism entailing domestic social reform. There was intense public involvement in welfare organizations, and their official functions were extended to give considerable scope to professional experts and administrators. Public health reformers had only a rudimentary sense of accountability to the public, as they developed an institutional infrastructure in associations and the state for the provision of welfare. Control of sickness insurances, municipal welfare and voluntary organizations was recognised as of strategic political importance. The political values underlying social institutions were transformed by the rise of authoritarian and collectivist forms of social organization.

Science and medicine were shaped by the politics of social status and the economics of class relations. This study is concerned with how German bourgeois values, which nurtured and inspired science and medicine, became associated with collectivist plans for social reform. As science enlarged areas of social activity, it became subject to conflicting socialist and nationalist strategies of development. Underlying party political differences were diverse conceptions of a collectivist welfare state reliant on technocratic administration and professional expertise of a scientifically educated medical profession. Doctors became imbued with a sense of social responsibility to promote the nation's health and to ensure the survival of the nation as a competitive world power. Eugenicists argued that doctors should treat patients in the interests of society and future generations. The sense of responsibility of the doctor to sick individuals weakened as awareness dawned of the economic costs of poverty and disease. Although German science and medicine lost their position of world leadership during the twentieth century, scientific social planning was to re-build the German economy and the health of the population after the catastrophic defeat of 1918. Medical sciences became caught up in authoritarian politics and posed threats to personal liberties and autonomy. Ultimately a racial concept of health was central to National Socialism. The illiberal creeds of racism and National Socialism became paradigmatic for the abuse and misapplication of science and medicine.

Popular ideology and technocratic expertise

The nineteenth century was rich in alternative types of science and medicine, associated with conflicting social interests. Public opinion included many varieties of scientific and socio-biological beliefs. There was the vision of science as a

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democratic and open type of knowledge. Popular science lectures went with ideas of self-education and self-help, and with socialist expectations of co-operation and unity. Some of the most widely disseminated forms of science were part of a broader movement for secular materialism. There were holistic alternatives to mechanistic theories that emphasized how nature was greater than any fragmentary analysis in rational and experimental terms of academic science. There was the potential for science as a form of democratic ideology; mass education would purge societies of ignorance, privilege and superstition. But as science became the domain of privileged professionals, it became ever more inaccessible to the average citizen; science and democracy could be conceptualized as antitheses. Doctors believed that the collective well-being of society meant that they could experiment on, treat and segregate the sick and the deviant without individual consent. Self-help and radical ideas of the individual's right to health weakened as medical and welfare institutions proliferated and the medical profession consolidated its power and status. The common spheres of public discourse became enclosed by expert groups.

Science was polarized between elitist and populist models. As a popular ideology, science used the means of mass communication that it had helped to invent. Printing – becoming both cheaper and technically more sophisticated – created the possibility of a mass market for scientific literature with strikingly illustrated encyclopaedias, popular magazines and textbooks. Diagrams became vibrant visual images when transferred to wall charts, dioramas, slides, and models such as the spectacular Visible Man at hygiene exhibitions. Societies and lecture halls for every branch of the natural world from astronomy to zoology, and commercial and public associations for aquaria, museums and zoos provided education and entertainment. Newspapers and journals helped to keep the public informed of intellectual breakthroughs so that science and medicine were part of a common cultural context. Railways and postal services sustained networks of communication facilitating scientific congresses and informal networks of correspondence, and the telegraph and newspapers communicated news of sensational discoveries like X-rays and of bacterial causes of diseases. Mass universal education from primary schools to public lectures for workers broadened access to knowledge. Advances in technology created possibilities for the mass production of high quality and reasonably priced instruments such as microscopes and telescopes. In addition to dissemination of the facts of science came the public expectation that this knowledge would be culturally and materially enriching, as well as providing a respectable leisure or professional pursuit. Such associations symbolized a popular commitment to liberal and secular culture based on natural laws and forces. During the mid nineteenth century there was a potential for science and medicine to be open, participatory and democratically organized.

Contrasting to science as a popular ideology was science as the expert knowledge of a technocratic elite. Knowledge as power motivated the appropriating of science to the domain of expert groups. Indeed, the very concept of the professional 'scientist' was a nineteenth-century invention, that pointed to the separation of the

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natural sciences from broader cultural movements. Scientific education and discoveries were accompanied by hopes of enhanced social status in the form of academic degrees, titles, medals and offices, as well as career opportunities and wealth. Statistical, historical, and anthropological data were collected on every aspect of society and nature. Although the natural sciences retained a commitment to the philosophical generalities of *Wissenschaft*, there was a tendency to reduce social and moral problems to scientific terms. Such an approach opened the possibility for scientific solutions to social problems. This was attractive to a state concerned with defusing socialist analysis of poverty, sickness and crime as the result of economic inequalities. Scientific solutions to social ills avoided public consultation, participation and accountability. The state fostered the development of pure research institutions in such areas as bacteriology. This had implications for health which became divided between strategies of self-help and popular learning (symbolized by the 'hygiene eye' of the entrepreneur August Lingner), and medical expertise. Technocratic science can be contrasted to science as a popular ideology supporting the democratic values of an open society.

While 'the age of the natural sciences' was to be based on liberal values of freedom of speech and publication, tolerance, and a free and thriving economy, there was no unanimity on the type of science to be deployed. Although the cultural and social values attached to science were associated with middle-class demands for German unification, there was a clash of interests. University teachers and students had taken a lead in the agitation for a united Germany. Traditions of academic freedoms were equated with liberal social freedoms and with culture as a form of national assertion. Yet there was division of opinion over whether science and culture should be the basis of an alternative set of reforming values, or primarily should augment national power. Universities and the sciences stood at the cross roads where the social interests of the educated middle classes and the state intersected. As university institutions were state funded and professors were appointed by the state, German academic life reflected the changing relations of the educated middle class, the *Bildungsbürgertum*, to the state. It was in the interests of both the middle class and the state to provide professional education for those who would be recruited into the ranks of officials, and into liberal professions such as medicine and law. Yet the value attached to learning went beyond either utility or scholarship. The vast effort devoted to science was envisaged as realizing higher ethical and social qualities. Scientific achievement would build Germany into a *Kulturstaat*, enshrining liberal values, and gaining international respect as the cultural leader of the civilized world.

The need to provide health and welfare for large urban populations was satisfied in a variety of ways. The state supported medical research as a basis for effective therapies. Municipal, state and insurance authorities financed expansion of hospitals and welfare institutions. These were to be staffed by scientifically educated professionals. The 'scientizing' of health was a product of industrialization and population growth with the need to prevent wastage of valuable resources

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of labour. Public health served to discipline and restrain the industrial workforce. There was a system of medical police with powers to quarantine, disinfect and, in the case of certain contagious diseases and mental illnesses, to detain in custody in hospital. Beyond its policing function, medicine was an agent of informal processes of socialization. The production of a healthy lifestyle, sanctified by scientific laws, was the outcome of subtle and informal processes of education, emulation, fashion and economic consumption. Processed foods, mass-produced clothing, contraceptives and such leisure activities as sports or walking reflected consumer demand for health promoting products and leisure activities. Bourgeois status was expressed not only in terms of economic and political power, but also in an orderly, self-disciplined and sober lifestyle that achieved widespread acceptability. Health was a means of attaining a cohesive and integrated society during the upheavals of industrialization. Yet whether scientific medicine or nature therapies and other popular anti-scientific ideologies held the keys to health was controversial. In such a conflict-ridden situation, the state initially tried to preserve a role as impartial umpire, but as it succumbed to the influence of professional experts, it adopted interventionist policies.

Eugenics and national health

Eugenics offers insight into the process of extending the dominance of a professionally controlled and biologically based form of health care. Eugenicists were prepared to do battle with rival strategies for reforming lifestyle and democratic socialization of medical services. They clashed with lay nature therapists and sexual reformers, and were critical of the socialist-dominated sickness insurances. Eugenicists demanded a reform of state authorities with powers being conceded to the medical profession. There were internal conflicts within the medical profession and among biologists over the role of biological heredity in determining health. The politics of health care can be gauged by the establishing of state, municipal and insurance authorities, and welfare associations, and by the influence within these of cliques of eugenic enthusiasts. Medical advance was to provide a de-politicized surrogate for civic rights and welfare reforms.

German eugenics raises the issue of how the noble vision of the civilized *Kulturstaat* took on authoritarian forms. Welfare policies undermined individual rights and reinforced state and professional power, creating an authoritarian social structure. The right of the individual to health was an important demand of the 1848 revolutions. Radical medical reformers instigated a campaign for a national ministry of health headed by a doctor. These democratic and professional demands were consistent as long as doctors were to be democratically accountable to workers' associations. But as science became more technical and the professions more organized, a contradiction developed in liberalism. Liberal schemes for universal education conflicted with the campaigns of liberal professions for freedoms from state controls and sovereign rights within their occupational sphere.

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The public became reliant on the services of the medical profession, as medical scientists became an exclusive and privileged status group. While some perceived that a contradiction had emerged between the professional and the public interest, the professions claimed that they had authority to override individual rights in the interest of society and of future generations. Biology took a major role in the genesis of a distinctive form of racial ideology, and in establishing the threats of genetic defects to the health of the 'social organism'. There was loss of individual rights in the field of family affairs, health care and reproduction. The sick, the handicapped and the mentally disturbed were subjected to professional and state controls, which could result in compulsory institutionalization, sterilization or medical killing such as 'euthanasia'. Medicine was transformed from a free profession, as it was proclaimed by the German Confederation in 1868, to the doctor carrying out duties of state officials in the interests not of the individual patient but of society and of future generations. The medical profession demanded that it be granted a state-enforced medical monopoly of health care. Doctors became part of a growing state apparatus for registering the population and for eradicating undesirable diseases and racial characteristics. Scientific and medical advances were accompanied by the rise of authoritarian social values.

The social bases of German biology, its patronage by the state and popularity among a broad social spectrum, must be regarded as crucial elements in the transformation of German biology and medicine. Eugenics thus raises the issue of the middle-class response to national unification, to the rapid industrialization, population growth and urbanization in Imperial Germany, and to the First World War and its catastrophic aftermath. The 1860s and 1870s saw a wide dissemination of biological values, penetrating many features of scientific and middle-class culture of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. The development of the *Bildungsbürgertum* into the professional sector of the middle class with the growth of responsibilities of doctors, welfare workers and psychologists provided the circumstances for the transformation of general biological values into an organized eugenics movement. There was assimilation of hereditarian biology into medical techniques with the expectation of social control of the deviant and the biological reproduction of the social order in ways favourable to professional middle-class interests.

Eugenics, as a product of middle-class values and as associated with public health, poses historical questions which transcend the limitations of the conventional history of German racism. Hitherto the history of eugenics has been neglected because it has been seen as a product of ultra-nationalist racial (or *völkisch*) movements. According to this interpretation, the new anti-semitic rhetoric of the purity of blood and race which gathered force from the 1880s was realized inevitably in the Nazi genocide. But although there were connections between racial hygiene and anti-semitism, the situation was complex, and eugenics did not necessarily point the way towards Nazi racism. There were those of other political persuasions, liberal and socialist, who looked to biology and medicine as the means to engineer social improvements. It was not without good reason that one of the

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first attempts to explore the history of eugenics, organized by SS medical officials in the German heartland of Thuringia, concentrated on the issue of eugenics and socialism. My interpretation stresses that eugenics was authoritarian in that it offered the state and professions unlimited powers to eradicate disease and improve the health of future generations. But it was neither a product of the theory of a superior Aryan race, and nor was it inherently Nazi. The synthesis between Nazism and eugenics was a process of adaptation and appropriation on both sides.

Eugenics was closely linked to the attempt to move beyond party politics as divisive and partial, and to use science and medicine to obtain real improvements in social conditions. This presented a novel role for the professional expert. Most eugenicists were doctors, frustrated at the lack of career prospects in the overfull universities and in the overcrowded medical profession. They sought to colonize new areas for medicine, such as sexuality, mental illness, and deviant social behaviour. What had been private or moral spheres were subjugated to an hereditarian social pathology. Scientific solutions to such social problems as crime, vagrancy and poverty appealed to state authorities concerned with neutralizing social and political tensions. Yet inherent within eugenics were tensions between a modern science-based professional technocracy and racial ideology; while eugenics legitimated strategies of professional imperialism and of social control, it had a broader appeal to a populist movement of racial nationalism.

The scientificity and the professionalism of German eugenics endow it with similarities to eugenic movements in other countries. There was a widespread concern with racial degeneration in those countries undergoing comparable social processes of industrialization, declining birth rates and the emergence of professional elites. Lombroso's criminology and French hereditarian psychiatry provided two influential models for eugenic social engineering. In Britain, France and Germany there was a scientific and public debate on degeneration as produced by industrialization. There was a considerable time lag between Galton's proposing the term 'eugenics' in 1881 and the founding of the Eugenics Education Society in 1907 or the Racial Hygiene Society in Berlin in 1905. A liberal and secular cultural movement preceded the organization of special leagues and societies. Scientists such as Galton and Huxley in Britain, and Haeckel and Virchow in Germany, propagated scientific values as surrogates for Christianity. Discussions of the social implications of Darwinism had penetrated many aspects of middle-class culture and welfare provisions before the founding of the Racial Hygiene Society. The experience of industrialization and of demographic change meant that issues such as the declining birth rate, the hereditary consequences of chronic diseases, and the problem of the degenerate residuum in the population could be seen as of widespread international relevance. Negative eugenic measures, such as sterilization, were imitated in many countries. This was facilitated by hereditarian principles becoming standard in medicine and the social sciences.

The tendency in assessing the German path to social modernity has been to concentrate on the most extreme features differentiating Germany from the rest of

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the 'civilized world'. Anti-semitism, hostility to liberal democratic values, nationalism and the distinctive course of socio-political development have been identified as causes of how Germany came to threaten world stability and civilized values. It has been more comforting to heap the guilt for racism onto extremes that are remote from bourgeois liberalism than to investigate authoritarian elements in liberal science, professions and perceptions of social issues endemic in modern society, such as poverty, disease and crime. While it cannot be denied that anti-semitism and Aryan racism were forces in the eugenics movement, eugenics represented far more than these. Indeed, there were factions seeking to purge eugenics of 'unscientific' racialism. At one level this study is meant to provide an analysis of the changing intellectual and social composition of eugenics. It is also necessary to assess the influence of eugenic and racial theories, in order to specify at what point in time and to what extent eugenic and racist beliefs permeated diverse social sectors. Extensive use of archives of key individuals, scientific institutions and of state administrations has been made in order to assess the influence of eugenics, and to investigate the interaction of popular culture, medical and scientific expertise and professional organizations with the state apparatus of bureaucrats. Permeating these institutions and social strata were political and national ideologies. Eugenics illustrates social stratification and regional differences within the social and administrative structure of Germany. This interpretative approach will serve to isolate those features of German society and ideologies of social cohesion both distinctive from and comparable with other societies.

The transformation of utopia

The issues of science as the expression of the social interests of the educated middle classes, the rise of professionalism and the shift to authoritarian social values, result in the following scenario. The birth of German national unity in 1870 was accompanied by more profound economic and social change than the Prussian architects of national unity expected. Rapid industrial expansion and a surge in population growth meant that a range of political structures and values were resented as restrictive. The 1880s saw the repression of socialism, a peak in the numbers of emigrants, and dissident, middle-class groups disappointed by the lack of professional opportunities and by cultural and moral restrictions. Interventionist and repressive state social policies coincided with demands for overseas colonies and political campaigns against socialists and against the Jews as an alien race. The criticism of industrialization as divorcing humanity from nature was widespread. Public concern over industrial living and working conditions gave rise to innovative schemes of welfare legislation and social insurance from the 1880s. A vociferous lobby argued that society would be healthiest if the laws of biological evolution were allowed to function freely. Controversies erupted over human and animal experiments. Those who shrank from applying natural selection to society proposed 'humane' social mechanisms to improve the conditions of the population through fertility control.

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Plans for utopian breeding settlements were formulated in the 1880s and 90s. These colonies were a reaction to the political and cultural repression, and harsh living conditions during German industrialization. During the 1890s the emphasis shifted to nationalist concerns with domestic social reform. Guidelines for a reformed life style were drawn up in accordance with the laws of biology and hygiene. These were variously termed *Volkshygiene*, *Rassenhygiene*, or *Sozialhygiene*, and were designed to prevent a supposed racial degeneration. Struggling young professionals sought the patronage of leading experts in biology, hygiene, and ethnology, and launched a movement for racial hygiene after the turn of the century. Moral decadence, chronic diseases like tuberculosis, venereal diseases and alcoholism, crime and deviant social behaviour – which included merely having two children or less – were diagnosed as symptoms of hereditary degeneration.

From the 1890s until the 1930s the movement for biological purity gathered strength. In Imperial Germany the eugenic movement was an elitist association, and sought to be a biologically regenerated type of aristocracy. Attempts were made to organize elite elements in other countries into an International Society for Racial Hygiene. The First World War marked a turning point in the transition from eugenics as cultural elitism to state social planning. During the war eugenic schemes to improve the quality of the race were considered by state officials concerned with the falling birth rate and with high military casualties. Defeat brought a profound transition in social values. Biology was looked to for providing guidelines for national reconstruction and for reinvigorating the German family and people. Eugenic concepts like that of an inherited constitution were accepted in medicine, biology, sociology and social work. There was a rapid expansion of custodial and therapeutic institutions such as mental hospitals designed to detain the large proportion of the population considered biologically inferior.

The economic crisis of 1929 brought support for the view that the costly state welfare apparatus could not be maintained. Negative eugenic measures such as sterilization gained support in a more authoritarian political climate. By 1932 sterilization legislation was prepared, and accepted by a wide range of Catholic, Jewish and socialist eugenicists. The Nazi takeover marked a fundamental change in the course of German eugenics. There was great emphasis on racial factors, and bureaucratic mechanisms were constructed for the implementation of public health policies on a racial basis. The concern with the economic burdens of the racially degenerate intensified; the category of the degenerate was enlarged to include 'races' such as Jews, gypsies, and slaves, social 'problem' groups such as criminals or the feeble minded, homosexuals, and women as the weaker sex. Biology justified the subordination and mass killing of the greater proportion of the population. Compulsory sterilization and 'euthanasia' of congenitally disabled children and mental patients were instituted. Yet racial hygiene in the Third Reich was far from a monolithic and unified body of ideology and policies. There were many conflicts between competing and diverse groups of racial hygienists in a power structure designed to proliferate competing hierarchies. Far from inevitable,

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the transition from sterilization to expansive 'euthanasia' measures provoked considerable dissension, and radical changes of principle. Nordic ideologies, medically oriented racial hygienists, and factions in the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) and SS (Schutz-Staffel) were in constant conflict.

During the Third Reich a heroic history of the racial hygiene movement was constructed. The movement was said to have paved the way for Nazism, owing to the appearance of schemes for improving the German race during the 1880s. Its founding fathers could claim prescience for having articulated and organized racial hygiene in such a way that it could be readily applied in the new order. Yet this history was a fabrication. Those who have assumed that eugenics was an offshoot of Aryan ideologies for racial purity and of anti-semitism have considered only the ultra-conservative fringe and have failed to understand the course, intention and scope of German eugenics. While there were links with *völkisch* racism and extreme nationalist groupings, eugenics has a history better understood from the perspectives of public health, social policy, and of the bio-medical sciences. Professional and bureaucratic groups disengaged from party politics as they sought a scientific basis for administration and for an ideology of social cohesion. As German academics prided themselves on their a-political objectivity, but also on their national commitments, eugenics was well suited to be an ideology of social integration. German biology and medicine assumed social tasks of national reconstruction.

This account of German eugenics has broader aims of providing insight into perceptions of major social changes: the declining birth rate, urban and rural social conditions, and debates on national identity. Eugenicians were confident that they could root out and exterminate the causes of mental and physical degeneracy, and transform daily life into a hygienic utopia of large, prosperous and patriotic families of sound 'eugenic' quality. This sense of power was accompanied by secularization of attitudes to life and confidence that biological processes could be fully brought under human control. Social cohesion was reinforced by biologicistic ideologies of health, of a progressing social organism and of society as a 'human economy' for the reproduction of the population rather than profit. These developments resulted from changes in the fortunes of the academically educated, professional middle class, the *Bildungsbürgertum*, in their attitudes to an increasingly assertive working class. The medical profession's quest for social power was pursued through the channels of eugenics.