

TOPICS IN 20th-Century Philosophy SPECIAL TOPIC: EUGENICS

Class time and room: Thursday, 9.30 am – 12 noon, Tory 1-83
Instructor: Rob Wilson
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Please read the whole of this course outline ASAP.

Copies are also posted on my website.

1. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar will be based on a selection of introductory readings on the history of eugenics and its contemporary significance, and will draw on a book manuscript by the instructor that is in progress with the working title "Standpoint Eugenics". Students in philosophy, history, sociology, education, science and technology studies, biological sciences, native studies, psychology, disability studies, bioethics, and other disciplines are welcome to take the course, with the consent of the instructor as necessary. Topics to be considered will include:

- what eugenics is and its relationship to racism, ethnocentrism, and disability;
- arguments for and against eugenic social policies;
- the legacy of the eugenic past, especially in Western Canada, on marginalized social groups;
- contemporary ideas and practices that might reasonably be thought to have a eugenic dimension to them, such as common forms of prenatal screening; various forms of ongoing institutionalization, and some defences of bioenhancement (e.g., those of Julian Savulescu); and
- the ongoing endorsement of, and individual and institutional complicity with, eugenic ideas (e.g., in contemporary bioethics).

The course will make use of many of the resources created by the Living Archives on Eugenics in Western Canada project (eugenicsarchive.ca), a project directed by the course instructor. These include a eugenics timeline and mind map, video interviews with sterilization survivors, modules on topics such as

immigration, women and eugenics, and institutionalization, and works by Living Archives team members. Much of the weekly work for the course will be done through discussion and collaborative learning.

2. THEMATIC OVERVIEW AND READINGS

The course will be organized around the six themes described below; the readings and other course materials (including blog posts and films) for each of these themes are listed under each theme. For each theme, I have provided a brief orienting summary, together with a couple of questions to think about for the corresponding weeks of the course, and a listing of the course materials. A good idea is to try to answer the questions for each section of the course both in advance of the corresponding classes, and then again in light of those classes. (A simple comparison of your responses will allow you to get some self-monitored measure of what you have learned in the intervening weeks.)

All numbered course materials will be available from eClass or through direct access from the University of Alberta library. There is thus no course packet to purchase for the course. Non-numbered course materials are videos, blog posts, and other media of relevance that can be accessed directly through the links provided. Further materials may be added at the discretion of the instructor, or at the suggestion of students.

Please read through this thematic overview early on, and let me know if there are other things you would like to cover, either in addition or instead. We may modify the course accordingly.

A. Standpointing Eugenics

Standpoint epistemology is best-known from feminist work on knowledge and the philosophy of science. In these weeks of the course, we will familiarize ourselves with feminist standpoint epistemology and consider other variations on standpoint epistemology before considering what a “standpoint eugenics” might look like.

- What difference does “standpoint” make to the theory of knowledge and of what it is to be a knower?
- What does a standpoint eugenics amount to?

1. Anderson, Elizabeth, 2011, Feminist Epistemology and Philosophy of Science, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, section 2 only, “Feminist Standpoint Theory”.
2. Grasswick, Heidi, 2013, Feminist Social Epistemology, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, section 2.1 only, “Differentiated Knowers and Standpoint Theory”.

3. Intemann, Kristin, 2010. "25 Years of Feminist Empiricism and Standpoint Theory: Where Are We Now?" *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 25(4): 778–796.
4. Wylie, Alison, 2004, "Why Standpoint Matters", *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, S. Harding (ed.), New York: Routledge, 339–351.
5. Wilson, Robert A., *Standpoint Eugenics*, ch.1. "Standpointing Eugenics".
6. Proctor, Robert N., "The Politics of Knowledge", in his *Racial Hygiene: Medicine Under the Nazis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp.282-297.

Alberta Eugenics Awareness Week Highlight Video, 2011 available from University of Alberta Living Archives Project Youtube channel
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iaKQeIfiZq4>

Amanda Baggs, "About being considered 'retarded' ", Youtube video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qn70gPukdtY>

B. The Ghost of Eugenics Past and the Study of Eugenics

"Eugenics" was coined by Sir Francis Galton in 1883, though the idea of eugenics has a longer history. Eugenics is often thought of as a historical movement existing between (roughly) 1865 and 1945, and has been studied as such. Here we will explore various ways to characterize eugenics and the relationships between eugenics and a variety of "isms", such as nationalism, racism, sexism, and ableism.

- What role have science and medicine played in the history of eugenics?
 - How have national contexts shaped eugenic ideas and practices?
1. Levine, Philippa, and Alison Bashford, 2010, "Introduction: Eugenics and the Modern World", in their *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*. New York, Oxford University Press, pp. 3-24.
 2. Wilson, Robert A., *Standpointing Eugenics*, ch.2, "Characterizing Eugenics".
 3. Cullen, David, 2007, "Back to the Future: Eugenics—A Bibliographic Essay Review", *The Public Historian* 29 (3, Summer 2007), pp.163-175.
 4. Kevles, Daniel, 1995, "A Reform Eugenics", ch.XI of his *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, Revised edition.
 5. Roll-Hansen, Nils, 2005, "Conclusion: Scandinavian Eugenics in the International Context", in 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, pp.259-271.
 6. Pernick, Martin S., 1996, "Contexts to the Conflict", in his *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of 'Defective' Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures Since 1915*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp.19-39.
 7. Weindling, Paul, 2010, "German Eugenics and the Wider World: Beyond the Racial State", ch.18 of *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, pp. 315-331.

C. Gender, Reproductive Rights, and Disability

Since one of the concerns that has driven eugenic thought and policy has been the nature of people in future generations, eugenics has often been focused on forms of reproductive control, such as sterilization. Contemporary Western societies often value a high level of reproductive autonomy, and reproductive rights, especially for women, were secured as part of the feminist movement. Here we will explore several ways in which gender and reproductive rights intersect with eugenics, discussing both positive and negative eugenic measures, the idea of those fit to reproduce, and practices that might fall under the heading of “gender eugenics”.

- Does a selective reproductive preference for one gender over another amount to a form of eugenics?
 - In what ways has advocacy for the rights of women, especially reproductive rights, intersected with eugenic thought and practices?
1. Ladd-Taylor, Molly, 2001, “Eugenics, Sterilisation and Modern Marriage in the USA: The Strange Career of Paul Popenoe”, *Gender and History* 13 (2, August 2001), pp.298-327.
 2. Ng, Yee Fui, 2012, “Disability Rights vs Quality of Birth Rhetoric: The Construction of Disability in China”, *LAWASIA Journal*, pp.1-25.
 3. Sparrow, Rob, 2012, “Human Enhancement and Sexual Dimorphism”, *Bioethics* 25, pp.464-475.
 4. Sparrow, Rob, in press, “Gender Eugenics? The Ethics of PGD for Intersex Conditions”, *The American Journal of Bioethics*, accepted 31st May, 2013.

D. Alberta and the Canadian Context for Eugenics

The Sexual Sterilization Act of Alberta was law in the province from 1928 until 1972, providing the legal basis for the vast majority of Canadian eugenic sterilizations. But little was known about this key part of the history of Canadian eugenics until Leilani Muir took legal action against the Province for wrongful confinement and sterilization in the mid-90s. Here we will look at the broader history of eugenics in Canada and what both case files and oral histories tell us about that history.

In covering this material, we will draw more than usual on the resources that form part of the Living Archives on Eugenics in Western Canada project. It is also likely that we will reach this section of the course during Alberta Eugenics Awareness Week 2013 (October 16-22), and students in the course should expect to attend several events during this week.

- How was it that eugenic sterilization continued to be practiced in Western Canada for nearly three decades after the end of World War II?

- In what ways do individual narratives and collective remembering provide us with insights into eugenics and its contemporary ramifications in Canada?
1. Living Archives on Eugenics in Western Canada, “The Women’s Suffrage Movement and Eugenics”. Online resource in development, available from the instructor.
 2. MacEachran Report, 1998.
 3. Park, Deborah C. and John P. Radford, 1998, “From the Case Files: Reconstructing a History of Involuntary Sterilisation”, *Disability and Society* 13:3, pp. 317-342.
 4. Wilson, Robert A., 2014, “The Role of Oral History in Surviving a Eugenic Past”, in Steven High (ed.), *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Violence*. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, pp.125-149 of manuscript.

Alberta Eugenics Awareness Week Highlight Video, 2012, available from University of Alberta Living Archives Project Youtube channel <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZmy6G5jIY0>

Gerald Robertson on the Repeal of Alberta’s Sexual Sterilization Act, public commemorative event, City Hall, Edmonton, 17th October 2012, available from University of Alberta Living Archives Project Youtube channel http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_DRq9QWpko.

Leilani Muir on the Repeal of Alberta’s Sexual Sterilization Act, public commemorative event, City Hall, Edmonton, 17th October 2012, available from University of Alberta Living Archives Project Youtube Channel <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWS3dr4pv0E>

Various, “The Modern Pursuit of Human Perfection”, videocasts from October 2008, University of Alberta Living Archives Youtube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0ED50290AE0B6C52> or the What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-PursuingPerfection.htm>

E. Bioethics and Eugenics

One important strand of work in bioethics revolves around the concept of a person, and a number of leading figures in the field have argued that human beings with limited cognitive capacities do not have the moral status “person”. Disability rights advocates have long rejected that view, and in recent years a productive dialogue has opened up between philosophers focused on disability and those advocating such views. Here we will consider the views of Peter Singer and Jefferson McMahan on persons, as well as Julian Savulescu on the selecting the best children, and explore the relationships that such views bear to eugenics and its history.

- Does standpoint eugenics have anything distinctive to offer in thinking about debates over persons and cognitive capacities?
- In what ways does (and doesn’t) mainstream medicine and bioethics promulgate problematic views of people with (intellectual) disabilities?

1. Eva Feder Kittay, 2010, “The Personal is Philosophical is Political: A Philosopher and Mother of a Cognitively Disabled Person Sends Notes from the Battlefield”, in Eva Feder Kittay and Licia Carlson (eds.), *Cognitive Disability and its Challenge to Moral Philosophy*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 393-413.
2. Peter Singer, 2009, “Speciesism and Moral Status”, *Metaphilosophy* 40 (July 2009), pp.567-581. Reprinted in Kittay and Carlson, pp.331-343.
3. Jeff McMahan, 2009, “Cognitive Disability and Cognitive Enhancement”, *Metaphilosophy* 40 (July 2009), pp.582-605. Reprinted in Kittay and Carlson, pp.345-367.
4. McBryde-Johnson, Harriet, 2003, “Unspeakable Conversations”, *New York Times Magazine*, 16th February, 2003.
5. Wilson, Robert A., *Standpoint Eugenics*, ch.3, “Subhumanizing the Defective”.
6. Savulescu, Julian, 2001, “Procreative Beneficence: Why We Should Select the Best Children”, *Bioethics* 15 (5/6), pp.413-426.
7. Savulescu, Julian and Guy Kahane, 2008, “The Moral Obligation to Create Children with the Best Chance of the Best Life”, *Bioethics* 23 (5), pp.274-290.
8. Oderberg, David, 2008, “Bioethics Today”, *Human Life Review*, Fall 2008, pp. 98-109.

Robert A. Wilson, “Peter Singer on parental choice, disability, and Ashley X”, videocast #1 from the Thinking in Action series, available at the What Sorts blog <http://whatsortsofpeople.wordpress.com/2009/02/13/all-wrapped-up-complete-thinking-in-action-series/> and the What Sorts Network website.

<http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>

Dick Sobsey, “Singer on universal human rights”, videocast #2 from the Thinking in Action series, available at the What Sorts blog <http://whatsortsofpeople.wordpress.com/2009/02/13/all-wrapped-up-complete-thinking-in-action-series/> and the What Sorts Network website.

<http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>

Dick Sobsey, “Peter Singer and profound intellectual disability”, videocast #5 from the Thinking in Action series, available at the What Sorts blog <http://whatsortsofpeople.wordpress.com/2009/02/13/all-wrapped-up-complete-thinking-in-action-series/> and the What Sorts Network website.

<http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>

Robert A. Wilson, “The ethics of exclusion, the morality of abortion, and animals”, videocast #4 from the Thinking in Action series, available at the What Sorts blog <http://whatsortsofpeople.wordpress.com/2009/02/13/all-wrapped-up-complete-thinking-in-action-series/> and the What Sorts Network website.

F. Contemporary Disability Studies and Eugenics

One issue that arises in thinking about bioethics and eugenics, as we will have seen, is that parents make decisions about, and on behalf of, the fetuses, infants, and children they typically produce, and these decisions and the attitudes they reflect interact with broader social attitudes about people, cognitive capacities,

and animals. Here we turn to several more specific issues in this general arena that have been pertinent to disability studies: the expressivist objection to prenatal testing, the notion of profound intellectual disability; and the relationships between disability, parenting, and the idea of loss.

- Is the practice of prenatal testing express a problematically negative view of people with disabilities?
 - What is the place of the notion of normalcy in thinking about disability?
1. Kent, Deborah, 2000, "Somewhere a Mockingbird", in Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch (eds.) *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights* (Georgetown, 2000), pp.57-63.
 2. Asch, Adrienne, 2000, "Why I Haven't Changed My Mind About Prenatal Diagnosis: Reflections and Reminders", in Erik Parens and Adrienne Asch (eds.) *Prenatal Testing and Disability Rights* (Georgetown, 2000), pp.234-258
 3. Asch, Adrienne, 2003, "Disability Equality and Prenatal Testing: Contradictory or Compatible?", *Florida State University Law Review* 30, pp. 315-342.
 4. Armer, Bill, 2007, "Eugenetics: A Polemical View of Social Policy in the Genetic Age", *New Formations* 89-101
 5. Davis, Lennard, 2007, "Constructing Normalcy", ch.2 of his *Enforcing Normalcy*, reprinted in his *Disability Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2nd edition, 2007), pp.3-16.
 6. Wilson, Robert A., *Standpointing Eugenics*, ch.4, "Where Do Ideas of Human Variation Come From?".

Robert A. Wilson, "What are the deep facts about our moral status", videocast #3 from the Thinking in Action series, available at the What Sorts blog <http://whatsortsofpeople.wordpress.com/2009/02/13/all-wrapped-up-complete-thinking-in-action-series/> and the What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>

Robert A. Wilson, "The son that Trent can never be, and what to do", What Sorts Network blog, January 26th, 2009. <http://whatsortsofpeople.wordpress.com/2009/01/26/the-son-that-trent-can-never-be-and-what-to-do/>

Julie Maybee, "Samantha, loss and ableism", post #13 from the Thinking in Action series, available at the What Sorts blog <http://whatsortsofpeople.wordpress.com/2009/02/13/all-wrapped-up-complete-thinking-in-action-series/> and the What Sorts Network website. <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-ThinkingInAction.htm>

Gregor Wolbring, 2009, "Human Beings-Sentient Beings: Species Typical, Sub-typical, and Beyond Typical", American Philosophical Association Pacific Division annual meeting, Vancouver, April 2009, from the University of Alberta Living Archives Project Youtube channel <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL14142145DB56EB3C> or the What Sorts website <http://whatsorts.net/events/events-humanKinds.htm>

3. ASSESSMENT

For assessment, students should expect to write a short (1500-2000 word) and a long (3500-4500 word) paper for the course, and to actively participate in

weekly in class discussions. These will be worth, respectively, 25, 50, and 25% of the final grade for the course. The differential expectations for undergraduate and graduate students are reflected, in part, in the differential lengths for the written work for the course. All students will be assessed by the following components, which will be formally equal in value:

- participation
- short paper (448: 1500 words 547: 2000 words)
- term paper draft (448: 2500 words 547: 3500 words)
- term paper final version (448: 3500 words 547: 4500 words)

Participation will include class attendance and manifest preparation, and the completion of minor writing tasks given in class.

Late submission of papers is discouraged, and you should talk to me in advance about a paper that will not be submitted by the due date. Expect a grade reduction for a late paper that does not have an extension in writing from me; I penalize at a grade a day for late papers, and set a date after which the paper will receive a grade of *zero*. To avoid disappointment, please take this general policy seriously.

Finally, what I hope is a reminder for most of you: that **plagiarism** is a seriously academic offense that is grounds for disciplinary action. The first item under “Inappropriate Academic Behaviour” in the University of Alberta’s Code of Student Behaviour reads:

30.3.2(1) Plagiarism

No Student shall submit the words, ideas, images or data of another person as the Student’s own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, project, assignment, presentation or poster in a course or program of study.

This document can be found at:

<http://www.governance.ualberta.ca/CodesofConductandResidenceCommunityStandards/CodeofStudentBehaviour/303OffencesUndertheCode/3032InappropriateAcademicBehav.aspx>

The University also maintains a more general website on plagiarism:

<http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/plagiarism/>

I would encourage you to consult both early in the course if you are unfamiliar with their contents and, more generally, **not to risk the consequences of plagiarizing** in this course, which could include not only failure in the course but have severe repercussions for your future at the University.

4. STUDENT SERVICES, ACCOMMODATION, SPECIALIZED NEEDS

The University of Alberta offers a range of student services, including the Aboriginal Student Services Centre and Specialized Support and Disability Services. You can find these listed at <http://www.ssds.ualberta.ca/> and at <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/student-services/>. You are encouraged to consult these pages and make use of relevant services provided. If there are ways in which I can improve the accessibility of the course and the materials it uses, please do not hesitate to let me know.

5. ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

I came to Alberta in July 2000 as a professor of philosophy after teaching previously at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where I was a member of the Cognitive Science Group at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology, and at Queen's University. I did my BA in philosophy at the University of Western Australia, and my MA and PhD in philosophy at Cornell University, minoring in cognitive studies. I am currently Director of Philosophy for Children Alberta, the principal investigator for the CURA-funded project, *Living Archives on Eugenics in Western Canada*, and recently also became a professor in Educational Policy Studies at the university.

My chief research and teaching expertise is in the philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and the philosophy of biology. In general, I am most interested in connections between philosophy and the various sciences, and I often getting my feet muddy in the process of pursuing those connections. I am the author or editor of six books, the two most recent of which are *Boundaries of the Mind* (Cambridge, 2004) and *Genes and the Agents of Life* (Cambridge, 2005). I am a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and, most importantly, a long-standing member of the Luxuriant Flowing Hair Club for Scientists (<http://www.improb.com/projects/hair/hair-club-top.html>). You can find out more about me and the range of recent and not-so-recent work I have done from my website: artsrn.ualberta.ca/raw/ .