

Subhumanity and Civilization

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Around the turn of the century a combination of Darwinism and various theories of degeneration gained a foothold in Denmark. This led to intense discussions of eugenic measures meant to increase the childbearing of “the good stock” and to put a stop to the “progressive degeneration” – especially in the form of the mentally handicapped – that was thought to be a threat to civilization. And in fact the advocates of this did succeed, in the course of the twenties and thirties, in having restrictive internment and sterilization laws passed.

One precondition of implementing these measures was the possibility of identifying those borderline cases between the abnormal and the normal who were considered particularly likely to “infiltrate” civilization and undermine it from within, unless they were deprived of their potential for contact with the surrounding world and their reproductive potential.

This article discusses why, in the attack on the “unadaptable”, it was considered necessary to choose a biological rather than a sociocultural theory of evolution as the foundation for the construction of a “civilization” which could only be upheld if culture was turned into something that could only be encompassed by the – hereditary – good brain.

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Cultures can change, yet still preserve essential features. *Civilization* can develop, can persist, or can be destroyed. This means that civilization becomes something terribly vulnerable, something all presumably civilized people must protect. The “uncivilized” must be civilized, but if anything prevents them, they must be rendered harmless; especially if there is a risk of them infiltrating the civilized and thus attacking that very core of accumulated knowledge and established positive features that is characteristic of civilization.

In the following – on the basis of work on the history of the treatment and care of the mentally handicapped in Denmark¹ – I will try to show how the fear of “the destruction of civilization” influenced the perception and treatment of the mentally retarded in the period from about the turn of the century until 1940. This period was typified by strong biological determinism based on a hodge-podge of different theories of evolution and degeneration. From this confusion there arose a eugenics

movement which won broad support from people working with the care of the retarded as well as policy-makers and others who made their mark on public debate.

Reproduction – that of the “well-born” and that of the “minus-persons” became a crucial issue in the discussion. It was agreed that the retarded were to be denied the opportunity to add to “progressive degeneration”; but to do this, one had to *find* the dangerous individuals. The intelligence tests recently devised by Binet became one of the tools for identifying the most dangerous “intelligence defectives”: the borderline cases, those who because of their assumed uninhibited promiscuity and moral inferiority increased the number of inferior individuals.

Internment and sterilization were the precautions that had to be taken for the sake of civilization. Important questions in this respect must be: how could this vulnerable civilization be built up on the basis of nineteenth-century theories of evolution and degeneration, and can the content of the concept of civilization be

extrapolated from the reactions to "the minus-person" – the mentally handicapped?

Biological or sociocultural evolution?

In the period in question the ultimate aim of both biological and sociocultural evolution was perceived as some form of *balance*: in the case of biological evolution it was a matter of reproductive success and a balance in the population; and in the case of sociocultural evolution the aim was to achieve the balanced state, as close to the ideal as possible, called *civilization*.

Certain biological theories of evolution – for example Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's² – can also be used without any difficulty to explain social and cultural development. This is not true of Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection (Hirst 1976: 16). Nevertheless it has often – even recently – been used as a point of departure for understanding culture or civilization. For example, David Rindos (1985) defends a Darwinist approach to cultural evolution, inasmuch as he thinks that belief in the inheritance of acquired characteristics (which is considered a pre-Darwinist, mainly Lamarckian feature) makes no difference to the application of an evolutionist model of cultural change, since for him culture is first and foremost adaptation.

For Darwin, selection is what ensures adaptation in the evolutionary process. Herbert Spencer, considered the father of the concept of cultural evolution, thought like Malthus that adaptation would quickly be neutralized by rises in the population; but where Malthus feared that human intelligence might not reduce population pressure in the long term, Spencer posited intelligence as precisely the variable that would carry evolution forward to civilization.³

For Spencer, the relationship between intelligence and fertility is inversely proportional. The most intelligent will be those who survive, and the intelligent have a lower fertility. Society will therefore develop a larger pool of intelligence among fewer individuals. This will ease the pressure of the population on resources, and everyone will become well adapted. This is the original "progressive ele-

ment" in Spencer's theory. What he does not tell us is what will happen to the unadaptable. Rindos thinks they will "die out". For a long time Spencer had the idea that *education* would solve the problem. He sees society as he sees the human brain: it must be influenced from earliest childhood to come to fruition in manhood (Spencer 1861: 73 ff). Adaptation is not just *there*; only when the intelligence pool of society reaches a certain size does the potential exist for the ideal society where the final adaptation can take place with the aid of cultural influence. The first phase of evolution seems to be governed by cosmic laws (and these cosmic laws in fact ensure that there is an automatic selection – the child grows and becomes more and more receptive to the final education that will bring it a good life). The "child" which does not achieve full adaptability will remain at a lower evolutionary stage and will never reach the third stage in Spencer's law of evolution – "complexity", where society has achieved optimum exploitation of human intelligence in all its forms. It will always stand outside civilization. It cannot be civilized; the question then is can it *harm* civilization?

Spencer does not answer this question directly – perhaps precisely because the first stages of evolution are governed by a kind of cosmic law; but in his later work he does in fact modify his theory of evolution and posits a mechanism that combines the simple and complex entities. It is this combination mechanism (which Spencer identifies as war) which becomes the driving force of evolution. Through conquests and alliances, simple units are allied with complex ones. Only by passing through the militaristic stage will society reach the industrial one; but he does not believe we have come so far yet (Spencer 1876; Høiris 1983: 195ff). At this stage Spencer fears in fact that population growth will be *quantitative* rather than *qualitative*. In other words, there is no solution to the problem of how and when one can "turn" evolution towards the ultimate end, civilization, with the aid of education of a humanity which has now achieved a sufficient degree of receptiveness. The mentally defective are not comparable to those "simple entities" that can be developed by merging with

complex ones. Spencer's theory cannot be used by the heredity-fixated eugenicists; for this reason and *also* because it is a reconstructive theory reaching infinitely back into the past. For the eugenicists, one can only speak of the reconstruction of the immediate past – three or four generations. For them, civilization *has* been achieved; now it has to be maintained by an active effort in favour of qualitative reproduction. In this context, Darwin's theory of natural selection is in every way down-to-earth and transparent; one can see when it is being prevented from taking effect, and one can intervene in time.

The problem for those who occupied themselves with the mentally handicapped in the 1900–1940 period was precisely that they feared that natural selection had been rendered ineffective by the progress of the natural sciences. Medical science could save weak individuals who would previously have died before they reached the reproductive age. At the same time Darwin's theory of natural selection had finally won acceptance as the "correct" scientific theory, and the Christian belief in the human being created in the image of God became an idiosyncratic, marginalized view. In Denmark, this total acceptance of Darwinism was particularly strong in literary circles, where there was no longer any attempt to prove that natural selection was compatible with a basic Christian view of existence, but where Darwinism was used to develop a kind of ethic independent of Christian moral doctrine.⁴

Man was a *biological* being, the result of a logical process of development. He was the ultimate – perfection; he was not unique, but he was superior to all other biological beings both because of his extremely well-developed brain and his reproductive success – two things that were also closely related in Darwin's theory. To explain this as the result of positive selection, there was talk of "unadapted" and "adapted" individuals. This way one ignored the harsh "element of rejection" that would have been more visible if they had spoken of "unadaptable" and "adaptable" with reference to the "stupid" and "intelligent". Perhaps this still obscures our understanding today of the conse-

quences for "the stupid" of belief in those evolutionary theories that centred on biological progress? For in the period dealt with here it was no longer a matter of unadapted and adapted individuals, but of some individuals being *unadaptable*.

A. R. Wallace, who has otherwise often been seen as Darwin's shadow, but who in fact developed a theory of natural selection parallel with, or before, Darwin's, was never able to concede that human brain capacity could have developed as a result of natural selection. For in that case it would only have been "necessary" to furnish the human being with a brain that was slightly better than a gorilla's, while the fact was that the "savages" had a brain "very little inferior to that of a philosopher" (Gould 1980: 49). If one can use the word "racist" of the mid-nineteenth century, this is perhaps the least racist statement from a scientific researcher of this period. Despite Wallace's conviction that human brain capacity was beyond natural selection, it was not from Darwin, but from Karl Pearson that the strongest attack came (Pearson 1900). The problem was that, if the excess capacity of the human brain was not due to natural selection, did this indicate that there was a "higher" power who had taken a special interest in a being created in his image?

Karl Pearson considered that Wallace's insistence on keeping the human brain out of the process of natural selection was a very great problem – precisely because Wallace is otherwise extremely stringent in his theory of selection.⁵

Reading Spencer carefully, one sees that the same problem of the origin of human intelligence exists there. Another problem is establishing the stage in the process of evolution at which intelligence develops so that it can itself "intervene" in the process – or whether it does so or can do so at all. True, intelligence *has* a function, but for Spencer it seems to work automatically – and there is a factor he has failed to consider: the "mentally defective", the unadaptable. When he begins to doubt his own theory of reproduction and fear that quantity may be the result rather than quality, it can hardly be because he is thinking in terms of

atavistic leaps back to a lower stage of evolution. The development of human intelligence remains a mystery which the eugenicists at least cannot turn to any account. Spencer's theory is about cultural evolution, not heredity. The eugenicists begin at a point Spencer has not even reached: the fully-evolved civilization.

In Leslie White, who calls himself a true evolutionist and insists on the continuity of his theories compared with Tylor and Morgan, we also find that the problem of "starting-points" for a potential civilization is an overwhelming one (White 1973). His theory has great resemblances to that of Spencer, but he did not concede this himself (Harris 1968: 634ff). White claims that human beings are animals like all others, but that at some point in the process of evolution the human capacity for abstract thinking, for *symbolization*, arose. Nevertheless, civilization "rolls" in over the human being without his having any influence on it. If one asks how and why an animal of an anthropoid species has become a human being with the ability to think abstractly, and therefore to develop art, science etc., he vaguely suggests that this may be due to mutations, neurological changes or some other cause; but the power of *symbolization*, which above all requires *language*, must have come suddenly, in one great leap. He exemplifies this with the deaf-mute Helen Keller's sudden experience of language as symbol, when her teacher despairingly subjects her to shock. From being an animal of an anthropoid species, she becomes a "plus-person". If one compares White's "cultural" theory with *biological* theories of evolution, it can clearly be seen that it is related not to Darwin's theory, but to that of the Dutch botanist de Vries. De Vries "corrected" Darwin's theory of natural selection by saying that changes happen discontinuously because of mutations. White, who has civilization "rolling in" over humanity, is unable too to explain the evolution of human intelligence without resorting to inexplicable leaps and mutations. Spencer ends up completely ignoring that there is a problem!

However, White's view of society was poles apart from Spencer's, whose theory accorded

excellently with the Victorian elitist view of the place of humanity in an imperialist system where the lower class was a kind of "race" at a lower stage of evolution than the upper class. There are no grounds for forcing the interpretation of Spencer so far as to imagine that the above-mentioned problems of quantity rather than quality could arise as the result of a fusion between "the simpler unit", the lower class, and "the complex unit", the upper class. If there had been such grounds, one would have to reinterpret the whole of Spencer's theory of progress – and the eugenicists would still have been no better off with his theory; in that case the question of heredity and environment would still remain unanswered. And that was just the question the eugenicists thought they had answered with Darwin's theory!

Towards the turn of the century the problems of reconciling biological evolution with Christian views were repressed out of fear of social upheaval. Religion had previously been a kind of guarantee against this; those concerned now put their trust in biological evolution, where the issue of the overwhelming importance of heredity was the essence. One could identify the enemy and take appropriate precautions. One had to trust in evolution out of a fear of *revolution*.

Common to the evolutionary theorists was the fact that they had read Malthus and had been fascinated by his theory that, while the population grows exponentially, the increase in the available resources will – at best – be linear. This makes life a struggle where only "the best" survive. As we saw, Spencer had some difficulty in solving the equation. Darwin turned Malthus' argument on its head – and had the problem solve itself. But in fact it did not solve itself! One could not renounce Darwin – his theory had an obvious appeal for the age – so one had to "improve" him by bringing in developed human intelligence as the factor that would "repair" the otherwise all-conquering course of nature. Everything outside the natural order became a function of hereditary intelligence.

Where Malthus warns of the punishment for "the loser", Darwin emphasizes the reward for those who achieve reproductive success. If this

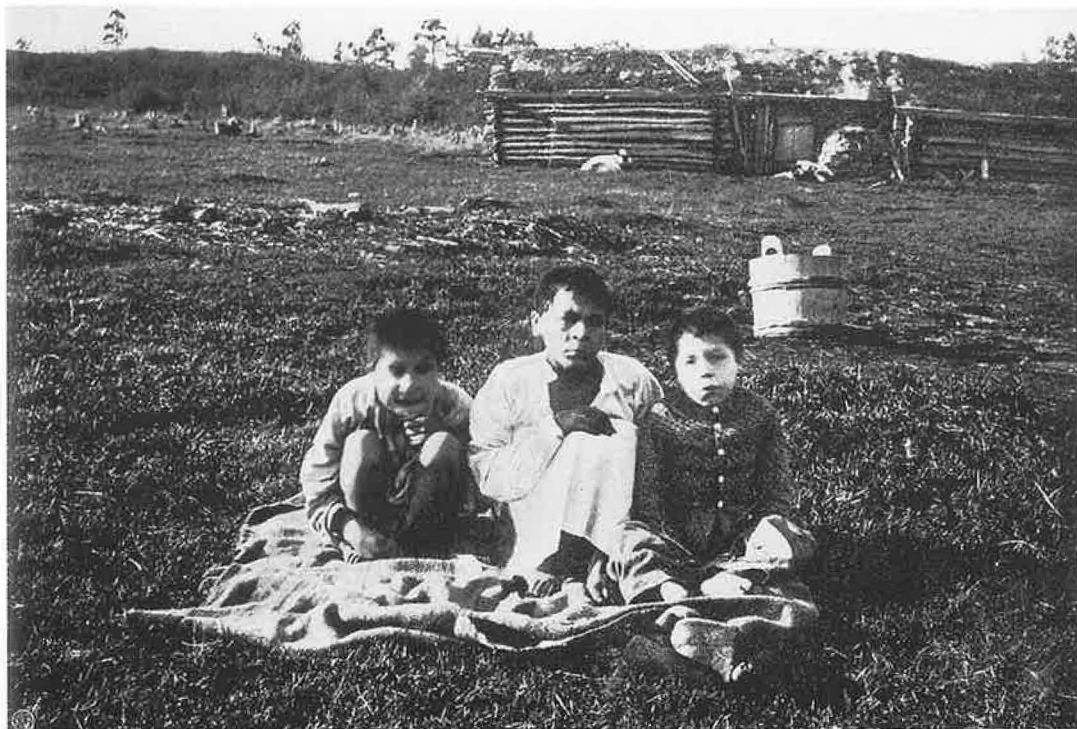


Fig. 1. This photo is from the documentation material of the Norwegian eugenicist Jon Alfred Mjøen, which was kept at his eugenics laboratory (the photograph is reproduced in Mjøen, J. A., *Racehygiene*, Kristiania 1914). The caption says "Three of eleven brothers and sisters, six of whom have limited mental capacity and five of whom are complete idiots".

reward does not come automatically, one must take action to bring it about. Human reproduction thus became the most important subject of discussion of the period.

Progressive degeneration and eugenics

In Darwin's day it was quite usual to imagine that acquired characteristics could be inherited; one tends to forget that Darwin actually believed this too (Hoffmeyer 1985: 174p; Robson 1985: 376; Pick 1989: 100) – and even more so as time went on. This is quite evident from *The Descent of Man* of 1871. In the period in question this "non-Darwinist" feature of Darwin was almost demonstratively forgotten. As early as 1865, however, Darwin's cousin Francis Galton, the father of the eugenics movement, abandoned the belief that acquired characteristics could be transmitted to the next

generation (Haller 1963: 12). Unlike Morel, who thought that increasing degeneration would lead to the sterility of individuals within four generations (Morel 1857; Friis 1899; Pick 1989; Kirkebæk 1993), Galton warned against a degeneration that would progress generation by generation until the fall of civilization. This necessitated an active effort: "a breeding program for man" (Galton 1889).

Belief in the inexorable influence of heredity on mankind, and the all-too-rapid growth of "inferior" human material, reached Denmark around the turn of the century. Articles in the Danish journal *Nyt Tidsskrift for Abnormvæsenet*, which dealt with issues related to the blind, deaf and mentally handicapped, show that during these years Darwinism and theories of degeneration were fairly randomly intermixed – as a rule under the label of Darwinism. Mendel's rediscovered laws of heredity had not yet won acceptance.⁶ Around 1905,



Fig. 2. The permanent international committee for eugenics. Among the people in this photo are the President of the committee, Charles Darwin's son Leonard Darwin (front), the Chairman of the anthropological committee and the eugenics movement in Denmark, the Police doctor Søren Hansen (far left), Subeditor Vincent Næser, Copenhagen (second from the right) and Dr. Jon A. Mjøen (far right).

when references to them began to appear, the picture became if anything more chaotic for a period. In all these varying pictures, however, one thing is constant: if one is mentally deficient, one is biologically *completely* deficient, for only the innate "good brain" has the *potential* to develop everything that can make society and the existence of the individual perfect: morality, humanity, the aesthetic sense, art etc. It is all these qualities that are cultivated in the individual and in society. The mental defective cannot be "cultivated" (Kirkebæk 1993). He remains a "natural"!

The first Sterilization Act was passed in Denmark in 1929, and in 1934 the Act was amended with special reference to the mentally handicapped.⁷ It is not directly evident from the two acts that eugenic considerations had much influence on them, but public debate on the mentally retarded shows clearly that such considerations were in fact given great weight in the formulation of the acts – especially the 1934 Act.

The eugenics movement which won so many supporters in England and our neighbouring

countries never became a real popular movement in Denmark (Kirkebæk 1993:18). But the problem of "progressive degeneration" was debated in all the newspapers, periodicals and popular weeklies, and many popularizing books and pamphlets on eugenics appeared. One of the reasons why the movement in Denmark never became very big may have been that the people who represented Denmark in the international movements were "positive" eugenicists. They were simply not fanatical enough!

In 1913 – shortly after the photograph fig. 2 was taken – the two Danish representatives on the board of the international movement were the Subeditor Vincent Næser and the Police doctor Søren Hansen. In the medical journal *Ugeskrift for Læger* Søren Hansen wrote: "One could call eugenics applied Darwinism, inasmuch as it is based on the theory of qualitative selection and seeks to transfer this principle to the increase and breeding of a healthy, strong race; and one gets the best idea of what this means from the work being done in England by the Eugenics Laboratory of the University of

London, founded by Galton and headed by Pearson..." (Hansen 1913: 3). Vincent Næser's principal idea was that the young graduates on whom the future depended should have better conditions, so they could marry earlier and have more children than the two that had gradually become the norm, for "society should not give the most original intellects instructions to end their lives in celibacy" (Næser 1919: 1091).

The procreation of "the good stock" was emphasized. For the "positive" eugenicists who represented Denmark and the fanatical polemicists in the press had one thing in common besides a fear of the destruction of civilization: they spoke in biological terms of "child-breeding", "selection of partners", "racial improvement" etc., but the true language of degeneration was most marked in the dailies and weeklies, popularizing books and pamphlets, and in *Nyt Tidsskrift for Abnormvæsenet*, in which the doctors' discussions of mental retardation differed radically from that of the educators. The struggle against debility was "one of the most serious and most complex problems of life" because the children of the retarded were always become retarded themselves, "...and thus directly increase the numbers of those who are a burden on society, those who are among the morbid growths on the social body", and also because "uninhibited sexuality is peculiar to no small number of mental defectives, who, when they are at large, ruthlessly and brutally become the slave of their instincts. Society as such has a decided right to demand that the burdens which it must and should bear according to our ethical and social views, are no heavier than absolutely necessary; and the individual members of society – and in this context I am of course thinking of the women – have as decided a right to demand protection from rape by mental defectives" (Scharling 1909: 188). The primary solution was sterilization.

Nyt Tidsskrift for Abnormvæsenet closely followed the debate among politicians on increasing degeneration, and as early as 1917 it was clear that the ground had been prepared for a sterilization law within a few years (Petersen 1924: 71). There was no strict party line on this

issue, which had obviously become an *emotional* issue despite the cool "objectivity" of the leading Danish eugenicists. Biology and emotion went hand in hand – and it was very much the declining birth rate that activated the emotions!

One zealous agitator for eugenics was the dentist and journalist Alfred Bramsen, who had "natural methods" for curing almost everything. Among other things, he popularized Karl Pearson's studies purporting to show that the "quality" of children was partly dependent on their position among their siblings: according to Pearson the firstborn children were of much poorer quality than the succeeding ones; the third child was the first one to be of reasonable quality. Much further along the line of siblings the quality began to decline again. Bramsen believed the solution to the problem was that women should bear more children, but at longer intervals. He gave detailed instructions on how this was to be done: mothers should ally themselves with nature, and first and foremost *breast-feed* their children. In this respect he mounted a bitter attack on the "modern education of women" that made women use any intelligence they might have to compete with men – for example in the scientific field – while what "the race" needed was for intelligent women to spend their time rearing healthy, intelligent and beautiful children (Bramsen 1911, 1912).

The problem of the firstborn children was taken so seriously that mini-surveys were done on the basis of the statistics from institutions for the mentally handicapped, and the aforementioned Søren Hansen carried out a major survey, published in the anthropological journal *Meddelelser om Danmarks Antropologi* in 1920–25. However, Søren Hansen came to the conclusion that hitherto too much emphasis had been given to the significance of heredity, since it had been overlooked that a hereditary deficiency could not simply be regarded as hereditary because it had also been present in the parents or more distant relatives. "On the whole, it will be necessary to found the study of hereditary factors in man on a rather wider basis than is appropriate for animals and plants. In the situation in question here there

can in fact be no question of heredity; nor does this, as Pearson has thought, conflict with any Mendelian theory..." (Hansen 1925: 148). When Søren Hansen mentions Pearson's relationship with the Mendelian theory, it is undoubtedly *also* to assert his position in a dispute among the eugenicists. Pearson never recognized Mendel's laws and thus also came into conflict with other leaders of the eugenics movement (Pearson 1914, 1924; Haller 1963: 12p).

From around 1910 attempts were made to make the public aware of and familiar with the possibility of sterilizing the retarded. The debate over sterilization or "the desexualization of the retarded" went on in *Nyt Tidsskrift for Abnormvæsenet* (comments by H. Scharling quoted above were part of this debate), and the USA was quite clearly the pioneering country. One of the objections to sterilization was that it could encourage immorality. Of this Christian Geill wrote in 1916: "Prostitution, which in women substitutes for crime in men,⁸ is at any rate not inhibited by sterilization, but possibly encouraged. One of the arguments that has justifiably been adduced against sterilization is that it is a temptation to sexual promiscuity. Oberholzer [Oberholzer 1912] therefore suggests, along with sterilization of women, surgical constriction of the vagina" (Geill 1916: 25).

It is a long way from Søren Hansen to the enthusiastic layman Alfred Bramsen (who was incidentally the writer who most stimulated popular debate). In a book that appeared in the "Sanitære Smaaskrifter" (Sanitary Booklets) series, *Eugenik: de Velbaarne og de Belastede* (Eugenics: The Well-Born and the Tainted), he wrote: "Confusion – and decline! – first arise when misconceived "compassion" not only holds a protecting hand over imbeciles and a profusion of others with serious hereditary taints, *but even enables them to have offspring!* To seek to regulate this – to render unto human compassion what is human compassion's, and to *the race* what is the race's – this is one of the great tasks of the future and of eugenics..." "...but that such individuals in their brief period of freedom (from internment or prison) are freely allowed to bring beings of the same calibre into the world, wretched creatures that

repeat the migrations of the parents to and from the institutions – this, I think, is far too bad! As things are now, a population of degenerates is being hatched; and degeneration is worse than disease; *for it cannot be cured – it must die out!* For the fertility of the incompetent is actually frighteningly high, far higher than that of the well-born! Bringing large numbers of physical and mental invalids into the world appears in fact to be the *only* contribution of these wretched, tainted individuals to the society in which they live..." (Bramsen 1912: 8).⁹

Bramsen also dismissed the issue of whether the improvement of social conditions could have any significance for the quality of the children: "It is thus utterly unfounded when it is claimed in socialist quarters that because miserable conditions may harm the health of many individuals, this damage is passed on to the offspring, and in the end produces a *deterioration* in the stock or race. It is an equally widespread misconception that the race is *improved* every time poor social conditions are improved, when poverty and disease are combated, unhygienic conditions abolished or unhealthy areas are torn down. No one would deny that poor and insufficient food, the crowding-together of people, an excessive workload, the lack of light and air, make the inhabitants of the "slums" *individually* less strong than – for example – their better-off contemporaries in the countryside. Anyone can see that the child who grows up in unfortunate surroundings usually becomes less strong than the one that lives in the best possible sanitary conditions. But this has no bearing whatsoever on the race as such! For one can by no means claim that each new generation in the poor district comes into the world more defective – a misunderstanding which is due to a prevalent confusion in the understanding of *what* on the whole can be inherited from generation to generation. For everything hereditary is something one is born with, like one's parents. *Everything else – all acquired characteristics* – cannot be transmitted from parents to children! Everything caused by hothouse culture, in other words, is as little hereditary as the

miseries that can be attributed to wretched circumstances" (Bramsen 1912: 7).

The word *velbåren* ("well-born"), formerly applied to people of noble lineage or used to address people of the highest classes, had become a term for the biologically "healthy" children whose forebears for generations had been free of mental illness and debility.

In the system for the care of the retarded, it was claimed that sterilization was a humane method to use when one wanted to avoid the dangers to civilization that would ensue from the procreation of the retarded. The issue of "humanity" and how the concept was to be defined in relation to the mentally deficient was on the whole a hotly discussed topic of the day (Rønn 1993).

Karl Pearson lamented the tendency to put emotional considerations before the good of the nation. It was not to the benefit of the nation when a quarter of all married couples – mostly the "poor and improvident" produced *half* of the next generation.

For most supporters of eugenics and degeneration theories, social conditions counted for nothing. It is therefore paradoxical that Karl Pearson (whose nickname was "Better-Dead Pearson") was a convinced socialist, who did however pour scorn on socialists for a tendency to use terms like "right" and "justice" rather than looking at the common good. He also warned against revolution and tried to demonstrate the benefit of evolution to the nation.¹⁰

Although most theories of degeneration arose during and after the 1880s as *counter-theories* to socialism (see Pick 1989), Pearson was no isolated case. In Denmark too there were people who were declared socialists and eugenicists. One of the examples was in fact the main architect of the sterilization laws, K. K. Steincke. In 1920 he wrote a very informative chapter on eugenics in his book on "the welfare system of the future".¹¹ In 1934, when the results of at least one of the sterilization acts had become evident, he wrote a classically emotive article on the mentally retarded as a danger to civilization (Steincke 1934; Rønn 1993: 24f).

In the meantime unemployment had risen dramatically and the birth rate was approach-

ing the lowest level ever. The "positive" eugenicists like Hansen and Næser were also worried about the declining birth rate, but had not – like Steincke – *themselves* been parties to political decisions that had to be explained and justified to the voters.

On the whole, the 1925–35 period was one of paradoxes. D. V. Glass pointed out the curious fact that in Denmark the prevailing opinion claimed that people should be allowed to practice family planning (although no clinics offering advice on contraception were established) and yet at the same time lamented the declining birth rate (Glass 1940: 319).

To find out which approach should actually be taken, Steincke set up a "population commission" – thus keeping the belligerents quiet until a report appeared.

The dispute was about family planning *in general* and about abortion on social grounds in particular, as well as the advisability of encouraging more childbirths in "the good stock" – but it was *not* about the desirability of preventing the retarded from reproducing. The essentials in this respect had been arranged in the swingingly restrictive Mental Retardation Act of 1934,¹² which also had wider provisions for quasi-compulsory internment. The retarded had become well nigh invisible.

The delimitation of mental deficiency

The most important requirement if the internment and sterilization laws were to be effective was that the retarded could be *identified* – that deficiency could be quantified. Many of the debates in the care system in the first decades of the period concentrated on this particular problem (Hedemand 1993). No one could be in any doubt that the lowest-ranking deficient, the idiots, on the whole constituted no risk to civilization – for one thing they were often uninterested in and/or unable to establish sexual relations; and for another, because of serious handicaps they were often sterile. The danger was anticipated from the *feeble-minded*, those who could only be distinguished with difficulty from "normal" people of low intelligence. It was in this group they expected to find criminals, prostitutes, beggars, tramps and other morally

inferior individuals. It was this group which – by proliferating dramatically – would cause society enormous expense and great misery with its hereditary immoral tendencies. Within a few generations it could lower the average intelligence of “the race”, with the fall of civilization as the probable result.

One of the researchers most often referred to in Denmark was H. H. Goddard, who had at “Vineland” in New Jersey what he called “a huge human laboratory”. Christian Keller, the leading figure in the care of the mentally deficient in Denmark, and editor of *Nyt Tidsskrift for Abnormvæsen*, frequently quoted Goddard and translated his articles and speeches for publication in the Danish journal. This gave him the opportunity to comment on the Danish situation (one gets the impression that Keller to a great extent used others as his “spokesmen” – hardly because he himself was afraid to air his opinions, but more so he could present the funding authorities with “effective” research which should also be implemented in Denmark).

Goddard concentrated on “morons” – a word he himself had coined from the Greek word for “foolish”. He considered himself an expert on the taxonomy of the retarded and trained people almost to “intuit” mental deficiency – or at least to identify morons visually and by means of a few simple questions. These field “investigators” should incidentally preferably be women, for while Goddard considered himself excellent at such identification although he was a man, women normally had more intuition than men.

When Binet’s intelligence tests appeared at the beginning of the century,¹³ Goddard very quickly adopted them, but to some extent adapted them to his own experience (Gould 1983: 292ff). In Denmark many experiments were done with intelligence tests, and at the *Aandssvageanstalt i Ribe* (Institute for the Mentally Retarded in Ribe, founded in 1907) some of the first experiments with intelligence tests were conducted with Goddard’s version of the tests.¹⁴

Whereas Binet’s intelligence test was actually “neutral” in the sense that it was meant to screen out children with learning difficul-

ties, which could be significant for their own as well as the “normal” children’s learning process, Goddard’s use of the tests was meant to identify the group that would breed a proportionate number of the retarded to the detriment of the nation and race. Goddard had experience of heredity research in which – unlike Pearson – he worked on the basis of the Mendelian principle. He concluded in *Feeble-mindedness, Its Causes and Consequences* (1914) that mental deficiency was “a simple recessive trait”, which means that two retarded parents must of necessity have exclusively retarded children. Only in a maximum of 19% of cases were there other reasons for deficiency than heredity (accidents during birth, prenatal or early illnesses like meningitis etc. – and in a small percentage of the cases he was unable to find any cause) (Haller 1963: 70).

A 1913 review in *Nyt Tidsskrift for Abnormvæsen* of a book by Goddard said: “The Kallikak family shows us once more that it is not the true idiots that are our problem. They must be cared for, but that is the end of that. No, the problem is “the moron”, the feeble-minded marginal case – those who make up the bulk of the Kallikak family” (Hjorth 1913: 5).

In the family study in question of the “Kallikak family” (Goddard 1912), Goddard succeeded in showing how the same man became the ancestor of two different lines: “The “Kallikak” who lived four generations ago, through his relations with a retarded woman on the one hand and with a normal woman on the other, became the forefather of two families, who are to one another as black to white: one typified by useless, harmful social elements whose existence cost the state so much in dollars that even the most lethargic citizen must wake up; the other – with a few isolated exceptions – consisting of useful, productive citizens on whose shoulders the burden of maintaining the parallel family has to be laid”. Keller then points out how necessary it is to take up this research in Denmark. He imagines that if one took a “Sprogø girl”¹⁵, and, with her as ancestress, studied her descendants, then “in her hereditary wake would follow nothing but *minderwerthige* individuals”. Such a family study would however take far too long – and in a



Fig. 3. J.-F. Millet: *The Man With The Hoe* (1863). Inspired by this painting, Edwin Markham wrote: "Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans / Upon his hoe and gazes at the ground / And on his back the burden of the world..." H. H. Goddard analysed this poem in 1919, at a time when he had started using intelligence tests rather than primarily visual identification of the retarded. Nevertheless he still thought he was able to identify mental deficiency with his eagle eye. Goddard was convinced that Markham's poem suggested that it was social circumstances that kept the man with the hoe down and made him resemble the sods of earth he was turning. This was nonsense, thought Goddard: the poor peasants suffered from their own mental deficiency, and Millet's painting proved it. The painting was a perfect picture of an imbecile (S. J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Penguin, London 1981, pp. 168–169).

hundred years much would perhaps be different, so it was *now* that the study would have to be started. It would cost money, but no money could be better spent (Keller 1922: 39).

It is indicative that in the nine years that passed between these two mentions of the family study (there had also been references to it and to others several times in the meantime) no doubt was ever expressed about the reliability of the studies. Søren Hansen's cautious conclusion about the survey as regards the position of children among their siblings contained no hint that social factors might play a role – it

was not for nothing that he was a eugenicist; he said simply that there were no significant grounds to assert that heredity had played a role in the case in question.

Goddard's "school" for morons had another important function: to study "normal" people through studying "abnormal" ones. In a lecture translated by Christian Keller (Goddard 1911: 3), Goddard presents the aims of his research. He points out that the institution for the mentally deficient is a particularly favourable place for scientific research, because these children are already in an abnormal state where any

intervention that offers the least hope of improving this state must be considered fully justified; and if it can be useful to experiment with animals – even plants – it must also be useful to experiment with human beings. Goddard also says that his current studies concern heredity and intelligence tests – and in precisely this area he needs experience!

In 1912 Goddard was invited by the Public Health Service to test his ability to identify morons among immigrants arriving at Ellis Island. Perhaps they could be pointed out and sent back, and this would reduce “the menace of the feebleminded”. Now he no longer needed to rely on his own and his assistants’ innate talent for identifying the retarded; he had done successful tests with Binet. According to Gould, Goddard was so encouraged by his experiments that he himself raised the money to send two of his women to Ellis Island in 1913 to do more thorough studies. “In two and a half months, they tested four major groups: thirty-five Jews, twenty-two Hungarians, fifty Italians, and forty-five Russians. The Binet test produced an astounding result: 83 percent of the Jews, 87 percent of the Russians, 80 percent of the Hungarians, and 79 percent of the Italians were feebleminded – that is, below mental age twelve (the upper limit of morosity by Goddard’s definition)” (Gould 1983: 292).

Goddard decided that these results were perhaps a little too good for others to believe. Could one get people to accept that four fifths of the inhabitants of a nation were feeble-minded? After playing a little with the figures, he got the number of feeble-minded down to between 40% and 50%. Just a few years later it became clear that Goddard had constructed a particularly strict version of the Binet test (Gould 1983: 294).

As mentioned above, Pearson was not a Mendelian, but he had another quality: he was an outstanding mathematician. Pearson was the man who invented the use of the correlation coefficient to measure the relationship between two variables. He used this in a “measurement” of Jewish immigrants. The Jews in particular had been a problem for the immigration authorities because they were generally considered intelligent. And when intelligence

was of such overwhelming importance that it was the *essential* feature of immigrants, what use was it to present other arguments against Jewish immigration? One only risked being accused of emotionally-determined animosity or lack of objectivity.

Pearson measured everything he thought could be significant in the assessment of the immigrants. For example, he established four categories for cleanliness of hair, of inner and outer garments etc. Then he made correlations among all his measurements and could not understand, for example, why cleanliness of hair and body only scored 0.2615 for boys and 0.2119 for girls. On this he remarks: “We should naturally have supposed that cleanliness of body and tidiness of hair would be products of maternal environment and so highly correlated. It is singular that they are not. There may be mothers who consider chiefly externals, so press for tidiness of hair, but it is hard to imagine that those who emphasize cleanliness of body overlook cleanliness of hair.” Pearson concludes: “Jewish alien children are not superior to the native Gentile. Indeed, taken all around we should not be exaggerated if we asserted that they were inferior in the great bulk of the categories dealt with.” Then Pearson measured the mental features in the same way and came to the conclusion that although the Jews, from an academic point of view, had in some cases succeeded excellently, it was a question whether they had “staying power” in the same way as the natives: “No breeder of cattle, however, would purchase an entire herd because he anticipated finding one or two fine specimens included in it; still less would he do it, if his byres and pastures were already full” (Gould 1983: 297ff).

One should normally understand the Danish term *racehygiejne* (eugenics – literally “racial hygiene”) as referring to heredity rather than race in this period (Kirkebæk 1985:8), but there is no doubt that there is an extremely close connection between “race” and “heredity”. What eugenicists sought to reveal in foreign races was hereditary degeneration. If one could *demonstrate* degeneration in the aliens, one could also prove that their low intelligence

would influence the future of the country of immigration. Degenerated families in one's own race had the same effect – they lowered "gross national intelligence".

There was not much difference between maintaining a presumed high level of intelligence in a country by *excluding* groups and by *interning* them. Exclusion was perhaps slightly easier, because the immigrants normally had no spokesmen who knew the laws of the country, and at the same time it was cheaper to deny access to immigrants than to intern the citizens of one's own country. However, the instruments used for delimitation were the same. In Denmark the issue of delimiting mental deficiency, especially in the 1920s, was an extremely important one, because there were forces that wished to forcibly introduce effective internment and sterilization laws. If one could identify mental defectives accurately enough, one could intern them in time and be ready to sterilize them as soon as the law was passed. Intelligence tests were the tool. Although there was also criticism of the tests, the debate in *Nyt Tidsskrift for Abnormvæsenet* shows that the prevailing opinion was that it was only a matter of a short time before it would be possible to screen out the dangerous mentally defective individuals with certainty. Faith in the advances of science meant that the brain became an anatomical organ whose functions could become as quantifiable as those of the heart or lungs.

Judgement tests

In articles and discussions of intelligence tests they appear to be randomly designated *intelligensprøver* (intelligence tests) or *forstandsprøver* (judgement tests). Reviewing the tests appended to the patient records of the institutions for the retarded, though, we find that in the intelligence test itself there is a subsection called "judgement tests". Where the other tests were meant to assess memory, visual and auditory perception, numeracy, linguistic ability and the ability to make definitions etc., the "judgement tests" meant that the subject had to make aesthetic and moral judgements. A child was asked, for example, to assess three

sets of drawings of young women: three "beautiful" and three "ugly". This very test was the downfall of several marginal cases between "feeble-minded" and "backward". We can see for example that an eight-year-old managed all the other tests well, but fell down on the "judgement test". In the margin of the test there is a double-underlined comment on the result: "He answered *wrongly* in all three cases!" These three "wrong" answers were just enough to put the boy in the "feeble-minded" department, where institutionalization was necessary. The judgement tests also involved moral/philosophical tests such as (for thirteen-year-olds in 1936): "a) Why is it easier to forgive a man when he does something bad in a passion, than when he does it without being in a passion? b) Why is it better to rely on what people do than on what they say?" And under these two questions we read: "Sensible answers required!"

When these tests were later (much later!) replaced, it was of course because their results were considered culturally determined and it was realized that there could be a cultural gap between the assessor of the answers and the subject.

In the 1920s, the "beauty questions" were criticized for example in *Nyt Tidsskrift for Abnormvæsenet* but the response was: "finding the most beautiful face in the three drawings is sure and fast" (Petersen 1924: 71). Yet that was not the case in this institution. The answers to these questions were just as often wrong as the others. But it was particularly the "moral" questions that produced the wrong answers. Here two different doctors could incidentally have their own separate "list of right answers" (which usually however matched well with those of their colleagues). The wrong answers to these questions could mean, if a patient managed the other tests fairly well, that the patient had clear "psychopathic" features. Among others, this applied to a large number of the "loose" women, when the other tests showed normal intelligence. On the other hand there are examples showing that these very girls talked to each other about how to answer the most difficult questions – the moral ones. A woman who had been asked the ques-

tions mentioned above said in an interview that a friend coached her on how to answer the questions.¹⁶ One could not help fellow patients with assessing weights, numeracy tests or the like, but one particularly bright patient could tell his or her fellow-sufferers what “they” (the assessors) thought were the right answers to the judgement tests.

In some of the earliest test forms from the twenties the questions for the judgement test were not printed – undoubtedly because the construction of the questions was left to the assessor. But the tendency was towards standardization, and this *could* be to the advantage of the subject! It is unlikely to have been common to “cheat in the exam” this way. It is more striking that for a number of years no consideration was given to the fact that such exchanges could take place among the patients.

The tests consisted, then, of tasks which, if they were answered almost appropriately for the subject’s age, were supposed to show the subject’s capability of becoming a practical load-bearer in society, and judgement tests that could *disqualify* them from ever getting so far as being allowed to carry out that function. In the 1920s and 1930s there was widespread agreement that people whose IQ was under the debility limit belonged in an institution or – if they were sufficiently peaceful and had some physical ability to work – in foster care, where a family could exploit their labour power and supervise them, often for some form of payment. The person – who would have to agree to sterilization before being let loose outside the walls of the institution – remained under the care of the system and could be sent back to the institution from one day to the next.

The part of the test which assessed the moral and aesthetic judgement of the subject became immensely important, especially in the late 1930s. One important reason for this was undoubtedly that the doctors by this time completely dominated the issue of patient assessment. In older patient records matrons and in some cases nursing staff could contribute statements on the patients (very few of the nursing staff had *access* to the records, though). Here they gave their subjective assessments – for better or worse – of the pa-

tients, who were often called by their first names. In 1935, for the first time, the administration of the institution in Ribe became the exclusive province of the doctors (this was very late compared with other institutions), and from 1936–37 the records change in character. The former name for the inmates, *alumni*, changed to *pt* (= patients), the medical examinations were intensified, and the main annual examination, the *status præsens*, was dominated by the medical assessment, supported by the intelligence test. The doctor rarely knew the patient, and based his assumptions about the patient’s character and morality on this intelligence test. Where the records had previously contained a mixed bag of information, they now mainly consisted of information on complex medical examinations and experiments. The retarded became the most-studied group of all – not for the benefit of the patients, but for the benefit of *us*, who were to be able to rest assured that our everyday life would not be infiltrated by people who lowered the average intelligence of society. The goal had been achieved – the problem was now only finding *room* to house the unadaptable!

Discussion

One of the points in the discussion of the destructive influence on civilization of the retarded was that they had many more children than “normal” people, and that this would mean a progressive degeneration of humanity. The irony of this is there are no grounds whatsoever for this assumption. What we can see is that the propaganda for family planning worked *better* among the educated middle classes than among the poor. There are no statistics showing that the retarded in particular had more children – only extremely dubious estimates made by some of the above-mentioned researchers, among others.¹⁷

The earliest patient records in my material (1907–20) show that if one excludes the worst-functioning patients – the true idiots – very few of the women who were institutionalized as adults had children; and if they did have children, they had perhaps been admitted to the institution by the local council precisely be-

cause as unmarried women they "led an indecent, irresponsible life" and had one or more children who were unprovided for. The women in this group are the most intelligent, and in several cases letters which they wrote themselves etc. show that they would never be judged to be mentally handicapped today. In other words, in many of the cases they are people who have been adjudged retarded *because* they had offended against certain norms. There is no reason to assume that they offended against the norms because they were retarded! As for the men, it is difficult to establish whether unmarried men have children – and anyway the earliest patients among the men were often idiots who had been in other institutions for many years.¹⁸ As we have seen, they were considered harmless. It was the *borderline cases* who were feared, and who above all were to be interned and sterilized. The idiots came from all classes of society – the borderline cases usually from seriously disadvantaged social environments. If so many of them came from this group, it was thought that it must be because they were in reality members of a "race" of inferiors, prostitutes and vagrants, a race of unadaptables who were only waiting for the chance to infiltrate civilization and undermine it from within.

The belief in heredity and the heavy burden imposed by the retarded on the economy and social morality was supported by the degeneration theories which – paradoxically – owe almost everything to a progress-oriented biological theory of evolution like Darwin's. Enthusiasm for "natural" qualitative selection could not be maintained in the face of medical progress which could not be reserved for the educated middle class and what is best described as the *petit-bourgeoisie*. Qualitative selection was no longer natural; it had to be culturalized somehow, so it could work for the maintenance of civilization. In this connection it will be necessary to come to some understanding of how the two concepts, civilization and culture, were perceived by the biological determinists.

General discussions of the concept of civilization have primarily been concerned with the following questions: 1) How did civilization take place, and what is the significance of the

way civilization evolved for the content of the concept of civilization? And 2) What is the relationship of the concept of civilization to the concept of *culture*, and in what countries and ages does one concept take precedence over the other? Both questions are crucial, but in this particular case I cannot express an opinion on how civilization took place – if only because I have only been able to localize a *concept* of civilization. After all, civilization does not necessarily exist just because one talks about it!

In any case, can an age ever judge whether this state of equilibrium close to the ideal exists? If civilization, as claimed in this period, was the overall concept of the achievable yet threatened ideal for the whole "stock", for the race and the nation, and for the West, then – with hindsight – it is easy to see that it did not exist. What existed was a hegemony of biological determinists who talked about civilization.

As regards Question 2 – the relationship of the concept of civilization to that of culture – it is notable that in this period, when in the USA F. Boas began speaking of cultures (Boas 1911), there was no discussion of this in an area like the care of the retarded. By contrast, Boas's break with the perception of the white race as *biologically* superior to all others was particularly important in ensuring that the very science which had contributed to this view, anthropology, turned round and reflected on the problem anew. Scholars who had previously practiced or relied on physical anthropology, phrenology, anthropometry and the like, no longer felt able to function as extensions of established society in relation to groups or persons who were considered lower on the ladder of evolution, or who may have fallen between the rungs! The inability to rely fully any longer on the anthropologists in the treatment of our own race's "inferior" members was perhaps in reality one of the reasons why medical science came to dominate the field so totally, especially in the period between the two world wars. The doctors had no doubts about the superiority of the healthy body over the sick one – and mental deficiency was for them an illness; and illness must be combated. If they cannot be cured, they must be eliminated.

When the biological determinists who dom-

inate the discourse of "mental deficiency" talk (as they very rarely do) about culture, it is always about the sense of the beautiful and the good in life that humankind can achieve when – thanks to its innate intelligence – it has gained the insight and energy to occupy with other things than everyday banalities. It is a concept of culture which is at once very comprehensive and very inflexible, one which is certainly not neglected – it is simply reserved for the "adaptable", the intelligent. It is *comprehensive* because it is a culture which is supposed to suit everyone as long as they have the mental capacity to accommodate it. It is not culture which encompasses the individual, but the individual who encompasses culture! It is *inflexible* because some are created able to encompass culture, and others are not. Culture becomes the characteristic of a society or a people which is able to contribute to the maintenance of civilization, among other ways by defining a *morality* which must be a codeterminant of conscious qualitative selection. Taking a biological theory of evolution like Darwin's as the starting-point, rather than almost any sociocultural theory, meant that one was able to argue against all ideologies of equality predicated on two ideas: that culture can be transmitted both vertically from the preceding generations and horizontally from the environment; and that the improvement of social conditions allows the individual to influence the development of society. The role of the mentally deficient in this game was that of the scapegoat. They became the *proof* of the need for a conscious qualitative selection which could perhaps prevent the destruction of civilization. One could not have a pluralistic concept of culture at the same time as a concept of civilization that was based on the notion of a biological evolution which only needed culture to ensure "natural" selection.

As long as morality, the aesthetic sense and art – indeed, all the benefits of civilization – depended on hereditary intelligence, the dependence of civilization on the human brain, and on that alone, was obvious. If one made this good brain into an exclusively biological matter, one had a whip to hold over the trou-

blesome members of society – the mentally deficient and other "unadaptables"!

Translated by James Manley

Notes

1. The project "From feeble-minded to mentally handicapped" is an ethnological analysis of the Danish system for the care of the retarded c. 1850–1990 with special reference to the identification of general concepts of normality and their influence on institutions for the retarded. The work on the project is done at the Department of European Ethnology of the University of Copenhagen, and is funded by the Council for Research in the Humanities.
2. Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, the Chevalier de Lamarck (1744–1829) wanted to discover laws that could account for the course of nature, and in 1802 he coined a word (presented in *Recherches sur l'organisation des corps vivants*) that would cover such research: *biology*. According to Jesper Hoffmeyer (Hoffmeyer 1985) the school of evolutionary thinking that bears his name – *Lamarckism* – has little to do with Lamarck's theory of evolution. By Lamarckism one normally understands a belief that characteristics acquired in the course of the life of an individual are passed on to that individual's descendants. This assumption was in fact the normal one in Lamarck's age, and his particular contribution to *biology* was that the process of change has a defined direction. His laws of transformation are rationalistic: everything that happens can be explained by these laws, down to the smallest detail. It is here in particular that he differs greatly from Darwin, who thought that evolution was based on random variations and the selection from among these of the characteristics best fitted for survival.
3. On an application of Malthus which led to *Neomalthusianism*, see Drysdale 1879. At the beginning of the century Neomalthusianism often came into conflict with eugenics. Reference can be made to Christensen 1909 from this period. See also Glass 1940 and, among more recent treatments of Malthus, Harris 1968 and 1979, and Banks 1981. As regards Spencer's view of the role of intelligence in evolution, see Spencer 1861 and Høiris 1985. A particularly thorough review of Spencer's theories can be found in J. D. Y. Peel 1971, and the possibility of coordinating Spencer's and Darwin's theories of evolution is discussed by Sahlins and Service 1960. On the shift from a Spencerian to a Darwinist concept of evolution, see Schroll-Fleischer 1983.
4. In the early 1870s the Danish poet and novelist J. P. Jacobsen, who was originally a botanist,

translated both *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* into Danish. He also wrote articles on Darwinism, for example in the periodical *Nyt dansk Månedsskrift*. The possibility Darwinism afforded Jacobsen of cutting out religion permeates all his work. However, the evolutionary thinking of Darwin himself became particularly clear in the work of the later author Johannes V. Jensen, who in his great work *Den lange Rejse* (The Long Journey) dedicated his efforts to describing *progress*. This did nothing to prevent Johannes V. Jensen using a “language of degeneration” in his articles and polemics that is almost only outdone by his sister, Thit Jensen, usually seen as his literary antithesis. Thit Jensen translated, for example, Margaret Sanger into Danish and in the 1920s travelled all over the country with her lecture “Voluntary Motherhood”, in which she violently attacked the way the retarded and other “flotsam and jetsam” were allowed to “breed like rabbits”. Thit Jensen made a huge effort to spread knowledge of contraception, but was otherwise an opponent of abortion – except, however, when it came to the retarded. The brother and sister Johannes and Thit Jensen are good examples of the way, however much people otherwise disagreed, there was great agreement on “the danger from the retarded”.

5. In Note VI in *The Grammar of Science* (Pearson 1900: 539) Pearson writes (on “The Sufficiency of Natural Selection to account for the History of Civilised Man”, p. 536): “It is not only literary historians but even naturalists who deny that natural selection is a sufficiently powerful factor to describe the development of civilised man. The most noteworthy scientist who takes this view is Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace. He considers that (I) the large brain of man, (II) his naked skin, (III) his voice, hands, and feet, (IV) his moral sense could never have been produced by natural selection. He holds that all these characteristics are more fully developed in the savage than are necessary for his needs. He believes, however, that they have been developed in man by selection, as man himself has developed other characteristics in the Guernsey milch cow. In other words, he asserts that they are the outcome of the artificial selection of some intelligent power and not of blind natural selection. This theory of Dr. Wallace’s has been well described by the phrase “man as God’s domestic animal”... I have added this note that the reader may not think that I have disregarded Dr. Wallace’s views on the inapplicability of natural selection to the history of man. Such is far from being the fact, but I hold that Dr. Wallace’s views as expressed in the chapter (pp. 186–214) on *The Limits of Natural Selection as applied to Man* in the recently republished “*Natural Selection*” and in the chapter on *Darwinism applied to Man* in

the “*Darwinism*”, will appear paralogistic enough to confute themselves if carefully studied.

6. As early as the 1860s, the Austrian Augustinian monk Gregor Johann Mendel published his laws of heredity, but they did not reach international botanical circles until 1900, when some botanists (including the Dutchman H. de Vries) achieved similar results by experimentation. Searching through the literature they discovered that both the experimental part of the work as well as the general theory had in fact already been published 34 years previously.
7. Act No. 130 of the 1st June 1929 and Act No. 171 of the 16th May 1934.
8. Geill is here directly summarizing Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), who in 1894 wrote a book about women as criminals (Lombroso 1894). Lombroso took the view that prostitution was woman’s “inborn” crime, and typically – furnished his book with numerous photos of prostitutes. Francis Galton also used photographs, but composed “types” from several different photographs (see for example Pearson 1914 and Regener 1992). Lombroso was the subject of much discussion in Denmark in the first decades of the century, and Geill was in fact critical of him. Nevertheless, in 1906 he published a study of Danish criminals, in which Lombroso’s methods and anthropometrical measurements were still rigorously used. These methods won acceptance in the Danish care system, where one can see from patient records that some doctors were more “Lombroso-influenced” than others. Lombroso belonged to “the anthropological school” which, unlike “the sociological school” (see Hallager 1906) thought that the proclivity to crime was hereditary and that criminals represented a lower stage on the evolutionary ladder: “Der Atavismus erklärt uns die Häufigkeit mancher Verbrechen, so von Päderastie und Kindermord, deren Eindringen in ganze Gesellschaftsklassen unerklärlich wäre, wenn man sich nicht erinnerte, dass Römer, Griechen, Chinesen, Kanaken diese nur nicht als Verbrechen betrachteten, sondern manchmal auch als Nationalgebrauch pflegten” (Lombroso 1902: 363). To an even greater extent, criminals resembled savages in both appearance and nature. They had low brows, darker skin, large ears, were emotionally inadequate, with powerful but transient emotions, they were lazy, the women were not good housekeepers etc. Lombroso’s atavism was not what was mainly discussed in Denmark – it was rather the fact that if the criminal character was *hereditary*, then there was nothing to do but to intern criminals indefinitely. In fact, one of the most far-reaching effects of Lombroso’s theory of degeneration was that a discussion grew up in many countries of the concept of “sanity” and legislation was changed to allow for the in-

ternment of "psychopaths" for indefinite periods. On Lombroso's theory of degeneration, see Pick 1989.

9. One not uncommon expression of the wish to "raise the breeding quality" of human beings was regret that polygamy was not permitted. Bramsen too lamented this, and blamed culture for preventing us from acting "naturally". Polygamy was of course an advantage, for it means that "it is left to just a few males to propagate the stock, while a hundred times as many of their male colleagues are wholly prevented from procreating – although many of them are in fact *above* average! Only among modern human beings do the worst wretches have the same right and the same prospects of furnishing as rich a contingent to the race as the most magnificent male specimens of the race! Nor can it be denied that the custom of monogamy in no way accords with the nature of the male sex drive, and that it thus – viewed from several aspects – proves to be a cultural product, not a natural institution" (Bramsen 1912: 26).
10. After criticizing the present social order, Pearson writes: "You may accept it as a primary law of history, *that no great change ever occurs with a leap*; no great social reconstruction, which will permanently benefit any class of the community, is ever brought about by a revolution. It is a result of a gradual growth, a progressive change, what we term an *evolution*... All progress towards a better state of things must be gradual. Progress proceeds by evolution, not by revolution. For this reason I would warn you against socialistic teachers who talk loudly of "right" and "justice" – who seek to stir up class against class. Such teaching merely tends towards revolution; and revolution is not justifiable, because it is never successful. It never achieves its end. Such teachers are not true Socialists, because they have not studied history, because their teaching really impedes our progress towards Socialism" (Pearson 1901 (1888): 347f). Like so many other degeneration theorists, Pearson has an *ideal* of progress for the achievability of which he worked. Progress could take the direction of class equalization – as with Pearson – or of a conservative "organic thinking" (which can in fact be found in Spencer). Since neither the socialist nor the conservative degeneration theorists believed, however, that social conditions were significant for the "human material" of the next generations, the result was well nigh the same. It was really only a matter of a difference in the severity of the measures that were to be used – and here Pearson was among those who demanded the most serious intervention!
11. Steincke called Pearson's school of thought "one-sided [because of] its wish to eliminate all weak individuals and favour the strong. In this respect it is based on an erroneous, obsolete, over-Dar-

winistic view of the concept of heredity, and sets aside precisely that justified consideration for the life of society that the social legislation seeks to promote" (Steincke 1920: 240). Despite this attack on the socialist Pearson's "over-Darwinistic" view of the concept of heredity (meaning Pearson's failure to recognize Mendel), Steincke himself wrote: "So if we do not want to risk the gradual decline and final fall of modern European civilization, we must embark on a systematic effort to counteract these unfortunate consequences of civilization, and also make an effort to bring about an improvement of the race, so-called *eugenics*, in Germany and Scandinavia in particular called *racial hygiene* or *racial improvement*" (Steincke 1920: 238). Steincke's book was written just after the First World War, and he mentions, as did almost everyone in that period, that war takes the youngest and strongest, so that it is particularly important to make the effort now, all the more so as prostitution and all it entails in terms of venereal disease is spreading from the cities into the countryside. The venereal diseases, thinks Steincke, mainly strike "the higher and most intelligent strata of society, those which already, through practicing the one or two-child system, are helping to promote the degeneration of the race". Steincke was a supporter of the Mendelian school, which was based on a distinction between genotype and phenotype, and he mentions a third school of thought which he does not think belongs among the scientific approaches, "because it does not draw a clear line between the interests of the individual and those of the race" (Steincke 1920: 241p). Both the Pearson school and the Mendelian school claimed to be considering the good of the race.

12. See Note 7.
13. The French psychologist Alfred Binet (1857–1911) began by studying intelligence (among other ways, by observing his two daughters), but in 1905 developed a method for the identification of low intelligence or feeble-mindedness. But it was only with the publication (with Th. Simon) in *Année psychologique* in 1909 of "L'intelligence des imbéciles" that one could speak of actual "intelligence tests". There have been innumerable further developments of the intelligence tests, and among the first to develop and use these tests was the Mendelian H. H. Goddard at the Vineland laboratories in New Jersey.
14. The empirical examples in the article all come from the patient records of the institution *Aandssvageanstalten i Ribe* (founded in 1907) – today the residential institution *Boinstitutionen Ribelund*.
15. In 1911 the organization *De Kellerske Anstalter* founded an institution for "feeble-minded, criminal and vagrant men" on the small island of Livø in the Limfjord. (This institution was given the

task of caring for the patients who had been admitted to the Ribe institution in the earliest years). A few years later the head of *De Kellerske Anstalter*, Christian Keller, fulfilled a long-standing wish for a similar island institution for women on the island of Sprogø in the Great Belt. This institution was primarily used to intern a particular kind of criminal women (see Note 9): the loose-living women who had perhaps already had one or more children.

16. Interview ER/PJ5.

17. In 1940 Glass wrote of the studies (conducted for example by Karl Pearson) which find a negative correlation between fertility and measured intelligence: "In recent years the 'dysgenic' aspect of differential fertility has received much attention, especially since various studies have shown a negative correlation between fertility and measured intelligence. It has thus been asserted that the population is recruited not only from the economically poorer sections of the community, but also that these poorer sections of the community, with their higher fertility, have a lower native intelligence than the wealthier sections. One writer has gone so far as to predict, other things being equal, a fall in the national intelligence of one point of IQ for every 10 years which would place most of the population in mental homes in two hundred years' time!" (Glass 1940: 74). Glass has little faith in the measurements – and in addition wonders whether one could not as easily doubt that there will be any population left in two hundred years. In Denmark, the Public Prosecutor A. Goll wrote in 1934: "The more family planning takes effect among the normal members of society, the more will the overwhelming fertility of the retarded, if strong countermeasures are not taken, be able to exert its harmful effects on the whole of society – indeed in time could transform the whole mental capacity of this society. For if, of two equally large social groups, one has a one percent higher birth rate, and the other a one percent higher death rate, within a hundred years the first group will make up 88.7% of both groups, the other only 11.3%..." (Goll 1934: 83f). Goll does however point out that these statistics cannot simply be transferred directly to the ratio of normal people to the retarded; but they do "indicate clearly the risk inherent in the constant undermining of the normal standard of society."

18. When the institution was founded in 1907, it was decided that *Aandssvageanstalten ved Ribe* (only in 1912 was the name changed to *Aandssvageanstalten i Ribe*) should mainly receive *asyllister* (i.e. asylum patients, the worst-functioning patients). So at first patients were transferred from the institutions in Zealand and the other one in Jutland. However, the institution was also obliged to receive inmates from the

south and west Jutland areas, and after an expansion it became equivalent to an ordinary institution. But until 1928 attempts were made to send patients who were considered receptive to a little book-learning to the Keller institution in Brejning.

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