

45. It should be noted that Bellamy too has been accused of lacking originality in these proposals. It has been suggested that Bellamy was indebted to August Bebel's well-known *Women in the Past, Present, and Future*, first published in 1883, and translated into English in 1885. See Mrs John B. Shipley, *The True Author of "Looking Backward"* (New York, John B. Alden, 1890), as cited in Griffith (1986, 70). See also Shipley (1890, 3). Bebel certainly took up Darwinist arguments, as applied to marriage, in order to contend that human evolutionary strategy demanded a socialistic system. But while he commended complete marital freedom in the future, and linked this obliquely to neo-Malthusianism, this was not linked to any evolutionary strategy dependent on such choice. See Bebel (1885, 127–29, 229). However, we know that Bellamy had in any case begun to wed feminism and Darwinism in his *Springfield Union* articles in the mid-1870s. As early as 1873, specifically, he published an editorial entitled "Who Should Not Marry," where he doubted that "legal restrictions on the subjects are desirable or practicable," preferring a system of constraint by public opinion. It is reprinted in Widdicombe and Preiser (2002, 181–83).
46. Bellamy 1927, 257. It has also been suggested that he derived the idea from an early American utopia, Marie Howland's *Papa's Own Girl* (1874). See Morgan (1944, 221). See further Griffith (1986, 70). Howland suggested that a reduction in the number of children would increase female independence, as well as advocating women's rights in general, intermixed with some communitarian experimentation.
47. Quoted in Bowman *et al.* (1962, 87).
48. Both had contributed to Burnett *et al.* (1886), in which Morris offered a sketch of "The Labour Question from the Socialist Standpoint."
49. An important exception is Arthur Lipow (1982), who views the Nationalist movement generally as an antidemocratic "authoritarian middle class reaction against capitalism" (p. 8), and notes the absence of universal suffrage and democratic control in Bellamy's scheme (pp. 24–29), emphasizing that "Even by the most generous standard, there is no democracy to be found in it" (p. 29).
50. *e.g.*, Rooney 1985, 59: "The principle of democracy was rarely questioned; in fact it was the lack of consideration for the will of the majority that was cited as the chief problem."
51. Quoted in Bowman (1986, 61). Bellamy has been cited as referring to a number of Owen's works in an article entitled "Literary Notices," *Springfield Union*, 23 October 1875, 6 (*ibid.*, 134 n. 5). But this reference appears to be incorrect. (Thanks to Maggie Humberston of the Springfield Library for verification.)
52. Morgan 1944, 222, 367–68, 370. In one of the very few works to link Bellamy to Owen, the latter's influence is described as consisting "chiefly in his catholic support of virtually every means then extant of wiping out existing evils, and in his emphasis on the peculiar virtues inhering in co-operation" (Barnes and Becker 1961, 2:631), which has no bearing on the central issues addressed here. Some biographers have asserted that "Bellamy's socialist society bore a close resemblance to Robert Owen's New Lanark" (Slotten 2004, 436).
53. It may be noted that Robert Dale Owen also opposed the association of primitivism with virtue, arguing that "The half-civilized Indian . . . may, even in his degradation, be considered, not happier or better indeed, but nearer permanent virtue and happiness, than when he roamed the woods, untempted and unsexed" (Owen 1840, 9).
54. A rather dated account is Himes (1928), 627–40.



Wallace, Women, and Eugenics

Diane B. Paul

.....

These concluding chapters stamp Mr. Galton as an original thinker, as well as a forcible and eloquent writer; and his book will rank as an important and valuable addition to the science of human nature.

Wallace's review of Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius*,
printed in *Nature* (S161 1870, 503).

The world does not want the eugenicist to set it straight. Give the people good conditions, improve their environment, and all will tend towards the highest type. Eugenics is simply the meddling interference of an arrogant, scientific priesthood.

Frederick Rockell's interview with Wallace,
printed in the *Millgate Monthly* (S750 1912, 663).

In the *Millgate Monthly* interview, conducted the year before Wallace's death, the interviewer expressed surprise at the intensity of his subject's anti-eugenic feeling. Wallace explained that he was sensitive on the point, having recently been described in a scientific publication as an enthusiast for eugenics. Scornfully insisting that nothing could be further from the truth, he asserted: "Not a reference to any of my writings; not a word is quoted in justification of this scientific libel. Where can they put their finger on any statement of mine that as much as lends colour to such an assertion? Why, never by word or deed have I given the slightest countenance to eugenics. Segregation of the unfit, indeed! It is a mere excuse for establishing a medical tyranny. And we have enough of this kind of tyranny already" (S750, 663).

Yet Wallace's objections notwithstanding, a contemporary might be excused for reading him as an advocate of eugenics, albeit not of the kind that involved segregation or other forms of negative selection. As John Durant (1979, 51) commented almost thirty years ago, misunderstandings on the point are "perhaps

forgivable" given ambiguities in Wallace's thought. In particular, Wallace wrote one of the few favorable contemporary reviews of Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius* (1869), a book that argued the urgent need for eugenics (though Galton did not actually coin the term until 1883).

How do we square Wallace's positive assessment of Galton's work in 1870 (a judgment he never repudiated) with his fierce denunciation of eugenics in the 1912 interview and in other conversations and several publications? Had Wallace's stance shifted over time, perhaps accompanied by an unconscious reconstruction of the past? Or could he reasonably be characterized either as endorsing or opposing eugenics depending on which features of his thought were emphasized and what the evaluator understood by "eugenics"? To at least make a start on answering this question, this essay explicates Wallace's attitudes towards efforts to control human breeding and attempts to situate these attitudes in the context of both his scientific views on the nature of heredity and selection and his broader socio-political commitments, especially his radical egalitarianism, his anti-statism, and his views on marriage and the capacities and condition of women. It is hoped that such an exploration will illuminate not only aspects of Wallace's thinking but also some underappreciated complexities in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century debates over the nature and meaning of innate human differences.

Galton's *Hereditary Genius* and Wallace's Response

In Charles Smith's list of the most important people in Wallace's intellectual life, Galton ranks eighth—below Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Henry Walter Bates, but above many individuals assumed to have been far more consequential for him, such as Robert Owen (<http://www.wku.edu/~smithch/wallace/mostcite.htm>). On the face of it, the ranking seems curious, and it would be natural to wonder if it resulted from an aberration in the weighted referral system employed by Smith; or since the rankings are based on the number of times that Wallace refers to various individuals in the main text of his writings, perhaps reflected the existence of numerous *hostile* mentions of Galton's work. But Wallace's comments on Galton were always respectful, and when he raged against eugenics, as he did frequently in his later years, it was apparently not with Galton in view. Even in "Human Selection" (S427 1890), a major statement on human breeding written after his conversion to Edward Bellamy's version of socialism, Wallace treated Galton's views as worthy of thoughtful consideration. Moreover, on several important matters, including issues related to what Galton would later term the "nature-nurture" debate, the two men were implicit allies. At least some of their commonalities (as well as divergences) are evident in Wallace's review of *Hereditary Genius*. So let us now turn to the argument advanced in that book and to Wallace's response.

Galton's researches in human heredity had been inspired by Darwin's 1859 publication of *The Origin of Species*. "I am sure I assimilated [the *Origin*] with far more readiness than most people,—absorbing it almost at once, and my

afterthoughts were permanently tinged by it. Some ideas I had about Human Heredity were set fermenting and I wrote *Hereditary Genius*" (Pearson 1924, 70; see also Pearson 1924, 82, 206, 357; Galton 1908, 287–88). Although the controversy-shy Darwin chose not to discuss human evolution in the *Origin*, Galton immediately found in the book a scientific explanation for humans' seeming inability to live up to their moral ideals. The insight was that man's imperfect nature, explained by theologians as a consequence of original sin, was actually a product of natural selection. Human beings were not fallen angels, but incompletely-evolved apes with inclinations that often clashed with their worthier judgments. In Galton's new view "the development of our nature, under Darwin's law of Natural Selection, has not yet overtaken the development of our religious civilisation. Man was barbarous but yesterday, and therefore it is not to be expected that the natural aptitudes of his race should already have become moulded into accordance with his very recent advance" (Galton 1865, 327).

Galton supposed that as a product of selection, human morality and intellect could be rapidly improved through breeding.² The need for progress was urgent, given not only the complexity of modern civilization but the apparent easing of

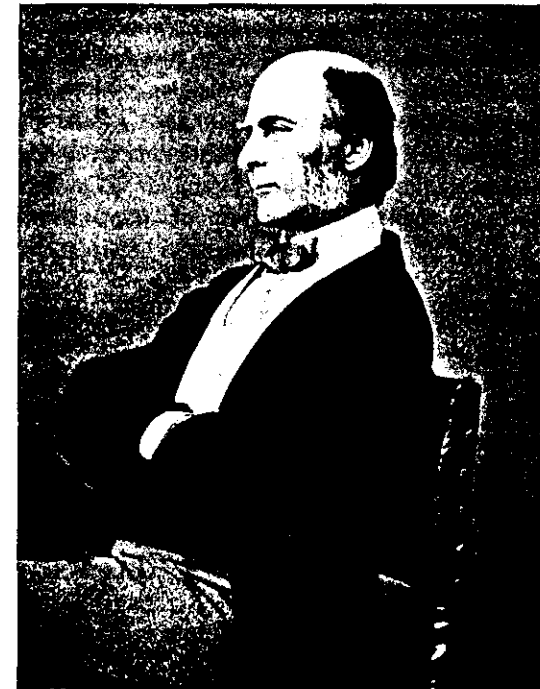


Figure 27 Portrait of Francis Galton.

Early photo taken from Karl Pearson's book *The Life, Letters, and Labours of Francis Galton* (1924). Out of copyright.

the process of natural selection. For in his view (and Darwin's), medical care and public and private charity now salvaged many of those who earlier would have succumbed to cold, starvation, or disease. Moreover, hereditary paupers, dullards, and criminals bred at an alarming rate—while the competent members of society married late and produced few offspring. Now that the weak were no longer being relentlessly culled from the stock, Galton worried that evolutionary progress could come to a halt. It seemed obvious to him that the solution was to breed from the best—although he was extremely vague as to how this aim might be accomplished, as in the following passage:

The time may hereafter arrive, in far distant years, when the population of the earth shall be kept as strictly within the bounds of numbers and suitability of race, as the sheep on a well-ordered moor or plants in an orchard-house; in the meantime, let us do what we can to encourage the multiplication of the races best fitted to invent and conform to a high and generous civilisation, and not, out of a mistaken instinct of giving support to the weak, prevent the incoming of strong and hearty individuals (Galton 1869, 356–57).

But as to what it is that we can and should do, Galton was largely silent.⁷

Galton's primary task in *Hereditary Genius* (an expanded version of his two 1865 papers, "Hereditary Talent and Character") was to prove scientifically that human mental and moral qualities—and not just physical ones—were hereditary. Using data obtained from biographical reference works, Galton showed that high achievement runs in families; i.e., that scientists, statesmen, military commanders, literary men, poets, judges, musicians, painters, and divines prominent enough to be listed were more likely than members of the population as a whole to have near male relatives who were also sufficiently eminent to be listed. Galton knew that skeptics would protest that the experiences and connections of the progeny of these high achievers would differ from those of persons chosen at random. But he dismissed the idea that social circumstances could explain their success, at least in science and other fields he considered meritocracies. Those with natural ability would succeed, no matter how adverse their environment, while those who lacked it would fail, however favorable their start in life or influential their social connections.

What was true of individuals applied equally to groups. *Hereditary Genius* included a chapter analyzing the comparative worth of different races. According to Galton's calculations, which were based on estimates of the proportion of eminent men in each race, black Africans on average ranked at least two and Australian aborigines three grades below whites in natural ability. But Galton did not consider these or other "savage" races a threat to Anglo-Saxons or Teutons since the stronger races would inexorably eliminate the inferior in a natural process that was already well underway (Stepan 1982). Of greater interest was the considerable variation found among white races, and especially within the

Anglo-Saxons. To Galton, it was obvious that the ancient Greeks, and especially the sub-race of Athenians, were the ablest people in history. Unfortunately, the most accomplished Athenian women often failed to marry and bear children while both emigration and immigration weakened the race (Galton 1869, 331). Thus Galton feared that even very superior races could deteriorate and ultimately disappear.

Contemporary reaction to the book was generally tepid and sometimes hostile. (When it was reissued in 1892, the response was much warmer [Gillham 2001, 171–72].) The exception was men of science. In her diary, Galton's wife Louisa's wrote: "Frank's book not well received, but liked by Darwin and men of note" (Pearson 1924, 88). Darwin was indeed enthusiastic, writing his cousin that: "I do not think I ever in all my life read anything more interesting and original" (Darwin and Seward 1903, 41). Darwin also wrote Wallace, saying that he agreed with every word in the latter's favorable review in the journal *Nature* (Marchant 1975 [1916], 206). So what did Wallace like—and dislike—in the book?

First, and perhaps most unexpectedly given his socialist leanings, Wallace thought that Galton had proved that reputation could serve as a measure of natural ability. Thus he wrote:

that notwithstanding all the counteracting influences which may repress genius on one side, or give undue advantage to mediocrity on the other, the amount of ability requisite to make a man truly "eminent" will, in the great majority of cases, make itself felt, and obtain a just appreciation. But if this be the case, the question of whether "hereditary genius" exists is settled. For if it does not, then, the proportion of mediocre to eminent men being 4,000 to 1, we ought to find that only 1 in 4,000 of the relations of eminent men are themselves eminent. Every case of two brothers, or of father and son, being equally talented, becomes an extraordinary coincidence; and the mass of evidence adduced by Mr. Galton in the body of his work, proves that there are more than a hundred times as many relations of eminent men who are themselves eminent, than the average would require (S161 1870, 502).

Wallace also wrote approvingly of Galton's comments on the decline in innate quality since the Greeks of Pericles' time. Apropos the claim that ancient Athenians were at least two grades of ability higher than modern Britons, Wallace remarked: "Well may Mr. Galton maintain that it is most essential to the well-being of future generations that the average standard of ability of the present time should be raised."⁸ And it is clear that Wallace concurred with Galton in blaming the Church for his compatriots' low intellectual and moral state on the grounds that its enforcement of celibacy selected against those men and women with the most gentle natures while its persecution of freethinkers selected against the bravest and the most truthful and intelligent. (Although Wallace does not mention it, he would surely also have approved of Galton's assertion [1869, 362] that, with respect to the goal of race improvement, the best form of society was one in which incomes were "not much [derived] from inheritance.")

The review expresses only one mild disagreement. Galton had taken issue with the Malthusian claim that marriage should be delayed until the husband could adequately support a family. In Galton's view, only the prudent would follow this advice, resulting in an increase in the (hereditarily) imprudent, who would both produce larger families and more generations in a century. But Wallace the naturalist pointed out that although the impulsive may marry earlier than the judicious, an increase in population is less dependent on the number of offspring that are born than the number that manage to survive to adulthood. In his view, the prudent man may marry late, but often weds a much younger woman. And he will in any case tend to leave more healthy offspring than will "the ignorant and imprudent youth, who marries a girl as ignorant and imprudent as himself" (S161 1870, 502).

Thus already manifest in the review are Wallace's beliefs that mental and moral qualities can be inherited, that the level of mentality and morality differs among nations as well as individuals, and that the standard of his own society is not what it should or could be. As contemporary reviews of the book show, the first two claims at least were hardly self-evident. Thus the philosopher and economist John Stuart Mill was a particularly vehement critic of the view that either individual or group differences in mentality or morality are attributable to differences in heredity. Indeed, in his influential *Principles of Political Economy*, first published in 1848, Mill wrote: "Of all the vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the social and moral influences on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences" (Mill 1965, 319).

Wallace is actually much closer to Galton than he is to Mill on the issue of innate differences (although he and Mill would shortly become allies on the issue of land reform).⁷ To understand better why this should be so, we now turn to Wallace's thinking on the evolution of human character.

Wallace on Human Evolution

As with so much else in Wallace's life, the best place to start is with his encounter with Robert Owen. Wallace was first introduced to Owen's theories when, after leaving school at the age of thirteen, he went to work as a builder's apprentice in London.⁸ As Greg Claeys notes elsewhere in this volume, "A connection with Robert Owen and Owenism runs through much of Wallace's long life, starting in early adolescence." As Claeys also indicates, one result of that encounter was to plant the seeds of religious skepticism. A second and related result was acceptance of the central Owenite principle that "the character of every individual is formed for and not by himself . . ." (S729 1908, 46–47). But contra Claeys, this principle does not reflect an environmentalist perspective, but rather an anti-religious and determinist one. In Owen's view, human character was a product both of heredity, which accounts for humans' natural powers, dispositions, and tendencies, and of

environment, which can either reinforce or deflect their proclivities.⁷ Human character is thus a product of natural and social forces, including education, but decidedly *not* a product of individual will.

That is a significant point of contact with Galton. Wallace's exposure to Owenism would have primed him to be sympathetic to Galton's claim that imperfections in human character are not due to original sin and, more generally, to his determinism. In *Hereditary Genius*, Galton expressed his impatience with the view, especially evident "in talks written to teach children how to be good," that individuals succeed through their own diligence and moral effort. In Galton's view, this was nonsense, since success is a function of natural abilities. But the implication (which shocked many of his contemporaries) that there were no grounds for assigning personal responsibility—that individuals deserve neither blame for their vices nor credit for their virtues, since both are beyond their control—is the same irrespective of whether control was exerted by nature or nurture or both. Thus the Owenite influence would have been as likely to favorably dispose Wallace to Galton's arguments as it would to prejudice him against them.

Wallace first discussed the heredity of human intellect and morality in "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the Theory of Natural Selection" (S93 1864). This was the first important paper applying Darwin's theory to humans, appearing a year before Galton's essay. The aim was to resolve the continuing dispute between monogenists and polygenists by proposing that human evolution had passed through an early stage of purely physical development, during which distinct races appeared, and a later stage, when selection acted mainly on mind. The monogenist and polygenist positions were thus made congruent; although the races had a common origin, divergence had occurred in the distant past before the evolution of humans' most distinctive traits, their intellect and character. Once selection began to act on the brain, humans were able to transcend their physical environment and the evolution of human physical form effectively ceased.

Wallace argued that sympathy, a tendency to cooperate, and foresight would provide an advantage in the struggle among groups; that is, groups in which those characteristics were prevalent would thrive, while their competitors would diminish in strength and numbers and eventually disappear. The higher—more intellectual and moral—races would supplant the lower in a process of selection that continues to the present and explains why Europeans have consistently prevailed whenever they have come into contact with "low and mentally undeveloped" native populations. The point is reiterated in the conclusion to *The Malay Archipelago*, first published in 1869, where Wallace writes that the true Polynesians are doomed as are the feisty Papuans. "If the tide of colonization should be turned to New Guinea," he wrote, "there can be little doubt of the early extinction of the Papuan race. A warlike and energetic people, who will not submit to national slavery or to domestic servitude, must disappear before the white man as surely as do the wolf and the tiger." (These comments on the inevitable extinction of many

aboriginal populations are similar to those of Darwin, who while sometimes deploring both the methods and mores of the colonizers, assumed the inevitability of the stronger eradicating the weaker, and comforted himself with the thought that the ultimate results would be salutary [see Keynes 1988, 172, 408; Darwin 1969, 1:316].)

Thus Wallace downplayed the existence of a struggle for existence among individuals while stressing the importance of the struggle among groups—a move characterized as the displacement of internal with external social Darwinism by Durant (1979, 42), who also notes the paper's unmistakable debt to the writings of Herbert Spencer, especially his *Social Statics*. It was an argument that greatly impressed Darwin (Greene 1981, 103–04), and also William Rathbone Greg, a Scottish essayist and son of a prominent mill-owner. In “On the Failure of ‘Natural Selection’ in the Case of Man,” an influential article published anonymously in *Fraser's Magazine* (1868), Greg quoted Wallace at length, pointing to his claim that in humans, selection had come to center on the mind rather than body. He also agreed with Wallace's claim that natural selection continues to operate in the struggle among tribes, nations, and races, noting that: “Everywhere, the savage races of mankind die out at the contact of the civilised ones.” But Greg was primarily interested in his own society, where he felt that the beneficent process of selection had been halted. In civilized societies like England, medicine and indiscriminate charity allowed the least valuable members of society not only to survive but to propagate their kind. As a result, paupers and imbeciles were outbreeding the middle class.

Wallace's initial reaction to Greg's proto-eugenic article is unclear. But he did comment on a critique of Greg that appeared several months later in *The Quarterly Journal of Science*. According to the anonymous author of the critique, natural selection, including of moral qualities, *does* continue to operate both among and within societies. Thus “there is no excuse for speaking of a failure of Darwin's law or of ‘supernatural’ selection.” The author continues:

We must remember what Alfred Wallace has insisted upon most rightly—that in man, development does not affect so much the bodily as the mental characteristics; the brain in him has become much more sensitive to the operation of selection than the body, and hence is almost its sole subject. At the same time it is clear that the struggle between man and man is going on to a much larger extent than the writer in “Fraser” allowed. The rich fool dissipates his fortune and becomes poor; the large-brained artizan does frequently rise to wealth and position; and it is a well-known law that the poor do not succeed in rearing so large a contribution to the new generation as do the richer. Hence we have a perpetual survival of the fittest. In the most barbarous conditions of mankind, the struggle is almost entirely between individuals: in proportion as civilization has increased among men, it is easy to trace the transference of a great part of the struggle little by little from individuals to tribes, nations, leagues, guilds, corporations, societies, and

other such combinations, and accompanying this transference has been undeniably the development of the moral qualities and of social virtues (Anon. 1869, 153).

On reading this commentary, Wallace wrote Darwin (20 January 1869) asking if he had seen “the excellent remarks on *Fraser's* article on Natural Selection failing as to Man?” and remarking that: “In one page it gets to the heart of the question, and I have written to the Editor to ask who the author is.”

Several months earlier, in comments following a paper delivered at the British Association for the Advancement of Science meetings (S142a 1868), Wallace suggested for the first time that Darwinian natural selection could not fully account for human intellectual and moral evolution, a point he reiterated in the better known essay on Lyell's geology (S146 1869). Then in “The Limits of Natural Selection as Applied to Man” (S165 1870), he famously shocked Darwin, among others, by arguing more specifically that natural selection alone could not explain the development of certain intellectual powers, such as abstract reasoning, or higher moral sensibilities (or certain physical traits such as hairlessness), and that these qualities could only be explained by the operation of some “unknown higher law.”

The reasons for Wallace's announcement that natural selection is not a sufficient explanation of human evolution have been extensively debated by scholars, and need not concern us here.⁸ What is relevant is that his view that “more recondite” forces were also operating in the realm of mentality and morality did not imply abandonment of the views expressed in 1864. Indeed, as Charles Smith has noted, he chose to publish a revised version of the essay under the title “The Development of Human Races Under the Law of Natural Selection” in his *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* (S716 1870). Had Wallace fundamentally changed his view, it is hard to understand not only why he would choose to reprint that essay but how he could favorably review Galton's 1869 book with its selectionist account of human intellect, talent, and character. As Smith (2003–, Introduction) notes, Wallace's views were broad enough “to accommodate both natural selection and spiritualism . . .”

In any case, we can now understand the tone of the review as a reflection of views that Wallace and Galton shared in 1870: that both individuals and groups differ in their innate endowments, that contemporary Britons are less capable than ancient Greeks, that behavior is determined and imperfections in character are not explainable by the doctrine of original sin. Both are critical of a system of inheritance that interferes with meritocracy. And they would move closer together as Wallace came to side with Galton (and August Weismann) on the question of whether acquired characters are heritable and hence whether selective breeding is a *sine qua non* of human improvement.

Of course there were already differences, and as we will see, new ones would emerge and/or sharpen. While both Galton and Wallace were determinists,

Wallace's Owenite-inspired outlook allowed environmental reforms—and especially education—to be an indirect cause of hereditary improvement. They would part ways on spiritualism. Moreover, Wallace would come to situate women at the center of his scheme, whereas for Galton, women were always on the periphery. Wallace was much more libertarian than Galton, even though the latter was a Whig, and thus inclined to keep the functions of the state to a minimum. And Wallace's egalitarian convictions separated him sharply from the elitist Galton.

Those convictions were nowhere more evident than in Wallace's concluding comments in *The Malay Archipelago*, published in 1869, which discusses the lessons that can be learned from "savage" man. In contrast with Darwin, Wallace generally admired the aboriginals he encountered in his travels as a naturalist and ethnographer, and he often favorably contrasted their values and behavior with those of his compatriots. Thus he famously commented in a letter home: "The more I see of uncivilised people, the better I think of human nature on the whole, and the essential differences between so-called civilised and savage man seem to disappear" (S22 1855). He ends *The Malay Archipelago* with a description of the ideal social state to which he thinks the higher races have always been and are still tending. That condition is one of "individual freedom and self-government, rendered possible by the equal development and just balance of the intellectual, moral, and physical parts of our nature,—a state in which we shall each be so perfectly fitted for a social existence, by knowing what is right, and at the same time feeling an irresistible impulse to do what we know to be right, that all laws and all punishments shall be unnecessary" (S715 1891, 456).

Wallace then suggests that a social state close to attaining this ideal actually exists in some aboriginal communities, where everyone is law-abiding and virtually equal in wealth and knowledge. In such communities there are no masters and servants and the division of labour is muted, as is competition. As a result, there is little incentive to major crime, and petty crime is repressed, partly by public opinion, but mostly by "that natural sense of justice and of his neighbour's right, which seems to be, in some degree, inherent in every race of man." And Wallace goes on to suggest that while Europeans may have progressed far beyond savages in intellectual achievements, the mass of the population has "not at all advanced beyond the savage code of morals, and have in many cases sunk below it." He concludes:

We should now clearly recognise the fact, that the wealth and knowledge and culture of the few do not constitute civilization, and do not of themselves advance us towards the "perfect social state." Our vast manufacturing system, our gigantic commerce, our crowded towns and cities, support and continually renew a mass of human misery and crime absolutely greater than has ever existed before. They create and maintain in life-long labour an ever-increasing army, whose lot is the more hard to bear, by contrast with the pleasures, the comforts, and the luxury which they see everywhere

around them, but which they can never hope to enjoy; and who, in this respect, are worse off than the savage in the midst of his tribe.

This is not a result to boast of, or to be satisfied with; and, until there is a more general recognition of this failure of our civilization—resulting mainly from our neglect to train and develop more thoroughly the sympathetic feelings and moral faculties of our nature, and to allow them a larger share of influence in our legislation, our commerce, and our whole social organization—we shall never, as regards the whole community, attain to any real or important superiority over the better class of savages (S715 1891, 457).

Thus Wallace's passionate egalitarianism is already evident and distinguishes his social views from those of Galton (or, for that matter, Darwin). The divergences would only deepen over time. Over time as well, eugenics was transformed from a utopian ideal with no very clear practical ramifications to a concrete program to control human breeding, including proposals to segregate or sterilize the hereditarily unfit.

Wallace on "Positive" and "Negative" Eugenics

Although Galton did not object to this approach, his own concrete proposals all involved "positive" eugenics: the encouragement of breeding by those with favorable traits. More specifically, Galton wished to encourage members of the hereditary elite to marry each other and at a young age. Among his proposals to accomplish this end was an 1890 scheme to give Cambridge University women judged especially superior in physique and intellect £50 if they married before age twenty-six and £25 on the birth of each child (McWilliams Tullberg 1998, 85). This kind of non-coercive eugenics seemed to Wallace inoffensive, if futile. Thus he commented in *Social Environment and Moral Progress* (S733 2007 [1913], 141–42): "Sir F. Galton's own proposals were limited to giving prizes or endowments for the marriage of persons of high character, both physical, mental, and moral, to be determined by some form of inquiry or examination. This may, perhaps, not do much harm, but it would certainly do very little good." It would be ineffective since, on Wallace's view, natural selection worked by purging the worst, rather than by improving the good. As he said in an interview published as "Woman and Natural Selection" (S736 1893): "This method of improvement by the gradual elimination of the worst is the most direct method, for it is of much greater importance to get rid of the lowest types of humanity than to raise the highest a little higher. We do not need so much to have more of the great and the good as we need to have less of the weak and the bad. The method by which the animal and vegetable worlds have been improved and developed has been through weeding out. The survival of the fittest is really the extinction of the unfit."

Wallace was usually at pains to distinguish Galton's version of eugenics from the proposals for "artificial selection by experts, who would certainly soon adopt methods very different from those of the founder" (S733 2007 [1913], 142). Coercive

methods to prevent the less desirable types from breeding were anathema to Wallace, an ardent libertarian. But Wallace also rejected the doctrine of inheritance of acquired characters, and with it the view that correcting unhealthy conditions and habits could directly modify heredity. Thus some form of selection was required for race improvement. But again, the methods could not be coercive. Asked in an interview whether “in view of the iron law of heredity” it would not be desirable to prohibit criminals and the diseased and deformed from marrying, Wallace replied that the answer lay not in legislation, but in the woman of the future. When they became the selective agents in marriage, the unfit would be gradually eliminated from the race (S737 1894).

In *Social Environment and Moral Progress* Wallace wrote:

I protest strenuously against any direct interference with the freedom of marriage, which, as I shall show, is not only totally unnecessary, but would be a much greater source of danger to morals and to the well-being of humanity than the mere temporary evils it seeks to cure. I trust that all my readers will oppose any *legislation* on this subject by a chance body of elected persons who are totally unfitted to deal with far less complex problems than this one, and as to which they are sure to bungle disastrously (S733 2007 [1913], 143–44).

But the ostensible problem that eugenics addressed—the need to improve the hereditary quality of the race—was very real to him. Wallace never wavered in his beliefs that mental and moral traits were inherited and that since heredity was not directly alterable by the environment, the path to improvement necessarily involved selective breeding. This perspective did not obviate environmental reform—on the contrary, it was an absolutely essential prerequisite for hereditary improvement. But the role of reform was indirect: It created the conditions under which selective breeding could positively and effectively modify the human race.

Wallace’s own scheme was designed to avoid both the Scylla of coercion and the Charybdis of “free love” (the abolition of marriage). In the view of many political and social radicals, the key to race improvement lay in abolishing the institution of marriage and allowing women complete freedom in choosing their mates. Advocates of free love considered marriage dysgenic since the choice of a partner was so often based on financial or other considerations unrelated to heredity. In particular, women’s need for economic security induced them to marry men who were physically, mentally, or morally deficient. In a socialist society, women would no longer need to marry for base reasons, and if they threw off the shackles of marriage, the process of sexual selection would be allowed full play. There would be no need for political authorities or scientific experts to decide who should and should not breed. Women would naturally choose to mate with the fittest men and their collective choices would elevate the race.

But as Martin Fichman (2004, 256–57) notes, Wallace was a conservative when it came to marriage and sexuality, and he feared that free love would undermine

family life and long-term parental affection. In “Human Selection,” the first essay in which he publicly declared his socialism, Wallace characterized arguments for free love on eugenic grounds as “detestable” (S427 1890). Indeed, he treated these arguments as scornfully as he did proposals to legislate segregation or sterilization of the unfit.

His solution was to de-couple sexual selection from free love. As is well known, Wallace had a eureka moment after reading Edward Bellamy’s utopian novel *Looking Backward* (1960 [1888]), which imagines a classless society in which gold would no longer “gild the straitened forehead of the fool.” Instead of marrying the wealthiest men, women would choose those who were the bravest, the kindest, and the most generous and talented, thus assuring the transmission of these traits to posterity. Although Wallace had dismissed the importance of sexual selection (or at least the mechanism of female choice) in respect to other animals, he followed Bellamy in arguing that if full equality of opportunity for women were established, its operation would spontaneously and continuously raise the standard of the human race.

Those men and women who were physically, mentally, and morally superior would marry earliest and in consequence, produce the most children. Of course this scheme assumes that the rejected individuals would not be able to gratify their sexual desires outside of marriage. Wallace acknowledges that for men, who have stronger passions than women, this assumption may seem problematic. It is a problem he rather implausibly resolves by assuming that, in a reformed society, men will have no means of gratifying their passions outside of marriage. In any case, the result of unleashing the process of sexual selection would “be a more rapid increase of the good than of the bad, and this state of things continuing to work for successive generations, will at length bring the average man up to the level of those who are now the more advanced of the race” (S736 1893, 3).

Conclusion

Wallace was nothing if not an independent thinker. That is as true in respect to eugenics as other scientific and social matters. Wallace is often characterized as a fierce opponent of eugenics, but that is not quite right. His disagreement with Galton was based on different understandings of both how natural selection worked and what kind of improvement was needed. As he wrote in *Social Environment and Moral Progress* (S733 2007 [1913], 152), defending his Bellamy-inspired perspective on sexual selection, “this mode of improvement by elimination of the less desirable has many advantages over that of securing early marriages of the more admired; for what we most require is to improve the *average* of our population by rejecting its lower types rather than by raising the advanced types a little higher.” Wallace and Galton were both concerned with the hereditary quality of the population, which they considered badly in

need of improvement. Wallace rejected Galton's solution because he thought it ineffectual, not immoral.

Like Galton, he rejected the doctrine of the inheritance of acquired characters, and so unlike many on the political left, Wallace could thus not simply rely on social reform to do the job of race improvement. Although economic, political, and educational reforms were imperative, they could not by themselves modify human heredity. (Contesting the common view that a hard view of heredity had pessimistic implications, Wallace stressed that were Lamarckism true, bad habits and social conditions would have continuously degraded humanity [e.g. S737 1894].) And since Wallace agreed with Galton that mental and moral differences were largely attributable to differences in heredity, improvement of the human race necessarily involved some form of selective breeding.

But he was morally opposed to the two alternatives on offer, both of which involved interference with marriage, to Wallace an almost-sacred institution. Thus "free love," which appealed to so many political and social radicals, held no attraction for him, and legislation to prevent the unfit from breeding was if anything even more repugnant. Wallace's view of how natural selection worked combined with his libertarian-socialist commitments and views on women to yield a solution that was distinctly his own.

There is no obvious right answer to the question of whether that solution constitutes "eugenics," nor would the answer be of any significance. Eugenics is a notoriously protean concept, sometimes defined (as by Galton) expansively, and sometimes narrowly—depending both on prevailing attitudes and the aims of the writer or speaker. By some definitions, Wallace was an advocate; by any definition, he was also a critic. That was also true of a host of left-leaning biologists in the late nineteenth and first three decades of the twentieth centuries, such as J. B. S. Haldane, Julian Huxley, and H. J. Müller. But Wallace's unique blend of hereditarianism, egalitarianism, and anti-statism provides a particularly potent challenge to conventional categories. No simple label will do justice to his intriguingly complicated views.

Notes

1. For example, Marchant (1975 [1916], 467) reports that in a discussion of "the teachings of some Eugenists," Wallace said: "change the environments so that all may have an adequate opportunity of living a useful and happy life, and give woman a free choice in marriage; and when that has been going on for some generations you may be in a better position to apply whatever has been discovered about heredity and human breeding, and you may then know which are the better stocks."
2. However, with his later discovery of the principle of regression to the mean, Galton came to believe that he had exaggerated the potential speed of improvement (see Galton 1908, 318).

3. In "Hereditary Talent and Character" (1865) Galton had imagined a utopia in which the state instituted a system of competitive examinations designed to identify the country's most talented young men and women. (The exams for women took into account beauty, good temper, and "accomplished housewifery," as well as intelligence and character.) Eugenic marriages would be rewarded monetarily and with a lavish ceremony in Westminster Abbey. But this was clearly a fantasy.

Galton was not opposed in principle to coercion; rather, he recognized that it was irrelevant to positive eugenics and not politically viable in respect to negative measures. His views are most clearly detailed in *Memories of My Life*. Aiming to defend eugenicists from the charge that they promoted "compulsory unions, as in breeding animals," he insisted that eugenic marriages could only be promoted through social influence and recognition. But he also wrote: "I think that stern compulsion ought to be exerted to prevent the free propagation of the stock of those who are seriously afflicted by lunacy, feeble-mindedness, habitual criminality, and pauperism . . . I cannot doubt that our democracy will ultimately refuse consent to that liberty of propagating children which is now allowed to the undesirable classes, but the populace has yet to be taught the true state of these things. A democracy cannot endure unless it be composed of able citizens; therefore it must in self-defence withstand the free introduction of degenerate stock" (Galton 1908, 311). In general, Galton was very circumspect on the issue of compulsion in his published writings.

4. He later employed this example as an argument against Lamarckian inheritance, noting that "all the accumulated effort of thousands of years has not made us greater men, intellectually, than the ancients, clearly proving that there has not been a continuously progressive development in the race" (S737 1894, 83).
5. Mill sought Wallace out to join the Land Tenure Reform Association. According to Mason Gaffney (1997, 612–13), Wallace saw land inheritance as a dysgenic factor giving an artificial advantage to unfit heirs, although the point is not made explicitly in Wallace's 1882 book *Land Nationalisation*. Mill stands tenth in Smith's statistical ranking.
6. James Moore (1997, 300–03) argues that it was the rural misery Wallace witnessed in Wales, where peasant grievances, especially against rent charges (which replaced the ancient right to pay tithes in kind) had turned violent, that cemented Wallace's budding socialist sympathies.
7. This was a standard "Lamarckian" view at the time (and Owen, like almost all nineteenth-century writers, assumed the inheritance of acquired characters). For example, in his famous 1874 study of the "Jukes" family, Richard Dugdale assumed that family members had inherited a proclivity for criminal behavior, but that their hereditary tendency to crime could be easily diverted, especially through education, to more productive ends (Dugdale 1877; see also Paul 1995, 43–44).
8. Smith (2003–) and Fichman (2001, 2004) believe that Wallace always viewed natural selection as a law subservient to more profound forces. A long-standing view, however, is that Wallace experienced an abrupt change of heart on the matter of the evolution of human mental and moral traits—linked to his embrace of spiritualism and/or disenchantment with the domestic political uses being made of his work—sometime in the mid-1860s; for examples of this perspective, see Kottler (1974) and Slotten (2004).
9. Wallace also predicts that the large surplus of women over men, which acts as another hindrance to the operation of sexual selection, will disappear in a more egalitarian

society. Unlike Darwin, Wallace believed that, in respect to mental abilities, women were the equal of men, which explains why provided educational opportunities, they often proved their superiors in performance. But by the same reasoning, he concluded that women lacked the "inherent faculty" to compose music; after all, women receive a better musical education than men but have produced no great composers (see S737 1894).



15

Out of "the Limbo of 'Unpractical Politics'": The Origins and Essence of Wallace's Advocacy of Land Nationalization

David A. Stack

In the winter of 1839–40 Wallace and his brother William were surveying in Kington and Radnorshire. When their work at Llanbister was complete they travelled ten miles south to undertake a task that, according to his 1905 autobiography *My Life* (S729), was new to Wallace: "the making of a survey and plans for the enclosure of common lands." He was later to describe enclosure as "a legalised robbery of the poor for the aggrandisement of the rich," but in 1840 Wallace thought nothing of the "simple robbery" he was helping to perpetrate on the tenants, leaseholders, and scattered cottagers of Llandrindod Wells. The work was interesting, and he "took it for granted that there was *some* right and reason in it," and that the land would be rendered more productive.¹ When he returned to the district, over half a century later, he saw how wrong he had been. The land had been neither drained nor cultivated. The area of common land ostensibly reserved for the use of the poor had become a golf-links, whilst the local population, stripped of their right to keep animals on the moor and mountain, suffered from a "scanty and poor" supply of milk and were dependent on butter supplies from Cornwall and Australia. The only beneficiaries had been the landowners, who had increased the size and value of their estates. The whole proceeding, Wallace concluded, had been "unjust, unwise, and cruel" (S729 1905a, 1:150–58).

The story of how Wallace had grown from a naive surveyor aiding enclosure in 1840, to become the founding inspiration of the Land Nationalization Society (LNS), forty years later, was told in Chapter 34 of the second volume of his autobiography. The narrative structure of that chapter—which begins in 1853 with Wallace reading Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* (1851) and culminates in his 1889 embrace of socialism—has left its imprint upon all subsequent accounts of Wallace and land nationalization. This is understandable and, to a degree, inevitable, but it is also unfortunate. As much as any other autobiography—"the least