

## Book Reviews

Nancy Stepan persuasively demonstrates that the scientific and social characteristics of Latin America meant that eugenics encompassed more than the racist and conservative social agenda that defined the movement elsewhere. "*The Hour of Eugenics*" is an excellent addition to the literature on eugenics and the history of science in Latin America.

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PAULINE M. H. MAZUMDAR, *Eugenics, human genetics and human failings: The Eugenics Society, its sources and its critics in Britain*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, pp. x, 373, illus., £40.00 (0-415-04424-3).

Several studies have recently come out on the British eugenics movement, and this is one of the best. Displaying an impressive mastery of a range of different source materials, Pauline Mazumdar explains the statistical advances involved in human genetics by relating them to the careers and personalities of some of their main protagonists and also to the ideological and personal struggles taking place within the contemporary Eugenics Society. For human genetics, she shows, was inextricably bound up in its early years with the eugenics movement, which in turn had been shaped by the preconceptions of an earlier tradition of Victorian social reform, in which the focus of concern had been the existence of a hereditary class of paupers. Indeed, this "eugenics problematic", we are told, continued to dominate the field until it finally fell victim to the changes of social and political attitudes brought about by the Second World War—but not before its intellectual credibility had been undermined during the course of the 1930s by the work of a younger generation of scientists (among them, Lancelot Hogben, J. B. S. Haldane and Lionel Penrose), who found themselves sharply at odds with the class arrogance and political conservatism of their predecessors.

The case is so persuasively argued that it is easy to overlook the fact that the Eugenics Education Society was actually founded in 1907 at the very moment at which most politicians, administrators and social scientists were *breaking free* from "the eugenics problematic". After all, can old-age pensions and National Insurance seriously be seen as attempts to control a "hereditary pauper class"? Certainly by the 1920s the agenda of social politics was being dominated, not by the existence of a "residuum" of the casual poor, but by the problem of mass unemployment—something not easily explicable in terms of inherited defect. Thus, when "the biologists of the left" during the 1930s mounted their attacks on the eugenics movement for its class bias and its underestimation of the importance of the environment, they were simply coming round to a viewpoint which most laymen had held for at least twenty years or more. Little wonder, then, that the eugenics movement, unlike its Victorian forerunners (the Charity Organisation Society, for example), never gained the ear of the key formulators of social policy. Most readers of this stimulating book will probably conclude that the British people have had a lucky escape!

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JUNE ROSE, *Marie Stopes and the sexual revolution*, London, Faber and Faber, 1992, pp. xiv, 272, £14.99 (0-571-1620-6).

It hardly needs saying that Marie Stopes was a key figure in popularizing birth control and redefining female sexuality in the early twentieth century. This is not the first biography; that appeared in 1924, authored, (dare one suggest, "ghost-written"?) by her close friend Aylmer Maude. Another, shortly after her death, was also by a male friend with whom she had enjoyed one of her recurrent ambiguous relationships, perhaps describable as "amitié amoureuse" (and perhaps not). Ruth Hall, in 1977, took a less indulgent attitude, but did not have access to all the material June Rose has consulted. None of these former biographies deals as searchingly with the extent of Stopes's construction of the myth of her own life. It is easy to become bemused by the amount of documentation: the enormous collection in the British Library, additional material in the Contemporary Medical Archives Centre at the Wellcome Institute, further papers still in the hands of