

LET US MAKE PERFECT CHILDREN:  
THE RHETORICAL CONCEPT OF OBLIGATION IN EUGENICS MOVEMENTS

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Examining the concept of obligation in historical eugenics movements provides a cautionary diagnostic tool for the liberal eugenics movement. To see how this challenging obligation rhetoric plays into the social and legal aspects of medicine, I analyze both past and present eugenics movements and demonstrate that narratives of obligation are present in all eugenics movements. By looking at the interplay of obligation and perfection, one will be able to develop tools for ethical decision-making for today and the future. Genetic technologies are advancing at a disquieting rate, surpassing both our legal and ethical means to establish safeguards quickly. This thesis on the rhetoric of obligation assists in developing a framework for ethical practices that can account for these continuing technical advancements.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As a German woman, I am only the second generation of women in my family who have personal freedoms and who live free from the oppression of the national socialist (Nazi) dictatorship. My grandmother was the same age as I am now at that time and the stark difference between our lives has always fascinated me. By talking to her and researching in my German history classes I learned about some of the rhetoric of obligation that the Nazi regime used concerning a drive for perfection in humanity and human reproduction. Since I placed their rhetoric firmly in the past, I was surprised to encounter similar rhetoric in recent publications from the transhumanist liberal eugenics movement. While the liberal eugenics rhetoric has been widely called out as a remake of Nazi rhetoric by scholars such as Michael J. Sandel, I want to take a closer cautionary look at this topic and more thoroughly look at how obligation played a role in Nazi eugenic rhetoric and how this rhetoric compares to the liberal eugenics movement. By doing so, I hope to be able to draw a clearer dividing line between a rhetoric that is dangerous to humankind and a rhetoric which encourages human progress. This project intends to make clear distinctions between these discourses so that the assumptions of Nazi past cannot be used as a pawn in the game of genetic discourse anymore.

Every time a group of people comes out with a series of claims that echo narratives of a dark past, it is very easy to simply put them in the same category and mark them as a shadow of former times. I argue that one cannot throw all arguments from eugenic movements into the same pot, since they all come from different time periods and political systems. Nevertheless, I will also try to point out similarities in the rhetoric

and argumentation, which is used in historic eugenic movements and compare them to the ones today.

“Eugenics” is a highly controversial word that scholars have translated as ‘well-born’ (Sandel 63). Its main goal is “to improve the genetic makeup of the human race” (Sandel 63), which is an objective that transhumanists generally see as praise-worthy and bioconservatives condemn as ‘playing God’. The most famous, or infamous, eugenics movement in the early to mid-1900s culminated in the creation of the Nazi programs, which pursued a pure Aryan race. Due to their historic significance and my German heritage, I will use rhetoric stemming from these Nazi programs as my line of comparison when it comes to narratives of obligation in the liberal eugenics movement.

While I focus on the Nazi eugenics movement as my historical backdrop, it is important to note that the singling out of the unfit and imperfect has always been part of human history. In 1700, for example, “Massachusetts Colony passed a detailed immigration law that selectively excluded the sick or physically disabled” (Kraut 23). These individuals could then be sent back to their port of origin. Another illustration of this rhetoric would be the arguments of Margaret Sanger and other proponents of the American Eugenics Movement in the early twentieth century (Kevles 90). There are also numerous other instances of a society’s exclusion of people due to their imperfections. One of these stories is rather personal to me and my German family.

My grandmother was born in 1924 and raised in a state of perfection. The Nazi state awarded her mother the Mutterkreuz, a motherhood medal, for birthing four children to show her perfect duty to the state. My grandmother furthermore looked perfectly Aryan with her tall figure, blond hair and blue eyes. To exemplify this perfection even

further, my grandmother had documents proving that even her heritage was perfect. No dark blemishes of Jewish, Gypsy or other imperfection “stained” her vita.

Nevertheless, in this perfect world and my perfect family, there was a flaw. My grandmother’s older sister, my great-aunt, was born as a special needs child. While I do not know the exact name of her disease, the descriptions from my grandmother alludes to a minor case of Down’s Syndrome, since my grandmother refers to her as “slow” on the rare occasions she mentions her older sister. My great-aunt obviously did not fit into the “perfect” human picture that was sought in Nazi Germany at that time. From what I gather talking with my grandmother, her parents were obligated by the state to put her sister into the state’s care. She was admitted to a medical institution and died shortly thereafter from what the doctors attested as pneumonia or a similar disease. This hospital was known in the community for euthanizing individuals who were “sub-par” and imperfect.

But what does this historic narrative have to do with our current lives? Has not the age of eugenics come to a close? In contrast, a renewed rhetoric of obligation is now surfacing: “In the age of genome, the language of eugenics is making a comeback, not only among critics but also among defenders of enhancement. An influential school of Anglo-American political philosophers calls for a new ‘liberal eugenics’” (Sandel 75). But what has caused this recent rise in rhetoric pertaining to eugenics and the obligation to make sure that children have ‘good genes’?

The answer comes from the efforts of medical progress. It has only been for the past century or so that women have had access to prenatal testing. Through the legality of testing embryos for genetic diseases, women now have the choice to abort the fetus if a

specific illness is proven. This access to new technology and prenatal testing has revolutionized medicine and all eugenics rhetoric.

Illustrating this revolution is a case that was dubbed a “Wrongful Birth Case” by the media and that took place in March 2012. The case deals both with the rhetoric of eugenics and the rhetoric of obligation and it shows how current these topics are in today’s society. A hospital did not detect a female fetus’ Down’s Syndrome condition when performing prenatal testing. When the parents realized at birth that their daughter had this condition, they sued the hospital for wrongful birth, since they claimed they would have aborted their daughter otherwise. While the parents do claim that they are using the \$ 3 million that they were awarded for their daughter’s care, this case comes with a variety of ethical issues (Duerson).

With the parents’ claim that they would have aborted their daughter, they assume that this would have also been in their daughter’s best interest. While opinions differ whether this is the case or not, there is a question whether this court ruling leaves openings for discourse going against this ruling. In the United States, court rulings are whenever possible based on precedence, which means each ruling affects the ones following. This case, therefore, gives parents the right to a healthy child, something which has never been established before. Parents can now obtain monetary refunds if doctors do not give the parents a chance to abort the child (Duerson).

### **An Exigency for Discourse**

Coming from the wrongful birth case, one might ask why there is still a need to look at rhetorical discourse of eugenics movements if there are some laws and legal cases already in place. The answer to this question comes from the fact that the advancement of

biotechnology is now speeding past the ability of the legal system to implement ethical safeguards. The Australian Law Reform Commission is one example of a government entity trying to create boundaries with the “Essentially Yours” report (Trent 807). This report covers issues ranging from family genetic testing to genetic discrimination and issues of privacy. It tries to be a guiding light in the genetic debate to the citizens of Australia.

Nevertheless, technology was rapidly evolving even while the advisors to lawmakers were creating this report. The rate at which technology is progressing also raises the danger of biotechnology overstepping certain moral boundaries. Looking at eugenics discourse is essential, however, when trying to develop a system of checks and balances to make sure that biotechnology is used for the betterment of society and not for its demise. So while governments have a hard time passing quick guidelines for ever new ways of genetic pre-birth testing, eugenicists and bioconservatives are caught in a gridlock of contrasting ideas and opinions about the issue.

We are facing technological changes in our lives like no other generation before us. Parenthood now comes with a lot more responsibility through the developments in the field of genetic testing. While it used to be the case that the parents did not find out about their child’s genetic makeup until they actually saw it at birth, like in my great-aunt’s case, it is now possible to test for a variety of genetic factors in earlier stages of pregnancy. What started off as simply identifying a child’s gender on an ultrasound has now reached a level of unsurpassed expertise of the fetus’ genome.

Bioethicist and liberal eugenicist Julian Savulescu sees great hope in this future of genetic engineering:

With the tools of genetics, we can select offspring in a more reliable way. The power of genetics is growing. Embryos can now be tested not only for the presence of genetic disorder (including some forms of bowel and breast cancer), but also for less serious genetic abnormalities. Sex can be tested for too. Adult athletes have been genetically tested for the presence of the angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) gene to identify potential Olympic athletes. Research is going on in the field of behavioural genetics to understand the genetic basis of aggression and criminal behavior, alcoholism, anxiety, antisocial personality disorder, maternal behaviour, homosexuality and neuroticism (Savulescu 37).

In this thesis, I will address bioethicists such as John Harris and, more prominently, the aforementioned Julian Savulescu, who argue that parents have the obligation to provide society with healthy children who have “the best opportunity in life” (Savulescu 39). I understand the argument for betterment, which comes out of this movement, since I also believe that the very trait that makes us human is a drive for perfection. This drive for perfection is a concept that I will explore further on in this thesis.

Nevertheless, this thesis will not try to solve the question where ‘life’ starts or at what point a fetus obtains human-like status. I do realize that scholars such as Michael Sandel see life as a gift and therefore see a need for protection of the fetus. I also recognize that scholars such as Julian Savulescu advocate a stance of opposition when saying that “the reason that genetic selection is not ingratitude and intolerance for the gift of life is because the life in question is not yet the life of a child. Destruction of early human embryos and fetuses is not infanticide” (Savulescu 37). This thesis endorses

neither notion; rather it is a rhetorical analysis that argues for an inclusion of historical narratives in all debate about eugenics, while respecting each side of the issue. While I am claiming that some liberal eugenics rhetoric can be dangerous, I also want to look at how it is different from the Nazi eugenics movement and if there are arguments that serve for the betterment of humankind.

My thesis is divided into three parts. First, I look at a (shortened) history of the eugenics movements, putting strong emphasis on the Nazi eugenics program *Lebensborn* and its use of narratives of obligation. *Lebensborn* was a program that officially provided maternity homes to German women. Nevertheless, it was also one of the major outlets of Nazi eugenics rhetoric and encouraged the creation of ‘perfect’ children (Peter 47). Second, I introduce some more of liberal eugenics literature by Harris, and mainly Savulescu, and compare it to the obligation rhetoric coming out of *Lebensborn*. Finally, I draw implications and conclusions about the similarities and differences of these two discourses concerning the concept of obligation in eugenics movements on an individual, societal and human race level.

In the remainder of this introduction, I familiarize the reader with some concepts and a review of literature that will aid in the understanding of my topic. I touch on the rhetorical concept of agency, the concept of perfection, and, central to my thesis, the concept of obligation. Most of the philosophical theorists who inform my work come from the Frankfurt School of thought who especially with Jürgen Habermas has taken issue with eugenics movements. Major rhetorical theorists include American scholars such as Fisher, Burke and Bitzer whose theories provide a framework to analyze the

arguments of obligation coming out of the Nazi and liberal eugenics movements respectively.

### **Narratives in Connection with History**

As Walter Fisher states “The central point here is that there is no genre, including technical communication, that is not an episode in the story of life (a part of the ‘conversation’) and is not itself constituted by *logos* and *mythos*” (Fisher 347). The reason that I feel historical narratives in connection with the narrative paradigm are so important is because our life is a succession of stories. We base our rationality on whether the stories that we hear make sense to us and how our experiences play into our decision-making. Employing historical narratives as a check and balance system is vital to the debate of eugenics and genetic engineering. I choose narratives of obligation coming out of the *Lebensborn* program in juxtaposition with the ones of the liberal eugenics movement to create a new narrative reality when talking about the issues of prenatal testing. Narratives provide an avenue for ethical argument that cannot be accessed through technical discourse. This technical discourse is prevalent in the current biotechnology debate concerned with the human genome and does not satisfy the rhetorical exigence that arises when parents are faced with the choice whether abort a fetus after a genetic disease is discovered through prenatal testing.

Bitzer defines this exigence as “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (Bitzer 6). Nevertheless “an exigence is not rhetorical when its modification requires merely one’s own action or the application of a tool, but neither requires nor invites the assistance of discourse. An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive

modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse” (Bitzer 7). The genetic engineering debate definitely comes with ethical imperfections. And since law-makers cannot keep up for the most part with boundaries and legal systems, it is up to rhetoric as the agent and the realms of discourse to balance out persuasive messages and make sure that there is a moral societal consensus reached, which will provide human betterment to all people. But what should these historical narratives look like? How would one define a historical narrative in the context of eugenics?

The narratives of obligation from the *Lebensborn* program have two main components in this thesis. First, they serve as interruptions in the current biotechnology debate by issuing a counternarrative. This advancement of biotechnology is a social happening. It will be affecting everyone. It is thus necessary to interrupt current debates using these narratives so that people are socially aware of the rhetoric of obligation and its basis of perfection. By interjecting historical narratives in the genetic testing debate, we can go into the future not naïve, but prepared for what is to come. Fisher also sees the importance of narratives in providing a counternarrative to what one particular person might believe. Fisher writes:

For the person involved, these stories would satisfy the need for equilibrium and the demands of narrative probability and fidelity – or at least they could be defended using those principles. It may be, however, that another observer would think otherwise, that the involved person was rationalizing. In any event, it is precisely in this sort of situation that narrative rationality is relevant as a system

for determining whether or not one should accept a story, whether or not a story is indeed trustworthy and reliable as a guide to belief and action (Fisher 349).

The second trait that I would ascribe to these narratives is that they have to be historical. I am convinced that humankind cannot go into the future successfully without knowing its past. And while they do not need to be personal, like my great-aunt's story, I do believe that all of them teach us something about the rhetoric of perfection. Looking at *Lebensborn* can show us how the term "perfection" was used and what outcome it brought about in the end. These narratives give us moral grounding to make future decisions when it comes to issues and debates concerning biotechnology.

According to Fisher, it is important that these narratives be historical, since this gives them a coherence and a high probability of truth: "Any individuated form of human communication may constitute a 'good reason' if it is taken as a 'warrant for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered' by that communication" (Fisher 350). Fisher also points out that stories depend on their historical predecessors: "Formal features of narrative probability concern coherence, consistency, and noncontradiction. It appears that they also depend on a comparison and contrast with prior, accepted stories. (...). Narrative probability, therefore, should be viewed as including material as well as formal features. Such a view is necessary to any interpretation and assessment of stories, especially those told to 'mystify' an audience" (Fisher 364).

Another rhetorical theorist who sees importance in historical narratives is Maurice Charland who says that "individuals can act in concert or as a mass, they can respond to impersonal historical forces, and we can interpret the sum total of their individual actions with respect to a collective agent. Historical narratives offer such interpretations"

(Charland 140). Charland clearly states that historical narratives are able to offer interpretations of actions and are therefore useful in looking at a collective agent. This collective agent in my thesis is the rhetoric of eugenics movements.

### **The Rhetorical Concept of Agency**

Charland also mentions another important concept: agency. Agency is one of the cornerstones of rhetorical theory. The author or agent is the one who has responsibility of the rhetoric that he or she is using and can therefore be held accountable by his or her audience. Kenneth Burke has been notable for bringing agency into the rhetorical realm, but it was Jürgen Habermas (following in Hannah Arendt's footsteps), who looked at rhetoric as communicative action: "The actual awareness of being the author of one's actions and aspirations is interwoven with the intuition that we are called upon to be the authors of a critically appropriated life history" (Habermas 59). According to Habermas, it is vital to be the author of one's actions, whether they concern the affairs of live or our rhetorical choices.

It is important to also look at these concepts of agency in the bioethical realm. Rhetorical agency comes into play in each rhetorical situation, when exigences like the Wrongful Birth Case call for discourse. Bitzer says though that "in the best of all possible worlds, there would be communication perhaps, but no rhetoric – since exigencies would not arise. In our real world, however, rhetorical exigences abound; the world really invites change – change conceived and effected by human agents who quite properly address a mediating audience" (Bitzer 13).

Yet liberal eugenicist Harris employs a different kind of rhetoric; one which is not all-embracing of our free agency. "I will argue strongly not only for the freedom, but also

for the obligation to pursue human enhancement” (Harris 9). Harris still embraces rhetorical agency and the liberty to take communicative action, but at the same time he also closes openings of action- driven discourse by juxtaposing the word “freedom” with the word “obligation”. This creates cognitive dissonance in the realm of narratives each time the paradoxical terms of “freedom” and “obligation” are intertwined in Harris’s argument.

As Kenneth Burke rightly states “Action involves character, which involves choice - and the form of choice attains its perfection in the distinction between Yes and No (shall and shall-not, will and will-not). Though the concept of sheer motion is non-ethical, action implies the ethical, the human personality” (Burke 65). Following Burke’s argumentation, if one is obligated to do something, like improving our children’s genetic make-up, one might feel societal pressures to choose abortion rather than raising a child with genetic disease. While I agree with the notion that parents should have their children’s best interest in mind, a call for an obligation of improving a child’s genetic make-up might make us lose agency and free choice, when it comes to deciding whether we might accept a child with imperfections.

Proponents of liberal eugenics argue that rhetorical agency is still at play. Furthermore, they claim that we even have more of an agency now that we can take evolution into our own hands: “Evolution was previously about the selection of genes according to environment which conferred the greatest chance of survival and reproduction. (...). The next stage of human evolution may be rational evolution, where we select children who not only have the greatest chance of surviving, reproducing and

being free of disease, but who also have the greatest opportunities to have the best lives” (Savulescu 38).

We already live in a society where persons with disabilities are at a disadvantage. It is therefore not surprising that the Oregon couple from the Wrongful Birth Case would have chosen abortion had they known that their child would be born with Down’s Syndrome. Savulescu would applaud this ruling, since “modern eugenics in the form of testing for disorder, such as Down’s syndrome, occurs very commonly but is considered acceptable because it is voluntary, gives couples a choice over what kind of child to have and enables them to have a child with the greatest opportunity for a good life” (Savulescu 38).

Savulescu’s argument, however, would make it even harder for a family to choose to have a child with this condition, when the moral standard is to make sure that a child comes into this world with a perfect genetic make-up. As Burke says: “Language is a species of action, symbolic action- and its nature is such that it can be used as a tool” (Burke 69). *Lebensborn* also heavily relied on language as a tool to increase societal pressures instead of simply relying on state enforcement (Heineman). I develop this line of argument more in depth in the following chapters.

A rhetoric of obligation infringes upon this nature of symbolic action by closing openings of discourse with a ‘my way or the highway’ approach or as Savulescu phrases it: “Our future is in our hands now, whether we like it or not. But by not allowing enhancement and control over the genetic nature of our offspring, we consign a person to the natural lottery, and now, by having the power to do otherwise, to fail to do otherwise is to be responsible for the results of the natural lottery. We must make a choice: the

natural lottery or the rational choice” (Savulescu 39). Rhetorical agency is infringed upon through the speech of obligation. Savulescu gives us the ‘right’ way to be; to support the rational choice of genetic enhancement. Any other choice is dismissed out of the discourse by saying: “To most of us, the choice is obvious. To be human is to be better. Or, at least, to strive to be better” (Savulescu 39).

Hannah Arendt rightly points out the way speech and action are interwoven by saying that “this revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are with others and neither for nor against them-that is, in sheer human togetherness” (Arendt 181). She sees that there has to be a coming together in both speech and action, which is something that is heightened by both Nazi and liberal eugenics movements through the call to better genetic makeup and infringed upon by not emphasizing a choice for accepting the imperfections of a child with a genetic disease.

### **Perfection and Obligation**

When dealing with genetic enhancement and eugenics, one struggles with the idea of perfection. Proponents of liberal eugenics argue for human betterment. While they might not call their point of view a drive for perfection, it is apparent that this effort is the foundation of all their arguments. Bioethicist John Harris says that “There is no such thing as perfection, not least because there is no agreed or even agreeable account of what human perfection might consist in” (Harris 109). I, however, see a drive for perfection as the condition that makes us human and that underlies Harris’ argument to better humankind. We see imperfect humankind around us every day and are always looking for something mending these imperfections by being perfect in this way. Every time one is looking for betterment, one aspires for a new realm of perfection, something which will

give humankind new meaning. While every culture has different perceptions of perfection, one can always find a prevalent rhetoric that defines perfection in each society.

The concept of perfection is not only important in the moral realm, it also plays a key role in the rhetorical argument of this thesis. The Wrongful Birth Case and others like it try to define a rhetorical situation, which goes hand in hand with our human drive for perfection: “What is more ‘perfectionist’ in essence than the impulse, when one is in dire need of something, to so state this need that in one in effect ‘defines’ the situation” (Burke 70). So when one tries to make sense of a situation, one follows the basic human drive to be perfectionist to make meaning out of a rhetorical exigence. It is vital that in a time when parents express a need for rhetorical guidance that their situation is perfected by a clear definition of their options in the realm of biotechnology.

But is there really a drive within all of us to be perfect in the realm of eugenics as well? A drive to create a perfect human? This topic not only applies to Nazi Germany, but it is current in the biotechnology debate of the present-day. With new biotechnology, we are trying to improve humankind and to fix humankind. The more discoveries are made, the more possibilities appear on the horizon. The prospects seem limitless. But with this new biotechnology also come ethical issues, especially when dealing with human perfection.

To me, this driving to perfection is a double-edge sword. When talking about perfection in connection with euthanasia, Michael J. Hyde and Sarah McSpirtt make this very clear: “Our passion for perfection is admirable, it defines who we are as metaphysical animals, creatures that have a longing, a nostalgia, for security, comfort and

completeness in our lives. The same passion is humbling, too” (Hyde and McSpirtt 150). It is true that this need for perfection can bring out the best in humans. But this drive for perfection can also lead humanity down a slippery slope of dismay by singling out the “imperfect”.

While I strongly agree that this drive for perfection is part of the human condition, one needs to also look at the double-sidedness of this human condition. Proponents of liberal eugenics only see the good in the drive for perfection and argue for an obligation to better humankind while also distancing themselves from the negative sides of eugenics. I do not argue that their point of view is wrong or flawed, I believe this view needs to be counterbalanced with historical narratives to have open and equal opportunities for discourse in the realm of eugenics.

One example of this would be looking at an obligation to go against what Savulescu calls “natural lottery” (Savulescu 39). He argues that we now have the power to choose the perfect child and discard whatever imperfections the natural lottery hands to us. Some of the *Lebensborn* rhetoric is quite similar; it also talks about the natural lottery as something detrimental to the human race, or more specifically the Aryan race (Peter 23). Yet Savulescu simply wants parents to ensure a better future for their child. The Nazi rhetoric goes one step further and aims at society as a whole as their audience and recipients of their message. It is arguments like these that I address in the following chapters.

### **A Concept of Obligation**

Talking about a rhetoric of obligation is not new. Bitzer notes: “If someone remarks that he found himself in an ethical situation, we understand that he probably

either contemplated or made some choice of action from a sense of duty or obligation or with a view to the Good. In other words, there are circumstances of this or that kind of structure which are recognized as ethical, dangerous, or embarrassing” (Bitzer 1). So we can see that obligation is deeply intertwined with a specific ethical situation. Ethical decision making is often connected with a person having an obligation or duty to perform on his or her ethical standards.

It is true, however, that a language of obligation can be both empowering and disenfranchising in the realm of eugenics. A rhetoric of obligation can add a new dimension of rhetorical urgency to a particular topic, since it does not offer a free choice. “There are many specific sorts of obligations we might think of in connection with future generations: not to spoil the environment for them or use up valuable natural resources or leave behind sources of danger like spent nuclear fuel, unexploded nuclear weapons, or other dangerous pollutants, and obligations concerning their genetic inheritance” (Harris 79).

While I agree that there are cases of obligation toward our children like the ones mentioned above, I am a little hesitant to follow Harris’ approach. As a rhetorical agent, we, of course, have ethical responsibilities when it comes to different realms of being. Nevertheless, we might have different responsibilities for the environment compared to our children. When it comes to the Nazi Eugenics program of Lebensborn, the obligations were clear: first to the state and then to the children. Nevertheless, its call to make their children better genetically echoes some of Harris’ argumentation (Heineman).

Harris argues for “permitting people to make themselves and their children, longer-lived, stronger, happier, smarter, fairer (in the aesthetic and in the ethical sense of

that term) and in finding ways to do this which will protect the safety of the people and of course be consistent with good government and regulation” (Harris 5). Harris’ and other liberal eugenicists based their notions on a moral obligation always hinged to “good” government. In all reality though, democracy is not always a guarantee for right moral behavior, as bioconservatives like Sandel and Habermas try to make clear.

Harris quotes Savulescu, who states: “Reproduction should be about having children with the best prospects. But to discover what are the best prospects we must give individual couples the freedom to act on their own value judgement of what constitutes a life of prospect” (Harris 77). I agree with Julian Savulescu’s notions that freedom needs to be an integral part of agency when it comes to genetic engineering. What Savulescu does not mention is that these couples base their value judgements often on perceptions of society.

This freedom is also bound to ethical standards, which are different for each individual: “The unconditionedness of truth and freedom is a necessary presupposition of our practices, but beyond the constituents of ‘our’ form of life they lack any ontological guarantee. Similarly, the ‘right’ ethical self-understanding is neither revealed nor ‘given’ in some other way” (Habermas 11). Habermas points out that this understanding of freedom is different for different societies. This makes looking at the Nazi eugenics rhetoric so intriguing; it uses some of the same arguments the proponents of liberal eugenics are using, but in a different culture and time.

“Through my choices I ensure that my children are worse off than others either because I do not select against disability or disadvantage or because by failing to enhance them I leave them relatively deprived” (Harris 121). Yet his argumentation would favor a

society where persons with disabilities are looked down upon, because the way they are is not in any way favorable in his world view. And since he argues for this obligation there is also no way of discourse going against a discrimination of people with disabilities, since they are less than perfect in the view of liberal eugenicists.

This view of obligation can also be seen in some more of Savulescu's argument for human betterment: "One technology affords us with the power to enhance our and our children's lives, to fail to do so will be to be responsible for the consequences. (...). To fail to improve their physical, musical, psychological and other capacities is to harm them, just as it would be to harm them if we gave them a toxic substance that stunted or reduced these capacities" (Savulescu 38). Savulescu goes one step further than Harris. Not only does he argue for an obligation for genetic betterment, he claims that failing to do so would harm our children. This line of reasoning does resemble *Lebensborn* rhetoric, which also claims that producing genetically inferior children is actually harmful to them and society (Peter 47).

Hyde and McSpirtt also point out that "despite our many 'excellences', human beings are still animals, fallible creatures: at our best, we live lives that, at one and the same time, advance towards and forever fall short of our having it all together before we pass away" (Hyde and McSpirtt 151). This is the side of the double edge sword that we need to be more aware of during this biotechnology debate. In times of plastic surgery and genetic "betterment" on the rise one needs not to forget that an aspiring to perfection also comes with a possible discrimination against the imperfect under societal standards. As a skeptic, but not an opponent of biotechnology, I feel it is vital to look at how the rhetoric of "good genes" can be a danger, but also serve for human betterment.

One might say that we did learn from our past and that these mistakes will not happen again and therefore these narratives are simply creators of panic. Bioethicists Allan Buchanan, Dan W. Brock, Norman Daniels and Daniel Winkler are quoted in Michael J. Sandel's book *A Case against Perfection* taking the above mentioned position concerning eugenics: "The 'bad reputation of eugenics' is due to practices that 'might be avoidable in a future eugenic program'" (Sandel 76). This locus of argumentation believes that we did learn our lessons and that eugenics and creating better and perfect humans in the future will be morally sound, because "while old-fashioned authoritarian eugenicists sought to produce citizens out of a single centrally designed mould," writes Nicholas Agar, 'the distinguishing new mark of the new liberal eugenics is state neutrality'" (cited in Sandel 75).

Historical narratives provide us with a measure of comparison for our current rhetoric in the bioethics debate. Habermas claims that "as historical and social beings we find ourselves always already in a linguistically structured lifeworld" (Habermas 10). Habermas rightly points out that we are not only the Burkean symbol-using animals, but also historical and social individuals, who relate socially to one another on a historical basis. We can look at how rhetoric was used historically in connection with concepts of perfection and we can use these artifacts to gauge whether the liberal eugenics movement has a threat of culminating in discrimination against children with disabilities or parents who choose to raise these children.

Historical narratives like the one from my family's story and others similar to it, like the ones from *Lebensborn* and *Mutterkreuz* (Heineman 139) or even stories coming out of the United States Eugenics Movement (Tomlinson and Helms) can show us

different storylines of humans pursuing perfection. In this project I will use the Nazi eugenics program of *Lebensborn* as my main objects of study in this regard. While I am a strong proponent of human betterment, one should not go into the future with naïve notions about humankind. Perfection, after all, is a double-edged sword, which can wield to the advantage and disadvantage of humankind in the debate about genetic engineering.

Of course, walking on the thin edge of the double-edged sword of perfection is very challenging. Words are powerful. And as seen above, humans are fallible creatures. We do make the same mistakes again, even though it might be slightly different than before. This is why looking at these historical narratives is so important. While we pursue human perfection, we are also teachable and seeking to obtain perfect knowledge. “The *logos* of language escapes our control and yet we are the ones, the subjects capable of speech and action, who reach an understanding with one another in this medium. It remains ‘our’ language” (Habermas 11).

I hope this thesis will add a communication perspective to the field of bioethics when it comes to eugenic movements. This thesis’s goal is to bring clarification whether the liberal eugenics movement makes us transcend human boundaries or makes us want to ‘play God’. I want to point out that the liberal eugenics movement does have arguments similar to the *Lebensborn* rhetoric from Nazi times. Nevertheless, there is an underlying drive for human betterment, which should not get dismissed completely, since it is a goal that humankind should always aspire to in the long run.

## CHAPTER TWO: A RHETORIC OF OBLIGATION IN HISTORICAL EUGENICS MOVEMENTS

While eugenics has always been the subject of scholarly research, this has not been the case with the term of obligation. When looking at the concept of obligation historically, there is increased attention on the connection between euthanasia and obligation. Jacob M. Appel draws these conclusions in his 2004 article "A duty to kill? A duty to die? Rethinking the Euthanasia Controversy of 1906." He mainly centers his argument on concepts of duty in connection to euthanasia; yet he offers few words on eugenics. The connection between euthanasia and obligation has also gained more recent attention in the Terry Schiavo Case. In the field of Communication, Michael J. Hyde and Sarah McSpirtt identify euthanasia and obligation in their article "Coming to Terms with Perfection: The Case of Terri Schiavo." The authors discuss about how perfection played a key role in deciding whether Terri Schiavo would have her feeding tube removed, which also has a lot to do with obligation in various areas of decision making in the realms of euthanasia.

On the other hand there has been a lot written on the topic of eugenics itself without the mentioning of the concept of obligation. Celeste Condit in *The Meaning of the Gene*, examines discourses of how heredity has changed over time and how this has affected humanity. She looks at various time frames in history and how the meaning of the gene and eugenics has evolved, which is important when looking at obligation discourses. Also, Dorothy Nelkin and M. Susan Lindee talk about society's fascination with eugenics and its impact on popular culture in their work *The DNA Mystique*. A more historical approach is taken by David Kevles as he traces eugenics movement through

time in *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*. He also makes the claim that eugenics are now safer and better, since we have evolved from former times and learned lessons of history. Nevertheless, obligation has not been examined as a key factor in historical eugenics movements by any of the above mentioned authors.

This chapter focuses on the role of obligation in historical eugenics movements in the frameworks of medicine, legislation and the social realm. It will trace a rhetoric of obligation in eugenics movements through time starting from its beginning in late nineteenth century England to its evolvement in early nineteenth century America and also its crosspollination into the rhetoric of Nazi Germany. All the pro-eugenic discourses, be they positive or negative, American or German, employ a rhetoric of obligation.

A rhetoric of obligation is enforced through couching it first in scientific and medical notions; it is then put into societal notions and is legitimized in law. This can occur in both the negative and the positive realm of eugenics and there are strong parallels between the early American and Nazi discourse. As mentioned in my previous chapter positive eugenics deals with an emphasis on encouraging the “perfect” people to procreate, while negative eugenics deals with a rhetoric that wants to keep “inferior” people from having offspring. Both negative and positive eugenics turn this rhetoric into action and employ a rhetoric of obligation in all historical eugenic movements.

### **The early Origins of Eugenics and Obligation**

Eugenics is a highly controversial concept that scholars have translated as ‘well-born’ (Sandel 63). Eugenics seeks to improve the genetic makeup of the human race, which really invites controversy as to what constitutes “improvement.” Eugenics is first mentioned in 1883 by Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, to describe how heredity creates talent and character. He was convinced that through marrying into families with good genetic pedigree one could make sure that future generations would be gifted and talented (Sandel 63). He wanted eugenics to be “introduced into the national conscience like a religion” (Galton 42). While he does not use the words obligation or duty to describe eugenics, it is clear that eugenics for him is vital when looking at society’s health as a whole.

Nevertheless, his creation and coining of the word eugenics came at a time when little was known about genes in a scientific sense. The word “gene” was derived from Charles Darwin’s theory of “pangenesis,” which dealt with variation and origin of traits. And a trait is what most eugenicists of the early twentieth century meant when mentioning the word “gene.” Since this chapter deals predominantly with the early twentieth century, one needs to keep in mind that “genes” are not talked about in today’s definition of the word, but rather as hereditary traits in human populations (Nelkin and Lindee 3).

Galton’s idea of what eugenics would encompass was very clear from the beginning. Eugenics, for Galton, deals with “all influences that tend in however remote a degree to give to the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable” (Galton 17). Eugenics then dealt with a vast array of

factors and not with genetics as we see them today. Galton says that eugenics looks at any factor which could be contributing to the survival of the right race through improvement.

Eugenics in the early twentieth century employs treatises dealing with heredity with a much broader focus on what constitutes the passing on of genes by conflating heredity and genetics. This discourse subsumed environmental and family factors under the guise of genetics, giving the rhetoric of obligation a much larger appeal. Through this rhetoric of obligation, the identity of a person was irreversibly linked to his or her genetic make-up and one would be either considered fit or unfit. Whether one would be deemed fit or unfit would come with a different responsibility of keeping the American or German race pure from the infiltration of bad blood into society.

### **Flourishing of Eugenic Obligation in the Scientific and Medical Community**

But how do rhetorics of obligation play into the eugenics movements of the early twentieth century? Eugenic discourses have a great deal of cache, in early century America, especially in the realms of science and medicine. These discourses get intertwined with democratic discourses of good citizenship and therefore Galton's and Darwin's ideas found supporters in the United States of that time. In 1910, biologist Charles B. Davenport opened the Eugenic Records Office in Cold Springs Harbor to prevent reproduction of the unfit (Sandel 64). According to Davenport, this office cataloged "the great strains of human protoplasm that are coursing through the country" (Davenport 271). His arguments found many supporters including the Carnegie Institution, the heir of the Union Pacific railroad, and John D Rockefeller, Jr. (Sandel 64).

Another supporter of Davenport's work was Dr. Harvey Ernest Jordan, the dean of the University of Virginia. He had previously worked with Davenport at the experimental biology station at the Eugenics Records office. He encouraged Jordan to demonstrate that there is a hereditary difference between black and whites when connected to disease and topics such as sex control (Lombardi and Dorr 301). By this argument being closely tied to the medical profession it gives the persuasive messages a lot more authority and makes them more believable in the eyes of the public. Davenport had many advocates and sympathizers from various circles. Coming from the scientific community and academia, these advocates and sympathizers lent credibility and legitimacy to eugenics discourse. And one of the important features to their advocacy is the role of obligation.

This rhetoric of obligation for negative eugenics was based for the most part on science and presumed scientific argument. In 1922, Chicago medical school professor William S. Sadler cited figures of increasing rates of insanity in the United States to obligate the unfit to get sterilized. He and other proponents of eugenics couched their argumentation in claims that insanity and criminality are based on the bloodline and genetics. Therefore a duty exists for families with cases of mental disease or criminality to not have any more offspring. Science empowered the eugenics movement and created a newfound importance of heredity. Predisposition becomes more important than actual opportunity and destiny suddenly becomes genetic (Nelkin and Lindee 23). Couching these arguments in scientific notions made them even more powerful, since the scientific community had always been well respected by the American people before and at that time.

The reason that science and medicine claimed that they had to pursue eugenics was clear: they saw it as a case of a public health to continue the natural selection that was now being hindered by human progress. Lothrop Stoddard, another proponent of eugenics, made it very apparent that Darwin's theory of natural selection had worked very well over the past centuries to take care of the unfit, but times had changed. Due to improvements in health care and philanthropy more feeble-minded people were reproducing and society was obligated to hinder them from doing so. Statements like these make it apparent that eugenicists of that time saw themselves as the saviors of the human race and were heralded as such in the media (Paul 8).

Professors of medicine, like William S. Sadler, often used arguments of obligation. His colleague Dr. Paul Brandon Barringer from the University of Virginia often linked disease to bad genetics and a predisposition for crime (Lombardo and Dorr 301). By this rhetoric being present in colleges where future medical professionals learned this as part of their curriculum, it made eugenics much more scientific sounding than it actually was in reality. These soon-to-be doctors then carried this rhetoric with them and would advise patients on the basis of eugenics rhetoric. Feeling obligated by their doctors, patients would embrace this rhetoric more readily than if this persuasive language would come from a different source. The rhetoric created a sense of ethos, which made these appeals that much stronger. Looking at their doctors as authorities in the medical field, Americans would follow their notions of eugenic rhetoric. The medicalization of obligation is the starting point of notions of obligation. Coming from arguments of public health, Americans looked up to their doctors and took their arguments about eugenics as face value in their daily lives.

The rhetoric of obligation is also strongly tied to the notion of the public. Since interest in public health and eugenics ascended concomitantly, rhetorics from both fields borrow many of the same discursive appeals. Both used similar terms that overlapped each other. This relationship helped both fields to become more popular and emphasized the connection between heredity and disease. The obligation to have a healthy state would take precedence over individual rights and needs (Lombardo and Dorr 297). Professors at medical schools also stressed that physicians would be great carriers of a message of eugenics and could advance thoughts of obligation even further by projecting eugenic propaganda (Lombardo and Dorr 302).

One of the most fertile grounds for eugenics rhetoric was apparent in the curricula of the University of Virginia, where chairman of the faculty, Dr. Paul Barringer, claimed that diseases like tuberculosis, syphilis and typhoid fever are indicative of imperfect genes or blood (Lombardi and Dorr 301). Ivey Foreman Lewis, another faculty member at the University of Virginia, offered a course in eugenics and stressed a connection between eugenics and public service. His colleague Robert Bennett Bean was another proponent of a strong connection between medicine and eugenics and later became known as one of the fathers of scientific racism. Under their lead the University of Virginia turned out graduates that under a sense of obligation to eugenics notions would later serve in places like the Department of Public Health where they were responsible for atrocities like the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment (Lombardi and Dorr 303).

### **Eugenic Obligation moves into Society**

This rhetoric of obligation also came with propaganda from the newly founded American Eugenics society in 1922, which was the first time eugenics was officially tied

to societal notions and not primarily the medical field. At state fairs, this society organized “Fitter Families” contests, where contestants would win trophies after submitting their eugenic history and took medical, psychological and intelligence tests. To establish this rhetoric of obligation even more, eugenics classes were also offered at universities across the country and by the 1920s, 350 American colleges had courses reminding young, Anglo-Saxon Americans of their duty to reproduce to better society’s gene pool (Sandel 65). Using obligation in both realms of the negative eugenics as well as the positive eugenics takes one back to the notions of perfection. Both types of eugenics obligate one to be perfect, yet in different ways in positive and negative eugenics. The double-edged sword of perfection divides society between the fit and unfit.

Another part of societal norms that added emphasis to a sense of obligation in eugenics rhetoric was the stock breeding metaphor, which first appeared at these state fairs. American farmers had been breeding their cattle for several decades to obtain best results in production. Eugenicists then took this practice and applied it to everyday America. This metaphor appeared in over a third of all articles written on eugenics or genetics of the traditional eugenics era (Condit 34). Mary Watts, the organizer of a “Fitter Families” contest at the 1920 Kansas Free Fair, praised this event by saying that finally after years of judging the stock of horses, now American families would be tested and receive the same attention as their cattle on the American farms (Paul 11).

Stock breeding, like in farming, put people into clearly defined categories. The breeders were the elite, fit class and the rest of the population, however, was put in the category of the imperfect. This stock metaphor saw people as a collective herd with no

individual rights and made a sense of obligation or duty to society much stronger, since most people could follow the associations with animal breeding (Condit 38).

A chart at the 1920 Kansas Free Fair cited unfit traits as “feeble-mindedness, epilepsy, criminality, insanity, alcoholism [and ] pauperism.” It claimed that all these traits could be extinguished with pure eugenics marriages over three generations. It also compared an emphasis of pedigree in pigs, chicken and cattle with the need for United States citizens to focus on their eugenics pedigree as well (Nelkin and Lindee 23). This use of propaganda made the visitors of these fairs feel obligated to try to eradicate these imperfections from their families and make sure that their children would have the best chance in life.

On the side of immigration, there was also a strong drive for only admitting genetically sound individuals. Officers were quite open about keeping out people who they saw as a threat to the purity of the race. They also argued for the heredity of infectious diseases and how illnesses like syphilis could in fact be contracted easier through a genetic imposition towards that disease (Lombardi and Dorr 308). By connecting so many aspects of disease and social life to eugenics, Americans were burdened by living up to these standards and upholding a sense of purity to not be seen by society as opposing this national cause. All these aspects were part of everyday American life. Eugenics thus became irreversibly linked with the life of Americans.

### **Eugenic Obligation is Legalized**

But a rhetoric of obligation came not from the financial supporters of Davenport’s work, but from politicians and legal reformers. President Theodore Roosevelt was very vocal about obligating society to be eugenically pure in a letter to Charles B. Davenport

on January 3, 1913, which shows traces of social Darwinist discourse: “Some day, we will realize that the prime duty, the inescapable duty of the good citizen of the right type, is to leave his or her blood behind him in the world; and that we have no business to permit the perpetuation of citizens of the wrong type” (Sandel 65).

Here, Roosevelt directly addresses the “good” citizen. On the one hand, he imposes an obligation onto people who see themselves as having the right blood or good genes to procreate and find the right person to procreate with for the betterment of society. On the other hand, one can also see that while one might be obligated to assist in the advancement of the gene pool, there is also an imposition on American society to hinder imperfect members from multiplying. This double-edged rhetoric puts a burden on society and makes an aspiring for perfection much more prevalent in the minds of the American people as a whole. The two dimensions of perfection call for encouraging those with good genes to procreate and prevent people with bad genes to reproduce.

President Roosevelt was not the only advocate for eugenic practices. While the majority of proponents were politically conservative, this rhetoric of positive eugenics of improving the American people also appealed to many social reformers. In Georgia, social crusaders put eugenics on their agenda as well as pensions, free school books and well-baby clinics. Negative eugenics also had its fair share of support on the side of the feminist social movement. Even Margaret Sanger, prominent leader in the feminist movement, called for birth control in order to keep the unfit from procreating (Paul 20).

Proponents of eugenics felt that simply obligating society to better its genetics was not enough. What is normally termed positive eugenics is a call for white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants to have more children and be mindful of eugenically pure marriages.

Eugenics supporters took it one step further and started lobbying for legislation to prevent imperfect members of society from procreating, which is going towards a negative eugenics, where the imperfect will be kept from having more children. In the case of the United States this came with laws of state enforced sterilizations. In 1907, Indiana adopted the first law for forced sterilization of mental patients, prisoners, and the poor. Overall, 29 states adopted legislation with a total of 60,000 people being sterilized as a result of these laws (Sandel 65-66).

Roosevelt also brings these notions before Congress. He claims that the one sin, which is national death, is the race suicide that comes from Anglo-Saxon women not having enough children (Appel 630). These implications go along the same lines of his earlier argument for the right blooded citizens to have the duty to birth more children. By speaking to Anglo-Saxon women, Roosevelt creates clear categories as to who is seen as having perfect genetics and who does not. He addresses Anglo-Saxon women as the ones responsible for the purity of the human race. By putting responsibility on the shoulders of women, he creates a much stronger sense of obligation on their part by drawing them as the moral vanguards of society. It is not up to the rest of society, including their husbands, to be genetically pure, but it is the obligation of the Anglo-Saxon women to ensure the spotlessness of the race by having multiple children.

There was also a large population of women who found their life cause in propagating eugenics messages. Eugenicists saw women very well fit for the work with families due to their social competency. This, of course, made it much harder for other women to withstand the rhetoric of obligation, since it came from women of their background and social class. Women did not want to be blamed for the downfall of good

genes. The Eugenics Record Office also still saw the women's primary duty in reproduction. Work contracts thus were terminated after three years of employment so they could focus on procreating with their eugenically sound husbands. (Paul 55).

The drive for obligating society through the use of legislation cumulated in the 1927 Supreme Court case *Buck v. Bell*. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes used *Jacobson v. Massachusetts* (1905) as precedent to enforce eugenics. *Jacobson v. Massachusetts* had made it legal for government to force people to be vaccinated. Coming from the same premise of protecting society from demise and upholding racial purity, this Supreme Court case made it legal to forcibly sterilize American citizens (Sandel 66). The mandatory vaccine laws served as the legal foundation for forced sterilization. The Justice looked to the medical field as his backing in the case of eugenics. By doing so, he tied the legal assessment to medical and scientific arguments and therefore legitimized this argumentation to a further extent.

The case dealt with Carrie Buck, 17, who was deemed feebleminded and was to undergo forced sterilization. Both her mother and daughter were also deemed unfit for reproduction, therefore requiring Carrie to be sterilized. Oliver Wendell Holmes illustrates an obligation of positive and negative eugenics quite well: "We have seen more than once that the public welfare may call upon the best citizens for their lives. It would be strange if it could not call upon those who already sap the strength of the State for lesser sacrifices" (*Buck v. Bell*, 274 U.S., 1927 in Warner and Tighe). The judge finds the obligation on the fit members of society to have more children more of a sacrifice than for an unfit person to be sterilized. With this rhetoric of obligation carried through the social sphere into the legal realm, it was made much more of a requirement for the

American people to buy into the ideology of eugenics. Obligation is now enforced not only through the medical field, but also legally and legislatively.

Again, here the obligation for the purity of the race is placed on women. Carrie Buck's sterilization is based on the fact that her mother, not father, was also feeble-minded. The judge traces her imperfections through the maternal line and makes it apparent that in most cases the female body is the carrier for bad blood and bad genes. While Roosevelt had earlier placed the obligation for a continuation of the pure race on the "fit" women, the judge in this Supreme Court Case now blames "unfit" women for polluting pure blood and forces them to be sterilized. It is notable that in the reasoning of the court there was no mention of the role of men in negative eugenics and the burden of sterilization was in this case only placed on the women of society.

Nevertheless, this drive to pass legislation dealing with eugenics was not new. As early as 1897 Congress asked for data collection on marriage records. These marriage records should help with better marriage decision-making to improve the overall health of the race. This bill, however, did not pass (Lombardo and Dorr 307), but after a lot more rhetoric of obligation the proponents of eugenics finally got their way in the Supreme Court *Bell v. Buck*. This legalization of eugenics rhetoric shows how vital it is to look at arguments of obligation, since often these persuasive messages become law and are then interpreted in the legal realm.

### **Eugenic Obligation is embraced by German Scientists and Medical Field**

Across the ocean in Germany, this rhetoric of obligation fell on fertile ground. Adolf Hitler shows his affinity to eugenics in his book *Mein Kampf*: "The demand that defective people be prevented from propagating equally defective offspring is a demand

of the clearest reason and, if systematically executed, represents the most humane act of mankind” (Hitler 255). Here one can see that a rhetoric of obligation is already turning into demands to the people of Germany of that time. Nevertheless, Hitler still appeals to humanity and goes along the same lines of negative eugenics as the American proponents of eugenics.

During the first years of the Nazi rise to power, American eugenicists were quite involved with their German counterparts. Harry Laughlin, superintendent of the Eugenics Record Office, organized the dissemination of Nazi propaganda. In 1935, at the International Congress for Population Science in Berlin, Laughlin and Clarence Campbell, the president of the Eugenics Research Association, served as vice-presidents. The Nazis also admired American eugenicists and a lot of American propaganda was translated into German (Paul 86). Here again, eugenic thought originated in the scientific community and the cross-pollination of both the American and German eugenic movements helped Hitler to take these notions again in the realm of law and codifying this sense of obligation.

One German historian, Reinhold Mueller, noted in 1932 how important the American eugenics movement was to Germany: “Racial hygiene in Germany remained until 1926 a purely academic and scientific movement. It was the Americans who busied themselves earnestly about the subject. Through massive investigations in the schools they proved (with impeccable precision) Galton’s thesis that qualities of the mind are as heritable as qualities of the body; they were also able to show that these mental qualities are inherited according to the very same laws as those of the body” (Proctor 98). By looking to American research, German eugenicists had much more to go on rather than

their own claims. They did not have to admit responsibility for coming up with these claims themselves.

The German medical community was very intertwined with the legal realm as well. The Nazis found biology and medicine as useful vehicles to advance their goals and the scientists looked to the Nazis for support in their endeavors. Gerhard Wagner, leader of the German medical profession at that time, stated that “Knowledge of racial hygiene and genetics has become, by a purely scientific path, the knowledge of an extraordinary number of German doctors. It has influenced to a substantial degree the basic world view of the State, and indeed may even be said to embody the very foundations of the present state” (Proctor 45). By saying this, the medical profession acknowledged the immense power they had in obligating persons to follow eugenic notions. This quote also shows how closely interrelated the field of medicine was with the government at that time.

Dr. Alfons Stauder, the head of the German Medical Association was very much aware how to connect their interests with Hitler politically: “The leading medical associations of Germany –the German Medical Association and the Hartmanbund- welcome with greatest joy the determination of the Reich government of national reconstruction to create a true Volk community..., and place themselves happily in the service of this great task of our fatherland, with the promise faithfully to fulfill our duty as servants of the people’s health” (Proctor 70). The medical profession saw their push for negative and positive eugenics as a way of serving their people and their health, which is a morally sound goal. But it is the fact that the medical profession saw it as their duty to serve the health of the people that made eugenical arguments so convincing.

Scientists saw great benefit of the Nazi rise to power as well and saw the National Socialist Movement as an ally in their research. Scientist Otmar von Verschuer said that: “the parallel development of political and scientific ideas is not by chance but rather by internal necessity... We geneticists and racial hygienists have been fortunate to have seen our quiet work in the scholar’s study and the scientific laboratory find application in the life of the people... We continue quietly with our research, confident that here also, battles will be fought which will be of greatest consequence for the survival of our people” (Proctor 295). The claim that eugenics is such an improvement on the lives of the people resonated well with society. The Germans had always looked up to their scientists and acknowledged that scientific research would lead to greater things. This was the same case with eugenics. Couching arguments of obligation in the scientific field gave the arguments that much more credibility and helped advance positive and negative eugenics.

### **Eugenic Obligation is again Legalized**

Hitler also went into the legal realm and passed the 1935 *Nuremberg Laws*. They received praise from American eugenicists and also dealt in part with state enforced sterilization (Sandel 67). Nevertheless, the laws went a step further than American eugenics and only gave full citizenship to the fit of the German state. Going along with the same rhetoric of obligation of the American eugenics movement they state that “taken with the knowledge that the purity of the German blood is the condition of the continuing of the German people, and filled with the unwavering will to secure the German nation for all eternity, the people’s congress has passed these laws” (Die Nuernberger Gesetze vom 15. September 1935). Race suicide was seen as a threat to both American and German people at that time and both governments, whether democratic or autocratic,

passed legislation to enforce the rhetoric of obligation in both countries. Both governments also favored notions of a perfect Nordic person with America going for white Anglo-Saxons and Germany for white Aryans, which made exchanging (pseudo)scientific research that much easier.

Hitler's 1933 Racial Hygiene Laws also codified the rhetorics of obligation into legal practice. The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring required all German doctors to register all cases of hereditary disease. It also established 200 hereditary health courts, who decided on sterilization of the unfit of the state. This law also established Nazi eugenics institutions, where feeble-minded persons were taken for scientific research (Die Nuernberger Gesetze vom 15. September 1935). In Germany a total of 300,000 people were sterilized, five times more than in the United States. Yet, this progress was soon deemed too slow and inefficient to purify the race (Condit 27).

Like in the United States, the sterilization laws were also seen as a way of eliminating crime and saving the state money. Prison cleric Ebel claimed that "when one reflects upon the fact that some proportion of the genetically ill are also morally defective and have broken the law, then one can easily understand how important sterilization may be in helping to reduce criminality." This, in turn, would also assist with saving money for the German state (Proctor 102). These reasons resonated with the German people as they had done in the American realm and a duty was instilled in these people to keep their children safe from criminals by supporting negative eugenics.

Physicians used the term of obligation also in a way as to relieve burden from society from taking care of the unfit: "It must be made clear to anyone suffering from an incurable disease that the useless dissipation of costly medications drawn from the public

store cannot be justified. Parents who have seen the difficult life of a crippled or feeble-minded child must be convinced that, though they may have a moral obligation to care for the unfortunate creature, the broader public should not be obligated...to assume the enormous costs that long-term institutionalization might entail” (Proctor 183).

The arguments of saving money for the state had also previously resonated with the American public. The Nazis did acknowledge that there were parents that wanted to raise children that did not live up so societal standards genetically, but the collectivistic approach was more important. If one would think of others, then one would realize that by bringing such a child into the world one would be obligating society to take care of this child, which is a burden that is unethical to load on fellow citizens.

Hitler also instituted several positive eugenics programs, like loans and subsidies to make the obligation of breeding of favored groups easier. He also established the *Lebensborn* program which let single and married women who were deemed eugenically sound give birth in special maternity homes with supreme healthcare (Paul 87). Members of the elite military S.S. were encouraged to have numerous children with racially perfect women (Kevles 117). Right after the German government passed these laws the *LA Times* ran a story titled “Why Hitler Says: ‘Sterilize the Unfit!’” and claimed that “Here, perhaps is an aspect of the new Germany that America, with the rest of the world, can little afford to criticize” (Burchardi).

*Lebensborn* can be loosely translated as fountain of life (Hillel and Henry 11) and was an organization helping SS families. The SS was Hitler’s model armed forces division and was responsible for instituting the eugenics policy into practice. On the one hand, they enforced negative eugenics by eliminating the unfit from society. On the other

hand, they also functioned as examples of positive eugenics (Weingartner 198) The SS men were handpicked due to their preferred traits and were asked to pass on these traits to as many children as possible (Hillel and Henry 33). This organization provided maternity homes for SS wives and other married and unmarried women which showed promise of carrying eugenically sound children. But after several years, *Lebensborn* grew into an apparatus of unseen proportions. Children with valued eugenics traits were taken from their homes in conquered territories and adopted by SS families in order to further the Nordic Aryan race (Weingartner 198).

Women were the important factors here as well. *Lebensborn* put an emphasis on women that was loud and clear. Fritz Lentz, one of the leading eugenicists in Germany at that time, claimed that: “Women are specifically selected as breeders and rearers of children and as persons who are successful in attracting the male...Hence arise the essential differences between the sexes...Not only do these differences exist, but they are natural and normal” (Proctor 51). The obligation on women to the benefit of the survival of their kind was rather strong, since it was seen as the natural role of the women to make sure that her offspring would be fit and perfect under the eyes of society.

Lentz goes on to say that “Since women are selected by nature mainly for the breeding of children and the allurements of man, their interests are dependent upon those of man and of children and are directed towards persons rather than towards things...[Woman] can more readily put herself in another’s place, she lives more for others, her main motive being her love for her husband and her children” (Proctor 51). By praising the woman’s traits of being able to think about others, it was easy to put an obligation of improving the German race on women. Since they were already thinking of

others, they would now think of others in a eugenical sense for the betterment of the nation.

In the early stages of Hitler's rise to power, the medical profession already saw the obligation of women to breed a pure race working successfully. The publication of the German physicians' association *Deutsches Aerzteblatt* claims: "Through the greatness of the Revolution-and the inner genetic power of National Socialism-the value of woman has changed, and today, one sees the ideal of the exceptionally Nordic woman thrust forward into the public arena" (Proctor 119). This shows that the sense of obligation was seen as resonating with the Nordic women of National Socialism. It is inherent to the characterization of the Aryan women to want to line up with National Socialist ideals and bear children that would improve the German race in the long run.

Nevertheless, while Hitler and his laws were embraced by the American eugenics movement and people such as Rockefeller even funded Hitler (Sandel 67), it was ultimately the negative eugenics and the following Nazi atrocities that silenced eugenics movements worldwide. Positive eugenics, however, did not receive much of a backlash. In the earlier years of Nazi rule, eugenics and anti-Semitic policies ran independent from each other. Before 1933 German eugenicists had even included Jews into the Aryan race. But by 1935 these two sectors of Nazi thought had merged and by 1939 had moved beyond sterilization to euthanasia of individuals deemed unfit for procreation, including people of Jewish faith and other "lower" classes of race. This suggests that scientific discourse here, just like in the American eugenics movement, can be used in such a way to justify horrible acts of eugenic notions.

Even though historical eugenics movements have ultimately different outcomes, they have several similarities in a rhetoric of obligation. This rhetoric plays out in eugenic discourses in three categories: It finds supporters in the medical and scientific realm, moves in the societal realm, and is legitimized through law-making. This demonstrates the pervasiveness of the obligation discourse and how it relies on a variety of intertwining and reinforcing rhetorical appeals. All want to instill a strong sense of duty or obligation into the English/American/German people. There are many different ways eugenic discourses unfold. Some are seemingly innocuous, others very abhorrent. However, all of them share one main thing in common: a rhetoric of obligation, which moves from the medical to the societal and then to the political realm.

Also, all eugenic movements appealed with this sense of obligation to the “fit” of society. In the case of the American eugenics movement this was clearly the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. On the other side of the ocean, the white Aryans were the image of perfection propaganda. These parallels cannot be overlooked. There is a definite cross-pollination of both eugenics movements not only in research, but also in the way the fit and unfit were portrayed. Both movements saw genetically impaired children as unfit and tried to save the state money and keep criminals from coming into being by positive and negative eugenics. Science was also used in the same ways to couch arguments of obligation in both societies as a whole.

Historical eugenic movements obligate the individual to act for society and have a collectivistic approach, while often placing responsibility on the woman for ensuring the purity of the human race. This eugenic obligation is always connected with scientific progress and according to eugenics proponents purely based on scientific facts. The

importance put by science on heredity made it easier to distinguish in society between the good and bad and turn social differences into genetic ones. Furthermore, in both cases a rhetoric of obligation ends in legal measures and is inscribed in laws, which makes looking at these persuasive arguments instrumental when looking at eugenic movements. In an age of genetic engineering a rhetoric of obligation concerning genetics is resurfacing.

## **CHAPTER THREE: A RHETORIC OF OBLIGATION IN LIBERAL EUGENICS MOVEMENTS**

The history of eugenics programs in the United States of America and Europe offers a clear warning. Yet, eugenics rhetoric remains in today's age and is becoming more prevalent with increases in genetic testing. We are in the age of genomes, where science can determine whether one's DNA is healthy or contains imperfections. This chapter examines to what extent the role of obligation is still present in these eugenic movements and whether this obligation is again legitimized through the legal, medical and social realms. The first section highlights the various ways obligation rhetoric seeps into the discourse on parental decisions. These ways manifest in certain material health practices that codify these obligations, like mandated genetic tests by physicians and insurance companies. The second part of this chapter deals with how these rhetorics of obligation affect other aspects in the social realm like genetic essentialism and gender issues. Lastly, I will focus on how the sense of obligation in the medical and social areas of life ties into legislative action.

During the previous eugenic movements, parents could only exhibit positive and negative eugenics through having or not having children. The more "perfect" members of the population were encouraged to procreate, while lower classes were encouraged to use birth control and be sterilized. Now eugenics movements are calling to the parents again to keep their children eugenically sound. But what does this mean? What constitutes a perfectly healthy child? The fact that these questions have no clear answers makes it easy for obligatory rhetoric to take hold. Liberal eugenicist Nicholas Agar states that "Hitler and GATTACA have made eugenics an unpopular idea. However, unpopular is not the

same as being wrong. (...)The only way to make the thesis of liberal eugenics fit for trial in the court of moral opinion is to vigorously argue for it” (Agar VII). Examining how obligation plays a part in this vigorous argument is key when looking at the liberal eugenics movement.

### **An Obligation to be Healthy**

Opinions about what constitutes a healthy child differ from community to community. This is apparent and can be seen in the deaf community. Most people outside the deaf community see deafness as something imperfect and as a disability. This ‘sickness’ needs a medical solution to make it easier for the deaf to function in the world of the hearing. Nevertheless, some people in the deaf community would argue that being deaf “is a sense of community and identity to be cherished” (Sandel 47). Therefore, they see being deaf as part of their being and not as a disability.

Liberal eugenicists argue that health is a way of maximizing happiness and therefore they cling to utilitarianism. Eugenicist Julian Savulescu states that “health is not intrinsically valuable, but only instrumentally valuable; a resource” (Savulescu, “New Breeds of Humans” 36). Characterizing health as a commodity makes it easier to accept other eugenics’ claims as true. If health is something we can obtain or buy as a resource, it is easy to want to achieve this perfection for one’s children as well.

Savulescu furthermore calls for parents to also be “morally obligated to genetically modify their children,” in areas of “memory, temperament, patience, empathy, sense of humor, optimism to give them the best opportunity of the best life” (Savulescu, “New Breeds of Humans” 36). A call for giving children the best opportunity is very reminiscent of the older eugenics movements. Nevertheless, in times

of increased competition for spots in college or jobs, parents do want their children to have the best chance in life. Drugs, like Ritalin, are already seen as acceptable methods to modify children's behaviors (Sandel 59). In these cases, Savulescu's eugenic calls of obligation to alter temperament and patience are already being realized through medication. Savulescu's enthymeme then follows by saying that genetic modifications should be fine as well, if parents already put their children on medication.

Liberal eugenicists generally argue that "there is no difference, in principle, between improving children through education and improving them through bioengineering" (Sandel 51). By equating genetic engineering with education, liberal eugenicists couch their arguments in a way that makes it easy to accept the moral obligation to genetically alter children. Most parents would agree that a good education is instrumental in a child's success later in life. Now if education becomes equated with genetic engineering, which is a health intervention, it is easier for parents to accept genetic engineering as an option to make their children more perfect and healthier.

This drive for perfection is taking hold in all of our present society. As previously mentioned, the use of drugs like Ritalin and Adderall is at an all-time high. Furthermore, drug abuse is also at an all-time high in professional sports. What if the peer pressure to take Ritalin on college campuses can be turned into peer pressure for the parents to genetically enhance children? One needs to be weary of the drive for perfection in today's society and see that there is a downside to society's 'betterment'. This behavior is rooted in a drive for perfection and also in an effort to discover the quick fix. One could also say that the overmedicating is tied to short cut parenting. It is that question of

legitimacy of medicating children that might provide a heuristic for understanding the choices of genetic engineering.

Yet most liberal eugenicists see no difference in nurturing through education and predisposing children to certain traits by enhancing their genetics. Liberal eugenicist John Robertson says: “A case could be made for prenatal enhancement as part of parental discretion in rearing offspring” (Agar 112). Much has been written on hyper-parenting and genetic enhancement that could become just one more tool in raising children. Again, here are issues of societal pressures that are like the ones when it comes to using drugs like Ritalin to increase children’s attention span and other personality traits. Self and societal imposed pressures on child rearing alter responsible assessments of genetic engineering risks. Therefore, discourses of obligation change the rhetorical landscape when parents are assessing opportunities for their children.

Robertson goes on to say that “if special tutors and camps, training programs, even the administration of growth hormone to add a few inches in height are within parental rearing discretion, why should genetic interventions to enhance normal offspring traits be any less legitimate?” (Agar 112). Here again liberal eugenicists couch their argument in the medical discourse and pose an obligation to the parents to go beyond simple medication and accept bioengineering as a way in bettering their children’s chances in life. Savulescu also gives the example of the popular drug, Viagra. He argues that if we accept Viagra to improve ourselves then we should also accept genetic enhancements as a way of augmenting ourselves (Savulescu, “Biological Enhancements” 34). It’s very telling that the ethical argument of liberal eugenicists seems to rest on making analogies to pharmaceuticals. Genetics and drugs are different in the way that

drug use can, for the most part, be reversed. Currently, genetic engineering cannot be altered past the initial intervention. Yet by putting medication use and bioengineering in the same categories, liberal eugenicists couch their arguments of obligation in a way that makes genetic engineering sound safe and appealing to the parents.

These arguments largely stem from the nature versus nurture debate. Liberal eugenicists clearly pose the question: “Why should [we] believe that it is any more hopeless to be at odds with the ‘genetically fixed’ than the ‘environmentally fixed’ intentions of a third person?” (Agar 117). While this argument is true, it is also apparent that liberal eugenicists couch their arguments much more in nature and evolution and mostly forgo nurture entirely. This emphasis on nature is an important part of liberal eugenics rhetoric that cannot go unnoticed. In an age, when we attribute more and more human characteristics to the genome, it is easy to accept an obligation to alter the genome in order to ‘fix’ oneself.

While some parents might object to their children’s traits being altered, most parents agree that they wish their children to be healthy. Yet again what does being healthy constitute? James Watson, the biologist who discovered the double helix-structure, is also a strong liberal eugenicist. He believes that women should be free to abort a fetus for any reason, even for the chance of the fetus becoming homosexual, becoming too short to play a particular sport, or lacking musical talent. Yet most parents would not see these instances of imperfection as being a health issue (Sandel 71).

Watson would disagree. He claims that: “If you really are stupid, I would call that a disease” (Henderson 13). And while parents might not agree that stupidity is a disease, they would agree that a higher IQ does help in today’s society. Now, of course, today’s

technology does not allow us to look at IQs before a child is born but science is advancing. And while now Watson's rhetoric can be discarded as futuristic nonsense, this might not be the case several years or decades from now.

Studies suggest, however, that the rhetoric of liberal eugenicists is taking hold in today's society. A survey by the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation found that most Americans believe that a person's genetic information is not private and that people should be obligated to share their genetic information with employers and insurance companies. Furthermore, 43% of participants in this study approved of gene therapy to improve physical and behavioral characteristics of their children (Nelkin and Lindee 168).

There are increasing pressures on parents to do the best for their child in realms of health and child-rearing in general. These pressures manifest in a variety of ways and lead parents to find scientific and technological fixes when available, especially when such fixes promise great results, like some medications. A genetic engineer could offer another avenue for these parents and the liberal eugenics play on the desire to do what is best for the child. Their arguments to justify eugenics invoke pharmaceutical and educational analogies. These seductive discourses of obligation put increased pressure on parents that blur acceptable "stopping points" for genetic manipulation.

### **A more mainstream Call for Obligation**

Even though a new wave of liberal eugenicists, such as John Harris or Julian Savulescu, argues for a eugenic obligation, there are more traditional eugenicists that say that liberal eugenics should be all about free choice. Philosopher Ronald Dworkin argues that the struggle for perfection is fine, since everybody wants society to have more talent

and achievement. John Rawls goes along the same line of argument and agrees that society should do anything to have more natural assets to obtain a preferred plan of life (Sandel 76/77).

Liberal eugenicist Nicholas Agar follows these notions: “Liberal eugenics proposes that these same technologies be used to dramatically enlarge reproductive choice. Prospective parents may ask genetic engineers to introduce into their embryos combinations of genes that corresponds with their conception of good life” (Agar 6). While these notions of liberal eugenics are supposedly all about freedom and choice, Agar and others forget that there are social notions of what constitutes good life, which most parents abide by in the public. It is true that each person individually has a different notion of their perfect happiness, but through media and other influences society as a whole also has an idea of what the good life constitutes. Therefore parents are not completely free in making their reproductive choices. Research has proven that today’s media does influence our choices and therefore limits our choices in the decision-making process.<sup>1</sup>

This more moderate liberal eugenicists’ stance finds a lot more supporters, since it makes claims that most people could agree on. Nevertheless, this does not mean that arguments like this do not contain an element of obligation. Rhetorics of obligation alter the question of free choice. Liberal eugenicists’ arguments function as the base of the opinions of liberal eugenicists like Savulescu; so they are one step away from a sense of

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<sup>1</sup>Kalaitzandonakes, N., L. A. Marks, and S. S. Vickner. "Media Coverage of Biotech Foods and Influence on Consumer Choice." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 86.5 (2004): 1238-46. Print.  
Schmitt-Beck, Ruediger. "Mass Communication, Personal Communication and Vote Choice: The Filter Hypothesis of Media Influence in Comparative Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 33.2 (2003): 233-59. Print.

obligation. And looking at the rhetoric of more tempered liberal eugenicists, they too tell society what to do: society is supposed to do anything, including genetic engineering, to better society. The tempered eugenicists do not use the word ‘obligation’, but their rhetoric is not too far away from scholars like Savulescu and others.

Moderate geneticists also believe that parents should be obligated to listen to their claims: “Persons requesting genetic advice cannot always be presumed to be capable of making a realistic decision (...) to the advisability of parenthood without support in the form of directive guidance” (Paul 126). These arguments, while sounding convincing, legitimize the power of eugenicists. It is true that parents do need guidance when talking about genetic decisions. In this point of exigence, however, parents are especially vulnerable to eugenic obligation rhetoric and need to be aware of such arguments.

### **An Obligation to be Genetically Moral**

Liberal Eugenicist Julian Savulescu sees even more potential in genetic engineering than simply healing the sick by saying that “our knowledge of human biology, in particular of genetics and neurobiology, is now beginning to supply us with the means of directly affecting the biological or physiological bases of human motivation” (Savulescu and Persson 2). Both neurobiology and genetic research are on the rise and this intersection brings me to a small, but important, subarea that more extreme liberal eugenicists are arguing for: Genetic Moral Enhancement.

Savulescu states that “There are in principle no philosophical or moral objections to the use of such biomedical means of moral enhancement (...) and it is imperative that scientific research explore every possibility of developing effective means of moral bioenhancement” (Savulescu and Persson 2). Savulescu and Persson also acknowledge

that there are more traditional means, i.e. education, which might also improve the morale of humankind. They see the future of genetic bioengineering as making people that are genetically good and moral citizens.

Savulescu and Persson see humans as inherently imperfect, and they claim that even through thousands of years being taught by such great philosophers as Buddha, Confucius and Socrates, we still have not evolved naturally to the point where we are not harming each other anymore (Savulescu and Persson 3). Savulescu and Persson are suggesting that we can eliminate the tendency for violence through genetics. Again, in times where we already influence behaviors with easy-fix medications, a rhetoric of obligation, when it comes to bioengineering morality, can be very tempting. This rhetoric shapes choices, imports problematic assumptions (i.e. genetic engineering is like medication) and articulates notions of perfection.

Savulescu realizes though that he is putting a rhetoric of obligation on less than perfect people: “The development and application of such techniques is no doubt a risky course to take- it is after all humans in their current morally inept state that must apply them-but we think that our present situation is so desperate that this is a course of action that must be investigated” (Savulescu and Persson 9). Liberal eugenicists are ready to take the risk of putting bioethical decisions in the hands of people that they feel are not up to ethical decision making so that humankind could advance more quickly. In an age with a reoccurring quick-fix mentality, rhetoric that can alter the course of humankind falls on fertile ground.

Liberal eugenicists celebrate human ingenuity that got us to the point that we can manipulate our genes, but they do not believe in humankind being able to make ethically

sound decisions. So what do liberal eugenicists believe in? The answer is quite simple: they believe in science. Savulescu states the sentiment of many liberal eugenicists: “Human beings will waste most of the huge potential to do good that modern scientific technology offers them” (Savulescu and Perrson 11). Couching their arguments in a strong belief in science, liberal eugenicists again legitimize their arguments through scientific discourse, which in today’s society is highly regarded.

The testing for genetic disorders should be obligatory, because “with the tool of genetics we can select offspring in a more reliable way” (Savulescu, “New Breeds of Humans” 37). With these tools it is very tempting for parents to select their children’s genetics. If there is an obligation to do so this drive for perfection becomes even more pressing. While we are still in the beginnings of genetic testing, this rhetoric opens the door for more liberal eugenics discourse affecting the choices of parents.

Liberal eugenicists discuss two senses of “obligation” rhetoric: the obligation to get your child genetically healthy and the obligation to act on any “shortcoming.” While it is scientifically possible to improve health through gene therapy, it is not always feasible to address the imperfections once the child is born. The possible and impossible of genetic engineering invite a disconnect that highlights the problems of liberal eugenics discourse. It is easier to couch arguments in a rhetoric of obligation before a child is born. Once a child is born, liberal eugenics loses tracking, since a call for correction of shortcomings would sound a lot like euthanasia of former Nazi times.

Savulescu comes from notions of transhumanism; “If those manipulations improve our capacity to make rational and normative judgments, they further improve what is fundamentally human. Far from being against the human spirit, such

improvements express the human spirit” (Savulescu, “New Breeds of Humans” 37). I agree with Savulescu that bettering oneself is part of the human spirit, but again, who will be the gatekeepers of this new technology when it is being paired with eugenic obligation? We have an inherent desire for betterment and according to liberal eugenicists this drive for perfection comes from evolution. The operating assumption behind natural selection is that we better ourselves as a mode of survival, but this spirit can run amok under societal pressures without proper checks. The limiting factor in our desire for perfection is nature itself, but with genetic engineering, we are attempting to overcome nature, which opens up a whole new set of considerations.

### **An Obligation to Save Money**

There is also another dimension to the arguments of obligation: money. Physicians who, in fear of malpractice suits, suggest all genetic tests possible, do most genetic counseling in the United States. The Department of Professional Liability of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists states that it is imperative for physicians to inform all pregnant patients of any genetic test available (Paul 128). This obligation is not only out of medical concern, but also out of legal apprehension. In this scenario, eugenic obligation is stronger than ever and by being obligated to have all genetic testing done, parents come to the point of having to make decisions in a realm where their choice making is infringed upon by doctors who are advised to suggest all genetic tests possible.

Another area of healthcare where eugenic obligation is already at play as well is health insurance. Not only are physicians pressing for genetic testing, there are also insurance companies on the case of women to have prenatal testing done. In the United

States people with genetic predispositions can be denied health coverage or have to pay much higher rates than their 'healthy' counterparts (Nelkin and Lindee 161).

The eugenic obligation rhetoric which leads to overt insurance mandates is also taking hold in governmental structures and the reasoning is always the same: the state can save money by having pre-birth and pre-employment testing done. If someone is predisposed to alcoholism, suicide or learning disabilities, then the state can either take responsibility if something happens out of the ordinary to the individual or simply say: we can blame it on the genes.

Liberal eugenicists are very vocal about obligating people to undergo genetic testing due to the financial burden genetically imperfect children will have on society. They argue that the state should fund gene therapy; at the same time parents need to be aware that they should not impose substantial burdens or costs or loss of benefits on themselves or others (Agar 84). This obligation does put a sense of guilt on parents who put the burden of caring for their disabled child on society. This rhetoric thus has a large impact on the supposedly free decision making of the parents.

There is some legislation, though, which is trying to safe guard against obligating Americans to be genetically tested and discriminated against on the basis of their genetic dispositions: The Americans with Disabilities Act. It limits genetic testing to a person's actual ability to perform a job and keeps employers to test for genetic health issues, which are not apparent through symptoms. Nevertheless, this Act does not deal with the discrimination of insurance companies obligating their members to genetic testing. This door is currently still wide open filled with a plethora of eugenic obligation rhetoric stemming from the liberal eugenics movement (Nelkin and Lindee 167).

Physicians are pressured to obligate parents to get genetic testing. Just because these parents have the information about the test, does not mean they have direction as to what to do with it. Such pressure to test has a lot of financial ramifications, especially around issues of insurance, which in turn takes the eugenics obligation rhetoric into the realm of legislative actions.

### **An Obligation to not be Disabled**

Yet with the Americans with Disabilities Act, there are still geneticists like Sir Francis Crick who says: “No newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment...If it fails these tests it forfeits the right to live” (Nelkin and Lindee 174). While this rhetoric seems drastic, it does play into societal standards of perfection and imperfection. By calling a newborn not human until it has passed certain tests, rhetoric releases the parents and society from the burden of having to deal with a new-born human if it should be born with imperfections.

Pre-natal testing has significantly decreased the number of disabled children being born in the US. But what does this sorting out of perfect and imperfect children do to the disabled children already living? While it is easy for liberal eugenicists to call for abortion, it makes it that much harder for parents to make this tough decision under this obligatory rhetoric coming from physicians and insurance companies.

Nevertheless, liberal eugenicists say that discrimination against the disabled cannot be helped in our world, since “while deaf people and others with disabilities certainly do continue to experience discrimination, they would continue to suffer limited opportunities even if there were no discrimination against them” (Agar 151). Putting an obligation on parents, then, to abort children that will have limited opportunities only

seems reasonable to the liberal eugenicists. Yet this rhetoric has implications on the parents' decision making that infringes on the parents' free choice.

These genetic tests also “will create a climate of opinion in which the birth of these children with these conditions will routinely be regarded as an error or mistake, either in medical management or in parental judgment, or both” (Buchanan et al. 328). Through these genetic tests people with disabilities or genetic diseases are devaluated since their parents could have followed a rhetoric of obligation and aborted this imperfect child. With the increase of genetic testing this discrimination will only grow larger as well.

### **Genetic Essentialism**

Another way a rhetoric of obligation is realized in the liberal eugenics movement is through genetic essentialism. Once people were put in different groups by their appearance, now we differentiate by genes. Now more than ever genes are the areas doctors point to when finding an imperfection or disease in a child. Science has furthered eugenic obligation by increasing the acceptability of genetic explanations when it comes to talking about areas like social behavior, where a child's behavior is now determined by genes and not its social upbringing. It is often easier to accept a genetic explanation rather than a mistake in parenting (Nelkin and Lindee 103). Parents have always had a sense of obligation to do the best for their children, but genetic science has introduced a new series of considerations that were not available to previous parents, including some considerations for which there are solutions.

Obligation in the eugenics realm furthers an emphasis on genetic essentialism as well. The obligation rhetoric operates from the premise of genetic essentialism. If we are

obligated to focus on our genes as the culprits of our behavior, we in turn leave other factors which could affect behavior by the wayside. We, as individuals, do not assume responsibility for our actions; it is in our genes. Society and medicine are also free from any blame when imperfect behavior occurs. Genetic essentialism becomes a type of shorthand in the decision-making process, which complicates, or at least heightens, the possible dangers of a rhetoric of obligation. The only way to address the reason for wrongdoings is to delve deeper into genetic exploration and a stronger sense of obligation to make sure that we find all the genes that are responsible for a person's behavior.

Genetic essentialism makes it easy to put people in categories and puts certain kinds of obligation on various groups. Here again comes the issue of gender and womanhood. Richard Dawkins, another proponent of liberal eugenics states that women, due to their genetic make-up, are made to be raising children, which is also due to the fact that they are the ones having more energy invested in the child at the time of birth (Nelkin and Lindee 107). While most people would probably not follow along with his claims, it is however important to note that genetic essentialism is a part of the eugenic obligation rhetoric which furthers division and discrimination against certain groups of people.

### **An Obligation of Positive and Negative Eugenics**

In our present times of economic downturns we are looking for a culprit for low financial performance and some scholars think they have found it: our gene pool. Writers David Kubiak and Daniel Seligman have looked to Japan's strong economic performance to their treatment of obligatory eugenics. They see a direct correlation between IQ and economic status. In turn they argue that America's economic struggles are directly related

to the mostly black poor having high numbers of children. In Japan, these writers claim, intelligent women have an obligation to reproduce; a pressure, which is not apparent enough in American policymaking (Nelkin and Lindee 172/173).

While it is true that families of lower economic status have generally more children than the academic elite, I believe the solution should not be a reoccurrence of positive and negative eugenics. But by looking at Japan and couching their argument in other country's policy making, liberal eugenics furthers a reoccurrence of obligatory rhetoric from eugenics movements of the past. It is also clear that this reoccurrence of eugenics obligation rhetoric is again targeted towards women. Not once are men mentioned in these scenarios. The burden of obligation is placed on the low-income women, who have too many children and the women of high academic status who do not reproduce enough. Obligation in the liberal eugenics movement has, just like its predecessors, a slant of gender discrimination.

Women are generally more likely to be discriminated against by health insurance companies due to the fact that they might become pregnant and therefore incur higher health costs. Research has found that when it comes to genetic testing, women are expected to undergo testing, whereas this obligation on men is nowhere near as strong. Celeste Condit mentions a case where a man was heralded for not undergoing prostate cancer surgery after being tested for a genetic disposition and actually being in the early stages of cancer. A woman, who had a predisposition for breast cancer was much more strongly pressured to undergo surgery, even though she had not developed this cancer yet (Condit 201). Eugenic obligation is therefore in times of gender equality still much more

apparent when it comes to women being tested and then facing the consequences of the test results.

Liberal eugenicists do see somewhat of a gender bias, but claim that “In affluent societies, although discrimination against women persists, its impact is not so severe as to make it impossible for those who have two X chromosomes to live happy and fulfilling lives” (Agar 150). Gender discrimination is a lot more apparent in other cultures, but one cannot set aside the role of obligation put on women even in affluent societies, like the United States or the European Union.

By choosing a child’s gender, gender discrimination can also be apparent. Savulescu praises this new technology of genetic testing: “Sex selection can enable couples to have children of the sex that they desire, very accurately and very safely” (Savulescu, “Biological Enhancement” 34). And while this might not be a great risk of discrimination in the Western world, once this technology becomes available to countries whose cultures favor one gender over the other, one will see a much higher rate of one gender being born. This discrimination is already taking place simply by ultrasound technology leading to abortion of female fetuses.<sup>2</sup> Technology might further the schism between the genders.

Negative and positive eugenics are not only apparent in the grand structure of eugenics, but also in the way parents can choose genes: “Under a liberal scheme, practitioners of PGD [Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis] would only use embryos that have genes linked with the traits parents have requested for their child, or are free of

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<sup>2</sup>Patel, Tulsi. *Sex-Selective Abortion in India: Gender, Society and New Reproductive Technologies*. New Delhi: SAGE India, 2006. Print.

Junhong, Chu. "Prenatal Sex Determination and Sex-Selective Abortion in Rural Central China." *Population and Development Review* 27.2 (2001): 259-81. Print.

genes linked with traits that they are seeking to avoid” (Agar 28). Again, here we are sorting out the imperfect and furthering the perfect, which is the basic definition of positive and negative eugenics. While this seems like the parents’ free choice, there is again a sense of obligation coming from society, which imposes on simple selection.

Yet liberal eugenicist Julian Savulescu states: “I believe we have a moral and economic imperative to embrace this kind of new science. (...)Through ethically informed legislation and proper community debate we can support this kind of new science ethically” (Savulescu, "Biological Enhancement" 33). Savulescu again legitimizes obligatory rhetoric through science and scientific research. If we look up to science as our future, then accepting liberal eugenicists’ claims as true is rather easy.

### **Liberal Eugenics Legislation**

So one might ask why looking at a rhetoric of obligation is so important. Other than the Wrongful Birth Case mentioned in chapter one, not a lot of court cases or legislation dealing with genetics have been established in the Western hemisphere. While this is true, there is a case coming out of Singapore. This case illustrates an appearance of both positive and negative eugenics in a free-market society, where an obligation of perfection has taken hold.

In the 1980s, the Singapore government was worried that educated women were not having enough children, thus supposedly draining the state of talent. They instituted a variety of positive eugenics tactics including a state-run computer dating service, financial incentives for educated women to bear children, courtship classes in the undergraduate curriculum, and free love boat cruises for single college graduates (Sandel 69). While these measures seem not to overstep ethical boundaries, it is a eugenic

obligation for the first time legalized in a democracy, which shows how quickly a rhetoric of obligation can turn into laws and legislative action taken by a government.

The Singapore case also came with a side of negative eugenics. Low-income women without a high-school degree were offered \$4000 as a down-payment for an apartment. In return they had to be willing to be sterilized (Sandel 69). Yet liberal eugenicists still argued, since the women were not coerced to take that money, that there was no obligation present. Yet money as an incentive to a low-income woman can always act as a strong argument for a particular cause. Second, if peer pressure comes into play or the need to support one's family, this offer might become more appealing. It is also interesting to note that both the negative and positive eugenics legislation was again aimed at women, even though liberal eugenicists normally claim that the betterment of society is a call to both males and females in today's society.

A wrongful birth case was brought up at the New Jersey Supreme Court in 1996. A couple was suing the hospital for not advising them to genetically test for Down syndrome. Their child did have Down syndrome, but the court did not settle the question whether the child's life was unworthy of living. Nevertheless, the court did ask the hospital to pay damages to the parents on ground of emotional hardship (Galton 122). This is just the first of many cases, including the Wrongful Birth Case, which tries to deal with eugenic obligation and the implications of the new innovations in prenatal testing.

Looking at the liberal eugenics movement, one can see that a rhetoric of obligation is always present. This rhetoric is couched in discourses of society, law-making, and health. While voices of the liberal eugenics movements do not agree on every nuance of their argument, most of them agree on the principle of obligation. This

chapter shows how this notion of obligation has already infiltrated society. This rhetoric of obligation has led to discrimination in various areas, including discrimination against the disabled and genetically imperfect. Again, we are putting people into categories with genetic essentialism and creating boundaries between the perfect and imperfect.

Buchanan et al. rightly state that: “individual reproductive freedom is not fully secure. It could be threatened (...) by a variety of other agents, ranging from social pressure to the action of insurers” (Buchanan et al. 322). A rhetoric of obligation is present in all of these arenas and parents’ individual choice is threatened by this rhetoric coming from the health field and society itself. By a rhetoric of obligation coming from societal pressure, eugenics can enter through the back door rather than being state imposed (Buchanan et al. 335).

It is very apparent that the liberal eugenics movement takes a lot of its cues from eugenics movements of former times. But to what extent are these eugenics movements similar or different and are we really at a risk of sliding down the slippery slope of eugenics? The next chapter explores these implications and furthers some of the argumentation of chapters two and three to find a definite and more pronounced answer to these questions, which are so important in an age of genetics.

## CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Investigating the concept of obligation in historical eugenics movements provides a cautionary tale for the liberal eugenics movement. Only when arguments of obligation are identified can health policy makers establish ethical safeguards in the realm of genetic testing and bioengineering. To see how this problematic obligation rhetoric plays into the social and legal aspects of medicine, I have examined both past and present eugenics movements. Arguments of obligation are present in all eugenics movements. This chapter will focus on the implications that come from the presence of this obligatory eugenics rhetoric in today's genetics debate.

By looking at the interplay of obligation and perfection, one will be able to develop tools for ethical decision-making for today and the future. Technology in genetic testing and bioengineering will continue to advance. Genetic technologies are advancing at an alarming rate, far outstripping both our legal and ethical ability to address any concerns. Focusing on the rhetoric of obligation assists in developing a framework for ethical practices that can account for these continuing technical advancements. Hence with the help of this framework scholars and bioethicists do not have to continually establish new structures of talking about bioengineering with every technological development.

Rhetoric hindering balanced discourse, such as obligatory rhetoric, needs to be recognized and not given a prominent place in the bioengineering discussion. This close reading of history by no means condemns eugenics movements. Moreover, this chapter will talk about similarities and differences between the eugenics movements of old times and new. There is, in fact, some merit to the presence of eugenics movements; I will

mention this merit and talk about its implications further on in this chapter. Nevertheless, a rhetoric of obligation might stand in the way for proponents of liberal eugenics to come into a more open discussion with others in the realm of bioethics and genetic engineering.

### **The Grounding of all Eugenics: Nature over Nurture**

The pillars of eugenics have stayed the same since its beginnings. Old and new eugenics movements seek to improve the genetic makeup of the human race. Yet unto this day, a clear definition of what this “improvement” entails is not apparent. Sir Francis Galton, the father of eugenics, has made it very clear that future generations need to be more gifted and talented (Sandel 63). Liberal eugenics goes along these lines as well and obligates parents to genetically pick perfect children for their children’s sake. Yet in competitive Western societies like ours an increase in talent does not only come with positive implications. By obligating parents to have a certain “type” of child, societal standards are implemented and children who are outside the norm encounter discrimination.

Both old and new discourses of eugenics movements furthermore obligate parents to go against an emphasis on nurture in developing their children’s personality or character. This rhetoric of obligation overlooks the actual parental role of nurture in favor of the genetic determinism of nature. Obligatory rhetoric in both eugenics movements links a person to their genetic makeup. Based on your genes you would either be perfect and fit under societal standards or imperfect and unfit. By couching discourse in biology and natural evolution, this rhetoric of obligation is legitimized and furthered through the realms of science, since both biological research and evolutionary discourse are an integral part of cherished Western academia.

Savulescu states that “with the tool of genetics we can select offspring in a more reliable way” (“New Breeds of Humans”). While eugenics movements of the old did not have these genetic tools at their disposal, it was true that they too wanted to select their offspring in a reliable way. In both cases the deck of genetic cards that fate deals each set of parents is seen as unreliable and unpredictable and needs to be counteracted with a rhetoric of obligation. The liberal eugenics movement sees the tools of obligatory genetic testing and genetic engineering as the answers to this unpredictability.

Both eugenic movements contain this strong emphasis on nature and evolution and leave the impact of nurture on a human being by the wayside. A surge of interest in science led to increased attention to eugenics in the early decades of the last century (Lombardo and Dorr 301). The mapping of the genome did the same for this age. In both cases, the human is defined by his or her genetic make-up and imperfections can be fixed genetically. What makes the rhetoric of obligation slightly more intense in this age is the fact that we can now actually alter the genome. Where the earlier eugenic movement did not have many scientific tools at its disposal, the current one can ask for genetic engineering and these procedures can be done currently or will be able to be performed in the near future.

### **Medical Science in the Old and New**

Scientific evidence plays a big part in the argument for obligation in eugenic movements. In the American Eugenics Movement, medical professionals cited figures of increasing insanity rates to increase the obligation on the “unfit” parents to counteract this statistic by having fewer children (Nelkin and Lindee 23). The liberal eugenics movement is again using scientific evidence to stress to parents the importance of

increased talent in their children. Bioethicists, like Savulescu, use data on IQs to stress the importance of increased intelligence in today's competitive society.

Liberal eugenicists again dig up obligatory claims of the old eugenics movements and see a direct correlation between IQ and economic status. They see a connection between low IQs and high school dropout rates in the mostly black lower-class neighborhoods (Nelkin and Lindee 172/173). Completely overlooking social factors, a rhetoric is established that is reminiscent of negative eugenics claims of the poor polluting the race. While the liberal eugenicists would not go so far as to go back to calls for sterilization, their rhetoric makes it very clear that IQ is a genetic trait that one needs to be obligated to increase in his or her future children in order to ensure a betterment of the general gene pool. Even if eugenicists concede that there might be some environmental factors, the way they construct and position the influence of genetic make-up overwhelms any nurture discourse.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the liberal eugenics movement does stay away from connecting obligation to negative eugenics. The older eugenics movements obligated the parents of unfit children to keep from reproducing; the liberal eugenics movement puts a much larger emphasis on obligating the parents of the fit children to continually improve their children. For the liberal eugenics movement, the prospect of genetic engineering will be able to erase all imperfections pre-birth, which makes an obligation of negative eugenics unnecessary. If one can make sure that all children are born with a better genetic composition, there is no need for altering non-existent imperfect children.

Nevertheless, aside from a shift of focus on positive eugenics, genetic predisposition is still more important than opportunity in both eugenics movements and the child's destiny is still solely genetic. By couching arguments of obligation in scientific notions of intelligence and levels of IQ, this obligatory rhetoric becomes legitimized and more powerful as science then and now is highly respected in Western democracies. *Giving the concept of obligation grounding in science is a rhetorical stratagem that should not be overlooked in an analysis of the liberal eugenics movement.*

Another parallelism of the two eugenic movements concerning obligation is the origin of this eugenic rhetoric. The obligatory rhetoric originated in the field of science at universities. Galton, Darwin and others talked about notions of obligation in university circles and the American eugenics movement also first disseminated an obligatory rhetoric in university settings (Lombardo and Dorr 301). Savulescu, Harris and others come to this debate from academic circles. They are university-trained bioethicists who are professors and teach future medical professionals and bioethicists.

The academic background of these liberal eugenicists affects genetic engineering discourse in two ways. First by training future professionals in the field of medicine, they are infiltrating the medical field with an obligatory rhetoric. This rhetoric is then branching out into hospitals and universities all over the country. The world of academia is still held at a high esteem in the Western world and research coming from this area is seen as credible and important for humankind.

Increased globalization also gives liberal eugenicists more means of international collaboration than their counterparts in the older eugenics movement. Transatlantic cooperation has always been inherent to eugenics movements and a missionary style has

been part of obligatory eugenic rhetoric. The current forerunner of liberal obligatory rhetoric, Savulescu, comes from the same country as his forefather Galton: England. And similarly, the obligation rhetoric is starting to gain traction in the USA. Only time will tell when this rhetoric will make its appearance in Central Europe; similar to its former geographical travels.

### **Eugenics and the Social**

Notions of obligatory perfection to have better children and categories of fit and unfit have stayed rather consistent when comparing the old and the liberal eugenics movements. While the liberal eugenics movement does not make claims about racial or ethnic perfection, it still has similar standards to its predecessor when it comes to the definition of “being healthy.” In the 1920s America, the unfit has traits of “feble-mindedness, epilepsy, criminality, insanity, alcoholism [and] pauperism” (Nelkin and Lindee 23). Liberal eugenicists see these as flaws as well. Yet their argument of obligating parents to genetically make sure that their children have high IQs and are free from disease sounds more appealing than pointing out the imperfections that we want to extinguish.

Savulescu’s claims of betterment in areas of “memory, temperament, patience, empathy, sense of humor, optimism” (“New Breeds of Humans” 36) seem appealing to parents of our current age. As stated in Chapter Three, in times of increased competition between children in college and other arenas, parents want their children to be better and have the best chance in life. An obligation for positive eugenics is readily present in today’s society and starting to be embraced by parents who stress the importance of their children needing an advantage in this so competitive life.

Liberal eugenicists claim that “if special tutors and camps, training programs (...) are within parental rearing discretion, why should genetic interventions to enhance normal offspring traits be any less legitimate?” (Agar 112). Positive eugenics follows the same logic. An obligation is placed on parents to improve their children to give them the best chance in life. It is true that the picture of what constitutes “the best life” differs in some areas in both eugenics movements; yet, the rhetoric of obligation concerning positive eugenics is strikingly similar.

One needs to see that while the obligatory rhetoric coming from the liberal eugenics movement mainly focuses on improvement of the human race, it in turn also means getting rid of imperfections. Positive and negative eugenics rhetoric go hand in hand. By putting an emphasis on the positive side, liberal eugenicists try to sound different from the old; nonetheless, categories of imperfections remain the same. So while the methods differ, and positive eugenics may be considered more palatable, the possibility of discriminating against those with the undesirable qualities remains.

It is true that “the ideal of the exceptionally Nordic woman” (Proctor 119) and the ideal of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant male are firmly in the past. An invocation of these images would surely not find any resonance with the general public today; yet pictures of healthy, intelligent and fit children are appealing as ever in today’s society. While we are not strongly favoring one race over the other anymore, liberal eugenicists are dividing the human race into categories of the fit and unfit, which is still the same type of discourse as it relates to the races.

The focus on women as the ones mainly obligated to have genetically perfect children has shifted; but implications of its bottom-line have stayed the same. While

women are still seen as the main decision-makers in the liberal eugenics rhetoric, this rhetoric also targets parents as a whole. Nevertheless, in the end it is the woman who is carrying the fetus and has to make calls to have genetic testing performed. Thus the main burden of obligation is still on the woman even in times of increase gender equality in Western nations.

The issue of sex selection is also another new avenue of obligatory rhetoric. In previous eugenic movements, while women were discriminated against, there was no obligatory rhetoric favoring the birth of one sex over the other due to a scientific inability to select the sex of a child pre-birth. With the advancement of genetic testing, however, we can now pick children through sex selection. While this seems like the epitome of free choice, societal obligatory pressures create a different picture. Certain societies value one particular sex over the other and particular traits over others. Suddenly, the free choice becomes a subconscious forced choice influenced by societal standards functioning in the realm of obligation.

### **The Legal Stance of Eugenics in the Free Market**

While the presence of obligation rhetoric is ever present in the medical and social arenas the case is rather different in the legal arena. After the culmination of the eugenics movement in Nazi Germany, western governments made sure that the obligatory rhetoric would not permeate to the legal realm anymore and lead to atrocities reminiscent of the Third Reich and their eugenics programs.

Nevertheless, learning lessons from the Nazi atrocities and American eugenic sterilizations did not happen overnight. It has only been in recent years that stories of victims of obligatory eugenics have been heard. Forced Sterilizations in North Carolina

had taken place until 1974 and it took until 2011 for state officials to start efforts to compensate the victims of these sterilizations. Yet these efforts might be too little too late. So far, only 41 individuals out of about 7500 NC eugenics victims have been found to be still alive. By the time funding is approved by the NC government this number might be even lower (Tomlinson and Helms). To add insult to injury, the bill to compensate these individuals was stalled by the North Carolina Senate in June 2012 after being passed overwhelmingly by the NC House and has not been picked up again since then (Severson). Nonetheless, the North Carolina government's attempt at eugenics compensation is one instance of the legal realm trying to take a step against obligatory rhetoric of former times.

Another realm where the government operates and can challenge obligatory rhetoric is that of genetic testing. While Europe is heavily regulating against genetic testing and stem cell research, "currently in the United States, no regulations are in place for evaluating the accuracy and reliability of genetic testing. Most genetic tests developed by laboratories are categorized as services, which the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not regulate" (Human Genome Project). This lack of oversight might be an easy way for obligatory rhetoric to take hold without being hindered by government entities. Here genetic testing has outstripped its ethical boundaries. People generally believe science and these tests, and act as if they are correct despite the chance of inaccuracies. As a result, pre-existing ideological assumptions take over, which the tests seemingly legitimize.

The US government claims that "this lack of government oversight is particularly troublesome in light of the fact that a handful of companies have started marketing testing

directly to the public. Some of these companies make dubious claims about how genetic testing kits not only test for disease but also serve as tools for customizing medicine, vitamins, and foods to each individual's genetic makeup" (Human Genome Project). Companies are using the obligatory rhetoric of liberal eugenicists to directly market to US families to obtain these genetic tests. By couching their arguments in lifestyle choice, receiving genetic testing is just another normal aspect of life.

The implications of the genetic testing now taking place in independent laboratories without oversight are vital to the bioengineering debate. The liberal eugenics movements or eugenic discourses in general have moved from government sanctioned activities to private corporations, which dramatically changes the nature of the discourse. No longer is it a government effort to build up a particular type of society, but it is corporations employing obligatory rhetoric while possessing a clear profit motive. Furthermore, the nature of the obligation appeals is quite different. No longer are they trying to obligate people to follow eugenic notions for a better society or for the good of the country, but for the good of their own self, family or children. This sense of obligation goes along the same lines as other obligatory rhetoric of many different private advertising appeals, especially with regard to medical and health matters.

While doctors and health professionals in clinics do most genetic counseling, the genetic testing in laboratories happens without genetic counseling (Human Genome Project). Parents are made to feel obligated to have genetic testing performed and are then left stranded with the results. These situations create an exigence of the rhetoric of obligation that needs to be identified and counteracted with open discourse.

This marketing of obligating genetic testing goes along with Savulescu's notions of health being "only instrumentally valuable; a resource" (Savulescu, "New Breeds of Humans" 36). If health becomes only a commodity, obligatory eugenics claims become easily acceptable. If perfection becomes easily attainable, a drive for perfection is in humanity's reach and only a question of economic status. If a person has the money to obtain genetic testing, then in Savulescu's mind, there should be no legal barriers to prevent this behavior. Obligatory rhetoric aids commercialism and free market eugenics in these cases and an increased awareness of these obligatory eugenic arguments might prevent a heightened commercialization of genetic testing without genetic counseling.

There are currently more than a 1000 genetic tests available from testing laboratories. These include pre-natal testing for diseases which will be debilitating and deadly for children, like Tay-Sachs disease. While an obligation for genetic testing for these diseases can be seen as acceptable by society, commercialized genetic testing for adult-onset disorders, such as Alzheimer's or certain cancers, is more controversial. "These tests are targeted to healthy (presymptomatic) people who are identified as being at high risk because of a strong family medical history for the disorder. (...) One of the most serious limitations of these susceptibility tests is the difficulty in interpreting a positive result because some people who carry a disease-associated mutation never develop the disease" (Human Genome Project). These laboratories are market-driven and try to sell as many genetic tests as possible. By using a rhetoric of obligation, they are maximizing their profits. Patients need to be aware of these rhetorical devices and the government needs to implement ethical safeguards, which aid in situations when a patient receives a positive test result from one of these laboratories.

Doctors having to suggest genetic testing in order to avoid malpractice suits or health insurance companies requiring their client to undergo testing are all manifestations of this obligatory rhetoric. The US government did pass the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) in May 2008 to keep employers and companies from discriminating their employees on the basis of their genetic information, but this does not include the medical and insurance realm (Human Genome Project). People are still discriminated against based on their genetic imperfections and literally have to pay for their genome, since they incur higher insurance rates after completing genetic testing.

Standing against the law as an ethical safeguard opposite an obligatory rhetoric is the free market and capitalism. The old eugenics argument of saving money for the public is as present as ever. The Nazi eugenics programs stressed that bringing an unfit or disabled child into the world would be obligating society to take care of this child, which would be a burden on fellow citizens (Paul 87). Cases like the Wrongful Birth Case mentioned in Chapter One again show that when a disabled child is born, money is a factor. The hospital now needs to pay for the costs incurred by this child with Down Syndrome, since through their diagnosis this child is wrongfully alive. Cases like this one make it easier for obligatory rhetoric to enter into the legal realm and be legitimized through court rulings. In the United States, court rulings are, whenever possible, based on precedence, which means each ruling affects the ones following. Cases like these give parents legal grounding to sue for their right to a healthy child.

A realm that is new to eugenics movements is the realm of liability and health insurance. A rhetoric of obligation is now for the first time tied into insurance claims. This type of obligation does not just function in ethical or moral arenas, but also in a

more material and financial one. While the underlying argument of saving society money remains the same from the last century into this one, the ramifications of this argument have changed.

This obligatory rhetoric also puts the same sense of guilt on the parents for bringing a disabled child into the world as the eugenic movement of the last century. In either case, the argument of putting a burden on society by bringing a disabled child into the world is similar. In the age of genetic testing these obligatory claims become stronger. Through this testing the condition of a disabled child can be determined pre-birth and a woman can have an abortion performed in order to not be faced with a child that will require constant care.

This thesis establishes that both the liberal eugenics movement and the eugenics movement of the past decade employ a rhetoric of obligation. In both cases, this rhetoric is manifested in discourses of society, law-making, and health care. The rhetoric functions similarly in society and the disciplines of medicine and education, where it originally was created and crafted. Nevertheless, there are some safeguards that the US government has established to guard against obligatory rhetoric, like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA).

These acts do not cover other areas of intersections of the legal and social arenas, however. People are still getting discriminated against by health insurance companies requiring them to undergo genetic testing. The influence of money and capitalism on laboratories that are not regulated results in a free market commodity of genetic testing without legal barriers.

Also with the rate of children with genetic diseases dropping due to the advancements of genetic testing, the children that are still born with these diseases are either discriminated against or their parents sue the hospital for not diagnosing this genetic disorder. This, in turn, puts an obligation on the hospital and doctors to perform a magnitude of genetic tests to make sure that these children are born without genetic defects and aid in the perfectionist notions of society in the long run. Obligatory eugenics in our times acts with two different methods. There are certainly rhetorical appeals to obligation, where there is a societal pressure that occurs through discourse. There are also very “real” and material obligations, such as genetic testing advised by doctors that are obligated by their hospitals to perform these tests out of fear of legal action against the hospital.

A rhetoric of obligation has a rhetorical impact on society in general. While it is true that the general public might not read scholarly journals and articles written by liberal eugenicists, they do gather knowledge from media sources. And Bioethicists such as Julian Savulescu make a point of going to talk shows and disseminating their obligatory rhetoric. They are aware of the power of the media and they are utilizing it to a great extent. Only an informed public can stand against one-sided rhetoric and combat notions of obligatory eugenics.

The goal of the thesis is to raise awareness of a rhetoric of obligation, and how that can be found in both earlier eugenics movements and the modern liberal one. Identifying similarities and differences between the eugenics rhetoric of former times and current rhetoric dealing with genetic determinism and perfectionist notions is instrumental to avoid the mistakes of former times. As more and more obligatory rhetoric

trickles down to society, gatekeepers need to make sure that the genetic bioengineering debate keeps a dialogic perspective. There is also a question of informed consent for the patient that is underlying this argument for gatekeeping. Openly discussing the obligatory dimensions of eugenics rhetoric is necessary to be fully informed as a patient when subjecting oneself to genetic testing.

This call for open discourse does not only apply to liberal eugenicists, however. This plea also applies to bioconservatives who invoke rhetorical metaphors of *Brave New World* and *Gattaca* any time questions of genetic advancement are discussed. Genetics research opens up the road to human progress and is a necessary tool for the evolvement of the field of medicine. Ethical decision-making needs to be a result of open discourse not hindered by obligatory rhetoric from the liberal eugenics side or scare-tactics from bioconservatives. Nevertheless, while rhetoric coming from the bioconservatives can easily be dismantled and has been analyzed by multiple scholars, the obligatory eugenics arguments have not yet been thoroughly identified as a rhetorical device in this bioengineering debate.

Biotechnology is rapidly advancing and information is also circulated at increasing speeds. A lot of times information goes directly to the consumer of news without any filtering by journalists or gatekeepers. Therefore, it is more important than ever to identify obligatory rhetoric in this present time to prevent mishaps in the future. While rhetoric that hinders discourse will never be completely abandoned by special interest groups, analyzing its content will aid in establishing a language for biotechnological progress.

Future research should continue to explore the role that obligation plays in the biotechnology debate. The liberal eugenics movement is a young one and obligatory rhetoric has only surfaced within the last years. I predict a further spread of this perfectionist rhetoric through various means, which might even lead to perfection being the acceptance of flaws. We are only at the beginning of this debate, and as technology arises, more ethical issues will surface, which will require open-minded bioethicists and policy-makers aware of this obligatory rhetoric.

There are, of course, legitimate concerns of parents and individuals to address inheritable diseases. Yet this screening needs to happen under the presence of genetic counseling which is aware of obligatory rhetoric. Genetic testing and bioengineering is going to advance even further with every passing day and I am not arguing for stopping this important medical research. Nevertheless, there needs to be a drive to put ethical frameworks in place to protect the patients and medical providers from falling prey to obligatory eugenics rhetoric. If people want to screen for diseases or specific traits in their children, they should do so without being merely pawns of the obligatory rhetoric of eugenics movements.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### EDUCATION:

- ❖ August 2011-May 2013  
**WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY**, Winston-Salem, NC  
**Master of Arts Degree in Communication Studies**  
Research Area: Health Communication and Bioethics
- ❖ August 2007- May 2011  
**PFEIFFER UNIVERSITY**, Misenheimer, NC  
**Bachelor of Arts Degree in Communications and Journalism,**  
Minor: **International Cultural Studies**; Cumulative GPA: 4.07

### HONORS:

- ❖ Member of Lambda Pi Eta (since 2009), Phi Delta Sigma (since 2010)
- ❖ Since 2011: Full Tuition Stipend at Wake Forest University
- ❖ 2011: Scholastic Achievement Award
- ❖ 2011 Pearl Walton Citizenship Award
- ❖ 2008-2011: Dean's List
- ❖ 2009-2011 Member of the Honor Society of Pfeiffer University
- ❖ 2007-2011: Recipient of Bill White Full Tuition Scholarship

### RESEARCH PAPERS:

- ❖ Food, Inc. and Stages of Oppositional Rhetoric (2011)  
Presented at: National Communication Association Conference 2012
- ❖ Obligation in Historical Eugenics Movements (2012)  
To be presented at Wake Forest Research Symposium (2013)
- ❖ Speaking for Others in the Realm of Eugenics (2012)
- ❖ Historical Narratives: A Language for Genetic Research (2013)

### CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE:

- ❖ "Research Ethics: Reexamining Key Concerns" conference  
Winston-Salem, NC (2011)
- ❖ "Biotechnological Progress: Rotten with Perfection?" conference  
Davidson, NC (2012)
- ❖ National Communication Association Conference, Orlando, Florida (2012)

## GRADUATE CLASSES INCLUDE:

- ❖ Health Campaigns
- ❖ Communication Ethics and Bioethics: An Interface
- ❖ Rhetoric of Science
- ❖ Sickness and Health in American Society
- ❖ Quantitative and Qualitative Methods Courses

## EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ August 2011- Present: **Teaching Assistant** for COM 110: Public Speaking  
Tasks include: Teaching independent lab sections, assisting with lectures grading assignments and speeches, working with students on improving their writing and speaking skills, supporting first year Public Speaking teaching assistants.
- ❖ 2009-2012: **Public Relation Liaison** for the Confucius Institute at Charlotte  
Tasks include: Creation of press releases, contact with media outlets, other advertising occupations.
- ❖ 2011: **Academic Support Services Aide** at Pfeiffer University  
Tasks included: Updating website content, creating podcasts, formatting forms for tutoring and international student services, yearly analysis reporting.
- ❖ 2010: **Business Development Assistant** with the David H. Murdock Institute at the North Carolina Research Campus  
Tasks included: Creating social media outlets and internet presence, writing press releases and other PR material, maintaining business and donor relationships.
- ❖ 2009-2011: **Editor-in-Chief** of the *Falcon's Eye* (Student Newspaper)  
Tasks included: Executive decisions on newspaper content, editing and reviewing stories, planning of staff meetings, attendance at a NBC Writing and Producing Workshop.
- ❖ 2008-2011: **Layout Editor and Online Editor** of the *Falcon's Eye*:  
Tasks included: Designing advertisements in correspondence with the ad buyer, creating the layout of the newspaper with Adobe Page Maker, updating *Falcon's Eye* Facebook and Twitter accounts.
- ❖ 2009-2011: **Writing Lab Assistant**: Tasks included: helping students asses their strengths and weaknesses in writing, addressing problems in their work and helping with MLA/APA citations.
- ❖ 2008-2011: **Certified Peer-Tutor**: Master Tutor Certification by the College Reading and Learning Association.
- ❖ **Languages**: English: fluent, German: fluent, Spanish: basic, French: basic.