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Eugenics as a Science and as a Social Movement

The Cases of Denmark and Norway 1900–1950

ABSTRACT

The article compares Danish and Norwegian eugenics in the first half of the twentieth century. It especially investigates sterilisation and racism, both of which are associated with the doctrine. However, it argues that the laws of 1929, 1934 and 1935 allowing sterilisation in Denmark were accepted as means to combat sexual offences. The comparative method supports such a contention, as the Norwegian sterilisation law of 1934 is found to have developed along parallel lines. Neither country had a functioning eugenics society. Therefore the doctrine was the provenance of scientists and other experts. Popularisation attempts met resistance from specialists. Eugenics could nevertheless be applied to debates about criminality or race. Similarities between the Danish and Norwegian versions outweighed differences. But in Denmark there was a greater focus on the pernicious societal effects of “feble-mindedness” than in Norway. Conversely, Norwegian eugenics was more racist than Danish.

Introduction

From its inception, the system of thought known as eugenics had a dual nature: it was both a field of scientific endeavour and an ideology.¹ Francis Galton (1822–1911), its British originator, advocated eugenics being brought into the national consciousness as a new religion. He also conducted careful statistical investigations underpinning racial improvement as a science. The doctrine was global in its reach, as exemplified by the 1912 International Congress of Eugenics held in London and its follow-up in 1921 in New York. It is therefore very well-suited to transnational studies, either relating to trans-

1 Lyndsay Andrew Farrall: *The Origins and Growth of the English Eugenics Movement 1865–1925*, New York 1985, pp. 206–207.

fers, i. e. how elements from one national context were modified and incorporated into another, or comparisons across countries. In 1990 Mark Adams called for more comparative studies of eugenics.² Since then, work by Lucassen (2010), Mottier (2010), Porter (1999), and Weingart (1999) has appeared, answering to the description and using Scandinavian or Swedish eugenics as an analytical tool.³

Scandinavian eugenics may be treated as a single case. It was usually known as “racial hygiene”, but reform eugenicists also employed the term “hereditary hygiene” or “kinship hygiene”.⁴ Reform eugenicists were scientists who were careful about drawing social conclusions from eugenic studies or left-wing intellectuals who also believed in the power of the environment. The purpose of the following is to undertake a comparison of Denmark and Norway, covering the two contentious issues of sterilisation and racism. It will show how eugenics developed along parallel lines there. This was partly caused by many variables within each national context being the same, and partly through the examples of the other. Both countries valued the input of the other in scientific and social matters. When the Danish Foreign Office received an invitation to the aforementioned congress in New York, its reaction was to ask the Norwegian government whether it was planning to be represented there.⁵ The Norwegian public debate on eugenics was informed by Danish examples.⁶ A speech that the Danish Social Democrat politician and eugenicist Karl Kristian Steincke had given in the Medical Association in Copenhagen was printed in its entirety in the Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association in 1929.⁷

- 2 Mark B. Adams: *Toward a Comparative History of Eugenics*, in: idem (ed.): *The Wellborn Science. Eugenics in Germany, France, Brazil, and Russia*, New York 1990, pp. 217–231.
- 3 Leo Lucassen: *A Brave New World: The Left, Social Engineering, and Eugenics in Twentieth Century Europe*, in: *International Review of Social History* 55:2 (2010), pp. 265–296; Véronique Mottier: *Eugenics and the State: Policy-Making in Comparative Perspective*, in: Alison Bashford/Philippa Levine (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, Oxford 2010, pp. 134–153; Dorothy Porter: *Eugenics and the Sterilization Debate in Sweden and Britain before World War II*, in: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 24:2 (1999), pp. 145–162; Peter Weingart: *Science and Political Culture: Eugenics in Comparative Perspective*, in: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 24:2 (1999), pp. 163–177.
- 4 Tage Kemp: *Danish Experiences in Negative Eugenics, 1929–45*, in: *Eugenics Review* 38:4 (1947), pp. 181–186, p. 181; Norwegian State Archive (NSA), Oslo. RA/PA-0280/D/Da/L0075/0001. Johan Scharffenberg in: *Vestfold Social Demokrat* 13 June 1929. Idem in: *Folket* 31 May 1929. *Bergens Arbeiderblad* 22 February 1937.
- 5 Danish Embassy in Kristiania (Oslo) to Norwegian Foreign Office 13 April 1921 in: NSA, RA/S-1278/D/L0279.
- 6 *Arbeiderbladet* 20 November 1929, *Adresseavisen* 11 March 1932, in: NSA, RA/PA-0280/D/Da/L0075/0001.
- 7 For more information on Steincke as an ideologue, see Richard Cornell: *K.K. Steincke's Notion of *Personlig Kultur* and the Moral Basis of Danish Social Democracy*, in: *Scandinavian*

Early Eugenics Organisations

A striking feature of Danish and Norwegian eugenics is that it had profound consequences on those societies without ever achieving a popular mandate. This is in direct contrast to Britain, where the doctrine was less influential.⁸ Voluntary sterilisation was rejected by the House of Commons in 1931, but Denmark enacted laws allowing sterilisation in 1929, 1934, and 1935 and Norway in 1934. The British scene witnessed the founding of the Eugenics Education Society in 1907, which, as the name implies, sought to bring the doctrine to wider attention. In the mid-1930s it instituted a special category of membership with lower dues, making it easier for working-class people to join.⁹ No such organisations existed in Denmark or Norway, where eugenics was almost entirely an ideology for the cognoscenti. The closest approximation would be the Anthropological Committee set up in Denmark in 1904. It was led by the police doctor Søren Hansen, and its other founders were Dr Laub, a surgeon-general, and Professor Harald Westergaard, a statistician and economist. It was a private society which did not accept members drawn from the public. At a later stage, membership was limited to the above plus high-ranking civil servant Adolph Jensen, Professor August Wimmer, a psychiatrist, medical director Johannes Frandsen, Professor Hans Clausen Nybølle, a statistician, and Dr Skot-Hansen, a surgeon-general.¹⁰ Norway had no popular eugenics organisation either, only the Consultative Committee on Eugenics, which was set up after 1913.¹¹ The founder was Jon Alfred Mjøen, who acted as its secretary, and its other early members were Professor Nordal Wille, a biologist, Dr Alfred Eriksen, a clergyman and former Labour parliamentarian, Professor Marius Hægstad, a philologist, Haakon Løken, Governor of Oslo, and Dr Wilhelm Keilhau, an economist and historian.¹² These organisations were cabals of influential people more than they were actual societies.

The officers of these clubs, Dr Hansen and Dr Mjøen, were among the institutors of eugenics in Scandinavia. Søren Hansen (1857–1946) was trained as an anthropologist, obtaining multiple grants and stipends to study with some of the leading European scientists in the discipline. An academic career was ruled out by anthropology not being

Studies 54:3 (1982), pp. 221–238.

8 Cf. Porter, p. 159.

9 Eugenics Society Annual Report 1936–1937, p. 11 in: British Library of Political and Economic Science, London. Carr-Saunders papers. A/2/12.

10 Letter to Ministry of Education 9 June 1943, in: Danish State Archive (DSA), Copenhagen. 2752 Københavns Universitet. Arvebiologisk institut, 1938–1989. Institutsager 1938–1948. Folder marked 1943–1948.

11 C. B. S. Hodson: Eugenics in Norway, in: *Eugenics Review* 27:1 (1935), pp. 41–44, p. 42.

12 Letter from Mjøen to Department of Social Affairs 27 July 1923, in: NSA, RA/S-1278/D/L0279.

a field of study in Danish universities at the time. He nevertheless wrote a number of anthropological books, which would also have advanced “racial hygiene”.¹³ Jon Alfred Mjøen (1866–1939) shared many of the attributes of Hansen. Because he belonged to the Eugenics Education Society in Britain, he had a higher profile in English-speaking countries and is the more well-known of the two. Mjøen studied pharmaceuticals in Norway and chemistry in Germany. Like Hansen, he received several state scholarships, but did not attain an academic career. Instead, in 1906, he founded the private Vinderen Laboratory, located at his home. Both Hansen and Mjøen were occasionally criticised for getting their facts wrong by professional eugenisists.¹⁴ Although a pioneer of Scandinavian eugenics, Hansen believed in the reform variant. Mjøen was a very clear mainline or orthodox eugenisist and also a populariser.

In Norway the eugenic infrastructure also consisted of the Institute of Heredity at the University of Oslo, set up in 1916 with partial funding from the Rockefeller Trust. Its chair was held by the cytologist Kristine Bonnevie, the first Norwegian woman to be a professor. Bonnevie was scathing about Mjøen’s popularisation attempt, and when the Institute had been established, he had been deliberately excluded from consideration as a member of staff.¹⁵ Mjøen considered that he had launched eugenics in his home country through a paper he gave to the Medical Society (*Medicinerforeningen*) in 1908. This organisation was a possible outlet for scientists interested in eugenics, as were the Hereditarian Society (*Arvelighetsforeningen*) after 1919 and the Norwegian Medical Association (*Den norske lægeforening*). Of course, they did not cater for the layman who might be inspired by the doctrine. The Danish case did not entirely match the Norwegian. Its Institute of Heredity was not founded at the University of Copenhagen until 1938, but again with Rockefeller money.¹⁶ However, the Anthropological

- 13 Bent Sigurd Hansen: Something Rotten in the State of Denmark: Eugenics and the Ascent of the Welfare State, in: Gunnar Broberg/Nils Roll-Hansen (eds.): Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, East Lansing MI 2005, pp. 9–76, p. 12.
- 14 H. O. Wildenskov: Sterilization in Denmark: A Eugenic as well as Therapeutic Clause, in: Eugenics Review 23:4 (1932), pp. 311–313, p. 311; Wellcome Library (WL), London. Letter from C. P. Blacker to Mjøen 14 September 1933 in: SA/EUG/C235. Microfiche 1 of 2. This was a reaction to Jon A. Mjøen: Genius as a Biological Problem, in: Eugenics Review 17:4 (1926), pp. 242–257, p. 246.
- 15 Nils Roll-Hansen: Norwegian Eugenics: Sterilization as Social Reform, in: Broberg/Roll-Hansen (eds.): Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, East Lansing MI 2005, pp. 151–194, p. 160.
- 16 Opened August 1938 and formally inaugurated 14 October 1938. See Manuscript in English dated February 1939, in: DSA, 2752 Københavns Universitet. Arvebiologisk institut, 1938–1989. Institutsager 1938–1948, folder marked 1938–39.

Committee collected data on heredity, which was incorporated in the new institute. The Committee received state funding and was the official wing of Danish eugenics before 1938.¹⁷ Eugenics could also be discussed in organisations such as the Danish Association of Wardens (*Dansk Værgerådsforening*), the Criminologists' Association (*Kriminalistforeningen*) and Danish Women's Association (*Dansk Kvindesamfund*).¹⁸ Popular eugenics, though, had much lower status than allegedly scientific versions. For this, state approval was crucial. Mjøen portrayed his Vinderen Laboratory as a private institution which the government had commissioned to investigate various scientific matters.¹⁹ It is true that Mjøen had been appointed to carry out work into the classification of alcoholic beverages. He probably sought a similar standing for his eugenic projects as the Anthropological Committee enjoyed in Denmark. His Consultative Committee has been described as little more than headed notepaper, but it did belong to the International Federation of Eugenic Societies.²⁰ The individuals on it were influential in their own right.

Popular Eugenics

Mjøen represented a popularising strand to Norwegian eugenics. In 1914 and 1915 he tried to convince the Liberals, of which he was a member, to adopt policies aiming at race improvement.²¹ These were taken from his *Norwegian Programme for Racial Hygiene*, presented in May 1908. It was divided into negative, positive, and prophylactic eugenics (combating racial poisons). Far from being the views of a nation, it was the brainchild of one man who had the gift of self-promotion. In 1914 he also published a book called *Racehygiene*, which was intended for the general reader. Various popular tracts also appeared in Denmark after the dentist Alfred Bramsen's *Eugenik, de Velbaarne og de Belastede* (Eugenics, the Well-born and the Afflicted) of 1912, but serious eugenicists wished to go the other way towards professionalisation.²² If Søren Hansen was the doyen of eugenics in 1930s Denmark, he was also in his seventies. Professor Oluf Thomsen, a human geneticist at the University of Copenhagen, had led the project setting up the

17 See letter to Søren Hansen 24 March 1939, which shows that state funding was available even for closing the Anthropological Committee, in: DSA, 2752 Københavns Universitet. Arvebiologisk institut, 1938–1989. Institutsager 1938–1948, folder marked 1938–39.

18 Lene Koch: *Racehygiejne i Danmark 1920–56*, Copenhagen 1996, pp. 45–46.

19 Description of Vinderen Laboratory in: WL, SA/EUG/C235. Microfiche 1 of 2.

20 Roll-Hansen: *Norwegian Eugenics*, pp. 170–171; *Notes of the Quarter*, in: *Eugenics Review* 25:3 (1933), pp. 143–146, p. 144.

21 Jon Alfred Mjøen: *Race og Folkesygdommenes Behandling og Forebyggelse som Statsopgave*, p. 3, in: NSA, RA/S-1278/D/Lo279.

22 Hansen, p. 20.

Institute of Heredity after 1927.²³ He recommended his student Dr Tage Kemp for the position of director. He had earlier helped Kemp secure a Rockefeller fellowship.²⁴ Kemp was appointed, and the Institute gained prestige after the Second World War when it took over the Bureau of Human Heredity, a records office of scientific data, from the Galton Laboratory at University College London.²⁵

Since there was a very slender basis to popular eugenics in Denmark and Norway, it may be imagined that the doctrine suffered from this. One of the stated aims of the Eugenics Education Society in Britain was to create a eugenic consciousness. Ultimately, however, it is through legislation that an ideology influences society. As mentioned, the British eugenicists failed to get sterilisation onto the statute book, while the Danes and Norwegians succeeded. The paradox is that the lack of popular eugenics societies may well have made it easier to get the measures through Parliament. The *Eugenics Review* in Britain was the membership journal of the Society. It contained a large number of articles alleging that working-class people were inferior to the comfortably off. In 1913, three years after the *Review* had been launched, this did not affect the voting of Labour MPs on the Mental Deficiency Bill.²⁶ By 1931, when sterilisation was considered, Labour MPs may have seen any proposal emanating from the Society as inherently anti-working-class. Just 31 Labour MPs voted for voluntary sterilisation and 130 voted against.²⁷ Conversely, in Denmark and Norway, Social Democrat and Labour parliamentarians overwhelmingly backed sterilisation. In the Danish Parliament, there was only a handful of votes against the sterilisation bill of 1929, among which six Conservatives.²⁸ When the Norwegian sterilisation bill was considered in 1934, not a single Labour parliamentarian voted against. The Swedish Social Democrats also voted for sterilisation that year, despite the existence of a eugenics society in their country.²⁹ They had less choice since the pro-

23 Memorandum to the Ministry of Education 16 February 1935, p. 1, in: DSA, 2752 Københavns Universitet. Arvebiologisk institut, 1938–1989. Institutsager 1938–1948. Folder marked 1943–1948 (sic).

24 Letter from Daniel O'Brien to Oluf Thomsen 22 December 1931 in: DSA, 2752 Københavns Universitet. Tage Kemp, Professor. 1941–1963. Korrespondance, faglig og administrativ 1941–1944.

25 Letter to C. B. S. Hodson 11 March 1947, in: DSA, 2752 Professor Tage Kemp. Korrespondance, Bureau of Human Heredity, Union Internationale des Sciences Biologiques 1938–1957. Folder marked Bureau of Human Heredity 1938–1957.

26 Mathew Thomson: *The Problem of Mental Deficiency. Eugenics, Democracy, and Social Policy in Britain c. 1870–1959*, Oxford 1998, p. 43.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 70.

28 Hansen, p. 39.

29 Gunnar Broberg/Mattias Tydén: *Eugenics in Sweden: Efficient Care*, in: Broberg/Roll-Hansen (eds.): *Eugenics and the Welfare State. Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland*, East Lansing MI 2005, pp. 77–149, p. 102.

posals came from their own government, which was not the case in Britain, Denmark or Norway.

How Sterilisation was Legalised

Allied to the explanation given above, and even more important, was that the sterilisation bills were promoted not primarily as eugenic enactments, but as protection against sexual offenders. The *Eugenics Review* contained a piece about proposed sterilisation measures in Norway in 1933. Commenting on the draft bill issued by Mjøen's Consultative Committee on Eugenics, the editor noted that it pertained both to sufferers from hereditary diseases and sexual deviants. These were to be treated by sterilisation and castration respectively. The editor feared that a bill with two separate purposes could cause confusion and that the sterilisation measures, which he was most concerned about, might be rejected on the back of opposition to castration.³⁰ In fact, this conflation strengthened sterilisation. In order to see how it is necessary to investigate the aetiology of the sterilisation measures.

In 1923 a petition was presented to the Danish Parliament from the Women's National Council (*Danske Kvinders Nationalraad*), asking what was being done to combat the rise in sexual crime against women and children. More than 100,000 people had signed the petition. It mentioned castration and internment for life as possible solutions.³¹ These were put to a commission on criminal law reform, which came out against castration as a punishment or deterrent due to its unpredictable effects. But in 1924 the first Social Democrat government came to power. Its Minister of Justice was the eugenicist Steincke, who appointed another commission that year to examine sterilisation of the mentally retarded and castration of some sexual offenders.³² Two issues that had originally been separate now became conflated. The second commission recommended sterilisation for inmates of institutions and castration for offenders with a particularly high sex drive.³³ The Liberal government implemented the commission's recommendations in 1929, including a sunset clause, whereby the law would only be in force for five years. The legislation came into effect on 1 June 1929.

Evidence for the non-eugenic impetus towards sterilisation comes from the British legation in Copenhagen's report to the Foreign Office dated 26 September 1929 on the Danish sterilisation law. Admittedly, there had been a previous report on 26 May, but the second report was concerned solely with the issue of sexual offences. Its first point was

30 *Eugenics Review* 25:3 (1933), p. 144.

31 Hansen, p. 31.

32 Tage Kemp: *Arvehygiejne*. Festskrift udgivet af Københavns Universitet i anledning af Universitetets årsfest November 1951, Copenhagen 1951, p. 25.

33 Hansen, p. 36.

the inevitable public reaction to the murder of a little girl in September 1929. The killer was described as a “degenerate of the name of Jørgensen”, implying that he suffered from a hereditary affliction.³⁴ There was a demand for further action against such dangerous individuals even after the sterilisation law had been passed. The Minister of Justice, Carl Theodor Zahle, explained that work was in progress on a bill to protect the public against infractors of the moral type, whether “abnormal” or “normal with vicious tendencies.” This suggests that the populace generally supported the provisions for castration in the sterilisation bill. How did it regard the other issue of sterilisation of non-violent mental defectives? It is likely this was ignored in order to attain the desired outcome on castration. Also, eugenic discourses described such people as “degenerates”, suggesting that they were decadent and dangerous too.

The Danish example was watched with interest in Norway. More evidence in favour of the non-eugenic origins of sterilisation comes from an editorial in the Oslo newspaper *Aftenposten*. The issue of 18 December 1929 refers to the Danish sterilisation law, “newly implemented” and speaks of “the considerable interest which attaches to the experiences to be made in this area in Denmark”.³⁵ The eugenic aspects of the law were seen by the newspaper as subsidiary, although not devoid of utility. The main point in its estimation was protection against sexual transgressors. The law had been passed six months earlier, yet came to mind when considering what to do about such offenders. The editorial also noted that sexual transgressors to a greater or lesser extent were driven by hereditary weaknesses. This provided an elegant justification for linking the major and the minor interest.

Not only was sterilisation in Norway influenced by developments in Denmark, but its actual implementation followed parallel lines. In 1927 a Penal Commission had recommended sterilisation but not castration. It had been set up in response to demands for better protection against sexual offenders. One of its members was the female physician Ingeborg Aas, who, in an appendix to its report, not only argued forcefully for sterilisation but also for the castration of sexual offenders.³⁶ Under the auspices of the National Council of Norwegian Women (*Norske Kvinners Nasjonalråd*), Aas published a book in 1931 entitled “How can society protect itself against the feeble-minded and sexual transgressors?”³⁷ This linkage was damning to the mentally deficient, as few would be interested in protecting their rights if it were imagined that they were potentially dangerous to women and children. Aas argued on eugenic grounds, making rudimentary

34 Letter from the British Legation in Copenhagen to Foreign Office 26 September 1929, in: WL, SA/EUG/D226. Microfiche 1 of 2.

35 *Aftenposten* 18 December 1929, in: NSA, RA/PA-0280/D/Da/L0075/0001.

36 Roll-Hansen: *Norwegian Eugenics*, p. 169.

37 Reviewed by Otto Lous Mohr in: *Dagbladet* 18 February 1932: in NSA, RA/PA-0280/D/Da/L0075/0001.

calculations about how much the public purse could save by these medical interventions. The presentation was hardly fair, but it was effective. A unanimous resolution of the National Council, meeting in Bergen in January 1932, urged Parliament to implement the report's suggestion.³⁸

When the bill on sterilisation was presented in 1934, there were provisions for castration too. A person at least 21 years of age could ask for voluntary castration if it was felt that he had an abnormal sex drive and would be dangerous to his surroundings. It could also be made compulsory if demanded by the authorities.³⁹ That these were important aspects of the bill is clear from the context. A British memorandum written by its legation in Oslo asked whether public opinion was for or against such measures. The answer is given by the clamour of the population for the harshest measures against sexual offenders, whenever a criminal assault had taken place. These included castration, flogging, and capital punishment.⁴⁰ Therefore, it is overwhelmingly likely that there was public support for castration, and sterilisation was regarded as intimately connected to it. The demands of working-class women, who rightly considered themselves and their children especially at risk, would have ensured that Labour parliamentarians voted in favour of the measures.⁴¹ It would have been very difficult for them, or for politicians of other parties, to take out the sterilisation measures in a bill for this purpose, even if it was the castration of sexual offenders which was the desideratum. And the eugenic discourse of "degeneracy" had successfully conflated the mentally deficient and such criminals.

It would be wrong to disregard wholly the strictly eugenic arguments for sterilisation or the efforts of eugenists to secure this outcome. In Norway Mjøen's Consultative Committee on Eugenics wrote to the Ministry of Justice in August 1931 detailing the principles it thought should be incorporated in such a bill.⁴² It later wrote a draft bill (including castration).⁴³ In January 1932 the socialist physician Johan Scharffenberg gave proposals for a eugenic law on sterilisation in *Arbeiderbladet*, the main Labour daily.⁴⁴ His suggestions included a greater degree of coercion. In Denmark Steincke had not

38 Letter from the British Legation in Oslo to Foreign Office 30 December 1932, in: WL, SA/EUG/D226. Microfiche 2 of 2.

39 Kemp: *Arvehygiejne*, p. 28.

40 Memorandum "Norway and the Sterilisation Question", in: WL, SA/EUG/D226. Microfiche 2 of 2.

41 *Arbeiderbladet* 14 November 1929 in: NSA, RA/PA-0280/D/Da/L0075/0001; Per Haave: *Sterilisering av tatere 1934–1977. En historisk undersøkelse av lov og praksis*, Oslo 2000, pp. 88–89.

42 Nils Roll-Hansen: *Den norske debatten om rasehygiene*, in: *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norway) 59 (1980), p. 280.

43 "Eugenics Legislation in Norway and Germany: Text of Proposed Laws", in: *Eugenics Review* 25:3 (1933), pp. 179–181, p. 180 f.

44 Roll-Hansen: *Den norske debatten*, p. 277 f.

only set up the commission which recommended the use of legal sterilisation, but he had also been a proponent for this since 1920. His book *Fremtidens Forsørgelsesvæsen* (The Future Welfare State) had made the extension of welfare conditional upon a eugenic programme, in order to make it affordable. In the speech in Copenhagen of 1928 mentioned above, he had listed “a certain extent” of vasectomy and salpingectomy as the fourth element of a eugenic programme which also included sexual education and restricting marriage and immigration.⁴⁵ As early as 1912, asylum director Christian Keller had urged a law on sterilisation in order to clear up the ambiguous legal situation in Denmark, which neither prohibited nor sanctioned it.⁴⁶

Sterilisation: Causes and Consequences

In terms of causal analysis, however, if the explanation advanced here is correct, the directly eugenic input was more of a background to the sterilisation laws than the decisive factor. The full explanation engages with Lucassen’s views on why sterilisation was not accepted by Parliament in Britain. He sees a high degree of class antagonism in that country as one of the reasons.⁴⁷ Class antagonism obviously played a part in the policies of socialist parties throughout Europe, but eugenicists’ hostility towards blue-collar workers must be the crucial point if this was to have an effect when those parties considered sterilisation bills. Although eugenic discourses in Sweden were often elitist, the eugenicists admired indigenous peasants too.⁴⁸ Swedish workers probably felt they had nothing to fear, and the public seems to have enjoyed the race rhetoric.⁴⁹

After Denmark had passed the sterilisation law of 1929, the measures were made permanent by new legislation in 1935. The new law made castration compulsory in some cases, while still maintaining the fiction that sterilisation was voluntary.⁵⁰ The consent of the patient was theoretically required, but since a guardian could also give consent on his or her behalf, it allowed asylum directors to make the decision. The 1935 law explicitly allowed sterilisation for eugenic reasons.⁵¹ In 1934 a separate law on mental deficiency permitted compulsory sterilisation of people affected by this. Therefore the original probationary law was split in two in 1934 and 1935, with separate provision for mental

45 K. K. Steincke: Sociallovgivning og rasehygiene, in: Tidsskrift for Den norske lægeforsning 3 (1929), pp. 1–19, p. 16, in: NSA, RA/PA-0280/D/Da/L0075/0001.

46 Koch: Racehygiejne, p. 54.

47 Lucassen, p. 283.

48 Maria Björkman/Sven Widmalm: Selling Eugenics: The Case of Sweden, in: Notes and Records of the Royal Society 64:4 (2010), pp. 379–400, pp. 388 ff.

49 Broberg/Tydén, p. 86.

50 Hansen, p. 41; Lene Koch: Tvangsterilisation i Danmark 1929–67, Copenhagen 2000, p. 26.

51 Ibid., p. 67.

defectives and sterilisation regarded in a new context of care for them. The 1935 law only concerned individuals of normal intelligence. The overt mention of eugenics might be caused by the input of doctors who reacted to the original 1929 law. As argued here, the doctrine was one for specialists in the fields of medicine, science, criminology, or charity. A popular mandate was not required, and it seems not to have been a very prevalent ideology among politicians either, as Steincke was responsible for advancing most of the eugenic legislation. In 1937 abortion was legalised after a commission recommended it.⁵² The text of the law stated that a pregnant woman could seek a termination if there was an obvious danger, owing to hereditary disposition, that the child would suffer from serious mental or physical diseases or subnormality.⁵³ Steincke's department succeeded in restricting marriage for mental defectives in 1938. The other declared eugenicist in the Danish Parliament was Social Democrat Vilhelm Rasmussen, a popular public speaker.⁵⁴

The Norwegian sterilisation law of 1934 allowed voluntary sterilisation of men and women over the age of 21 who could give a valid reason for wishing the procedure to be undertaken.⁵⁵ There were also provisions for the sterilisation of people of unsound mind, mental defectives, or individuals below the age of 21. These additionally required written consent from the individual's doctor or warden. Lastly, persons regarded as permanently insane or of very severe mental retardation could be sterilised with the approval of their warden or guardian, the initial application coming from them, the police or institutional authorities. It was not revised until 1977, but in 1942 the Quisling government decreed a new law for the protection of the national race.⁵⁶ This law allowed any person in authority to initiate sterilisation on a subject who lived locally. Such sterilisation would be compulsory, and there were even guidelines on the use of physical force. It remained valid until the end of the war. No similar wartime policy or law existed in Denmark, mainly because the coalition governments of Thorvald Stauning, Vilhelm Bull and Erik Scavenius succeeded in avoiding direct German rule.

A comparison of eugenics in Denmark and Norway should naturally consider whether there were imbalances in the number of sterilisations carried out between the countries. In 1950 the Danish population stood at 4,281,000, while there were 3,278,000 inhabitants

52 *Berlingske Tidende* 18 May 1936, p. 3.

53 "Danish Law on Abortion", in: *Eugenics Review* 30:1 (1938), pp. 43–46, p. 43.

54 Hansen, p. 21. See *Social-Demokraten* (Denmark) 16 January 1915, p. 2; 28 January 1915, p. 2; 15 January 1917, p. 4.

55 Per Haave: *Tvangssterilisering i Norge. En velferdsstatlig politikk i sosialdemokratiets regi?*, in: Hilda Rømer Christensen/Urban Lundberg/Klaus Petersen (eds.): *Frihed, lighed og tryghed. Velfærdspolitik i Norden*, Århus 2001, pp. 140–160, p. 141.

56 Roll-Hansen: *Norwegian Eugenics*, p. 179.

of Norway.⁵⁷ A total of 5,925 sterilisations had been carried out in Denmark.⁵⁸ In Norway the tally of the 1934 law was 1,856.⁵⁹ Then there are the sterilisations effected under Quisling's law. According to Per Haave's recent study, 502 people were sterilised while it was effective between 1943 and 1945.⁶⁰ That figure is included in the calculations below, so that the continuity of Norwegian history is maintained. The greater total in Denmark is accounted for, firstly, by the law coming into force earlier there, and also the larger population. But if we divide the number of sterilisations by the number of years each act had been operational, we reach an annual rate of almost 269 for Denmark and 139 for Norway. This is significantly higher in Denmark, even when its larger population is taken into account. (Norway would have had an imaginary rate of 181 sterilisations a year with a population equal to Denmark's.) We should also be aware that these figures are not the total number of sterilisations carried out in each country. A large number of women were sterilised on medical grounds, independently of the law.⁶¹ It would nevertheless be true to say that the higher Danish figure, the separate law for mental defectives, the earlier implementation of the law, and that the 1934 law officially sanctioned compulsion, indicate that the Danish authorities viewed the early twentieth-century discourse of the "menace of the feeble-minded" with greater alarm than the Norwegians did.⁶² Lene Koch has argued that sterilisation in Denmark was intimately tied up with the social welfare reforms which were planned for the future, whereas Haave sees no equivalent link in Norway.⁶³

Racism: Ambiguous or Open

The other question which this comparison is able to comment on is to what extent Danish and Norwegian eugenics were racist. Both Bent Sigurd Hansen and Koch agree that Danish eugenics was not fundamentally racist, though the latter includes the Roma people (gypsies) in the list of undesirables which eugenists hoped would disappear.⁶⁴ Nils Roll-Hansen sees the majority of Norwegian eugenists as racists, and Haave has written a book specifically on the sterilisation of the "Romany" people (travellers similar to gyp-

57 Brian R. Mitchell: *International Historical Statistics. Europe 1750–2005*, Basingstoke 2007, p. 3, p. 6.

58 Koch: *Tvangssterilisering*, p. 372, p. 373, p. 381.

59 Haave: *Tvangssterilisering*, p. 143.

60 Per Haave: *Sterilization under the Swastika: The Case of Norway*, in: *International Journal of Mental Health* 36:1 (2007), pp. 45–57, p. 48, p. 45.

61 Haave: *Tvangssterilisering*, p. 144.

62 For an introduction to this topic in the United States, where the discourse originated, see Stephen Jay Gould: *The Mismeasure of Man*, London 1992, especially p. 158 ff.

63 Haave: *Tvangssterilisering*, p. 159; Lene Koch: *Tvangssterilisering i Danmark 1929–67*, in: Christensen/Lundberg/Petersen (eds.), pp. 163–178, p. 163.

64 Koch: *Racchygiejne*, p. 234; Hansen, p. 50.

sies, known as *tatere/tattare* in Scandinavia) in Norway.⁶⁵ The eugenics of the Nordic countries in general had a very strong racial component to it. At the International Congress of Eugenics in New York in 1921, Mjøen made his name with a warning against miscegenation, and he succeeded in having a committee set up to look specifically at immigration.⁶⁶ All the eugenicists who served on it were Scandinavians, except the American Charles Davenport. In 1928 the International Federation of Eugenic Societies established a committee to examine miscegenation. Half the members were Scandinavians.⁶⁷ Mjøen was an arch-racist of such proportions that he may rightly be labelled as a proto-Nazi. He ended his popular book on eugenics with a eulogy of Northern Europeans:

The Germanic people stand today without doubt at the helm of the modern Aryan ship of culture. No new and uncounted Aryan races of culture stand ready to take over if the power of the Germanic people should fail. [...] No, the race which has the best, the victorious potential in its germ plasm, is the 'immortal' one, which has the future in its grasp. It is the race which in England fostered a Shakespeare, a Darwin, which in Germany made Goethe, Kant, Lessing, Nietzsche and Wagner. It is the race, which corporal display of power and mental production in philosophy, music and especially science, the history of the world has not witnessed equal.⁶⁸

Much of his work consisted of investigations purporting to show that race mixture was harmful. He tried to prove this in rabbits by referring to the way their ears hung down or stood up when different breeds were mated.⁶⁹ He referenced but ignored the work of the anthropologist Eugen Fischer, who had studied intermarriage between white colonisers and so-called Hottentots in South-West Africa.⁷⁰ Fischer, who later co-authored the standard German textbook on eugenics, found that the offspring was healthy and

65 Roll-Hansen: *Norwegian Eugenics*, p. 159, p. 164, p. 181; idem: *Den norske debatten*, p. 262, p. 264f.

66 Letter from Mjøen to Department of Social Affairs 27 July 1923 and newspaper report by S. Haard av Segerstad, dated October 1921, in: NSA, RA/S-1278/D/Lo279.

67 „International Eugenics Federation: Report of the annual meeting“, in: *Eugenics Review* 20:3 (1928), pp. 185–187, pp. 186–187.

68 Jon Alfred Mjøen: *Racehygiene*, Kristiania (Oslo) 1914, pp. 238–239.

69 Jon Alfred Mjøen: *Harmonic and Disharmonic Racecrossing*, in: Charles B. Davenport/Henry F. Osborn/Clark Wissler/Harry H. Laughlin (eds.): *Eugenics in Race and State*, Vol. 2, *Scientific Papers of the Second International Congress of Eugenics*, Baltimore MD 1923, pp. 41–61, p. 57; Jon Alfred Mjøen: *Race-Crossing and Glands: Some Human Hybrids and their Parent Stocks*, in: *Eugenics Review* 23:1 (1931), pp. 31–40, p. 32.

70 Mjøen: *Racehygiene*, p. 69; idem: *Harmonic and Unharmonic Crossings: Racetypes and Racecrossings in Northern Norway*, in: *Eugenics Review* 14:1 (1922), pp. 35–40, p. 38.

that no adverse effects resulted from miscegenation.⁷¹ But Mjøen was on a trajectory to a completely different conclusion. His studies of intermarriage between Norwegians and the Sami people of Northern Norway became increasingly hysterical. Initially, he merely voiced his scepticism about “the purifying effects of blood mixture”.⁷² Then he began to postulate that tuberculosis, other diseases and crime were often caused by race-mixture. Later, he wrote that he was becoming more and more convinced that the inmates of asylums and prisons were to a large extent recruited from this mixed population.⁷³ In the *Eugenics Review* in 1931 he reviewed the book *Die Rassenmischung beim Menschen* (Race Mixture in Humans) by Herman Lundborg, Director of the Institute of Race Biology at Uppsala University in Sweden. It concluded: “Herman Lundborg has in this and other works given his countrymen a warning. We [...] are in great debt to him for his courageous campaign to preserve the Nordic race from race-mixing and destruction”.⁷⁴

By a curious coincidence, the same issue contained an article by Søren Hansen on eugenics in his home country. He argued for eugenics as part of a programme of social hygiene, eliminating diseases like tuberculosis and syphilis, which were not strictly speaking hereditary.⁷⁵ On the question of race, he had this to say:

We do not in Denmark share the opinion of those philosophers who look upon the so-called Nordic race as the best of all, and dream of making a pure breed of it. The pure Nordic type is certainly strong and healthy, but in no way more or less resistant to disease than other European races, if not transferred to foreign surroundings. We do not indulge in any hope of strengthening the people through selective racial mating; but we try to do it by the best mental and physical education possible and by improving the general hygienic conditions of the children.⁷⁶

Indeed, there are fewer examples of scientific racism in Danish eugenics. In 1942 Tage Kemp, Director of the Institute of Heredity in Copenhagen, suggested that a work on the genealogical, social, and psychiatric conditions of the Roma people in Denmark should be published as priority relief work, in other words to aid the wartime economy.⁷⁷ This

71 Broberg/Tydén, p. 90.

72 Harmonic and Unharmonic Crossings, in *Eugenics Review* 14:1 (1922), pp. 35–40, p. 38.

73 Race-Crossings and Glands, in: *Eugenics Review* 23:1 (1931), pp. 31–40, p. 36.

74 Mjøen: *Die Rassenmischung beim Menschen*, in: *Eugenics Review* 23:3 (1931), pp. 253–254, p. 254.

75 Søren Hansen: *Eugenics Abroad. II-- In Denmark*, in: *Eugenics Review* 23:3 (1931), pp. 231–234, p. 231

76 *Ibid.*, p. 234.

77 Letter from Tage Kemp to Ejnar Munksgaard publishers 4 August 1942, in: DSA, 2752 Københavns Universitet. Tage Kemp, Professor. 1941–1963. Korrespondance, faglig og administrativ 1941–1944.

study by the medical doctors Erik Bartels and Gudrun Brun had been conducted at the institute. It contained a history of the Roma in Europe, followed by reports of previous research on this group in Germany and Norway. The latter included the work of Eilert Sundt (1817–1875), a pioneering Norwegian social scientist, as well as Johan Scharffenberg. Bartels and Brun saw *tatere* (the “Romany” people) and various other appellations as identical to what was then defined as gypsies.⁷⁸ Then there was a prosopography of as many Roma as possible in Denmark, with a genealogy of nine families.

Because of quotes from the previously published work, usually accepted without further comment, the book initially reads like a racist tract. This is what it had to say about Roma in Germany:

As to the sanitary and moral conditions it is said that the houses are extremely overcrowded and dirty. There is nothing like a bedstead for each person. [...] With the exception of some few ‘luxuriating bastards’ they are work-shy and live by begging and going about selling various goods. The principle of their household economy is as follows: ‘If there is money we live, if there is none we starve’.⁷⁹

There is no doubt that the authors disliked Roma and considered them inferior to Scandinavians. They wrote about the “these troublesome citizens” and “the gipsy problem” as a matter of course. It included reliance on public charity and unsettled living conditions, maybe affecting the education of the children.⁸⁰ But when they moved on to consider Roma in Denmark, they clearly decided to be fair-minded. Thus we learn that Denmark’s Roma “cannot be characterized as lazy” and that they try their best to make sure the children attend school.⁸¹ Another important factor in being less hostile to Danish Roma is that they were a negligible minority, numbering no more than 700 to 800 individuals.⁸² Mental tests on the children showed that the vast majority were normal, and when a child scored poorly, Bartels and Brun explained it away by saying their education is deficient or that the general impression formed is more favourable. They even occasionally admired some families, such as the case which they labelled *Gen C. 8*:

The waggon is brand new. Inside it is very tidy. The man is not in. His wife makes an unusually intelligent impression, and informs me that she and her relations had nothing to do with “travellers” before she was married. All the children seem to have

78 Erik D. Bartels/Gudrun Brun: *Gypsies in Denmark. A Social-Biological Study*, Copenhagen 1943, p. 11. Cf. Mottier, p. 136.

79 Bartels/Brun, p. 50.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 58 f.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

a quite natural mentality, but in comparison with other children from a similar economic milieu they are astonishingly intelligent, free and easy, and with a surprisingly good physique. Their carriage is perfect, their teeth sound. A grown-up daughter is one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen, corresponding exactly to the most romantic conception of the gipsies.⁸³

Thus, using eugenic criteria, Bartels and Brun came to the conclusion that Roma were not a threat to the Danish race. (The conclusion would presumably have been different if the prevalence of mental defect in the adults had been found to be hereditary.)⁸⁴ As long as there was no further immigration, intermarriage with poor Danes would cure the Roma of their *Wanderlust* and make them reasonable citizens.⁸⁵ This was the opposite of Mjøen's view that Roma were racially mixed and therefore unbalanced hybrids, filling prisons and asylums.⁸⁶ The Danes wrote that Roma had already contributed something to society through their circuses and musical entertainment.⁸⁷ Some had even invested in hotels and inns. Elderly Roma could not change their ways, so they should be allowed to retain their culture and be treated leniently if they committed small infringements of the law.⁸⁸ There should be no sterilisation of them as a group.

The contrast is striking also to Scharffenberg, supposedly a reform eugenicist, who wrote that Roma were a lower race who could not be assimilated to the Norwegian population.⁸⁹ There were too many imbeciles, schizophrenics, dipsomaniacs, work-shy, criminal vagrants and beggars among them. In his proposed sterilisation law, travellers were singled out as a special category for the operation.⁹⁰ His was not an isolated opinion. Ingeborg Aas was in favour of the sterilisation of travellers. She wrote that a large percentage of them were defective and feeble-minded. She thought that there would not be great resistance to ending this "plague of the nation".⁹¹ Ragnar Vogt, a psychiatrist, was another leader of eugenic opinion in Norway. He was a clear racist too: in his introduction to the theme, he wrote about "worthy" and "unworthy" races, opining that the suffrage should not be conceded to "the lower races" or the state risked being run on

83 *Ibid.*, p. 144.

84 See letter to the School Director of Copenhagen 30 January 1939, in: DSA, 2752 Københavns Universitet. Arvebiologisk institut, 1938–1989. Institutsager 1938–1948, folder marked 1940–42 (sic).

85 Bartels/Brun, p. 173f.

86 Race-Crossing and Glands, in: *Eugenics Review* 23:1 (1931), pp. 31–40, pp. 36–37.

87 Bartels/Brun, p. 56.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 175.

89 Haave: Sterilisering, p. 39.

90 *Ibid.*, p. 32.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

mean motives.⁹² There were racist opinions also in some of the Danish eugenic literature, such as the popular works of Jonathan Leunbach and Knud Hansen of 1925 and 1929 respectively.⁹³ Both wrote about the inferiority of coloured people and threats to the white race's supremacy. Søren Hansen criticised the first book in a letter written to the periodical of the Danish Medical Association.⁹⁴

The difference is that Leunbach and Knud Hansen had nothing like the stature in Danish eugenics which Mjøen, Scharffenberg, Aas and Vogt had on the Norwegian scene. Hansen was an unknown figure. Leunbach was a Jewish communist who was sentenced to three months' imprisonment in 1936 for carrying out illegal abortions.⁹⁵ Mjøen may not have been universally appreciated, but he was a Norwegian delegate to the International Congress of Eugenics in 1921. He was the most well-known of Norwegian eugenists abroad. Aas, a deputy delegate to the League of Nations, served on the committee which considered sterilisation, as did Vogt.⁹⁶ The latter has been described as "the founder of modern psychiatry in Norway".⁹⁷ Scharffenberg was a leading writer on a wide range of matters, as well as one of Norway's most famous doctors.⁹⁸ He was consistent in his belief in eugenics, only willing to eliminate certain ethnic minority groups, based on a family history of criminality or social problems. Thus he called for Norway to accept 5,000 Jewish refugees from Germany, as they were an exemplary race, an attitude for which he was strongly condemned by a letter writer in *Fritt Folk*, the newspaper of Quisling's party.⁹⁹

The External and Internal Enemy

Immigration was a highly contentious issue in Norway during the interwar period. As in the United States, eugenics found a rich field of application here. In 1927 the police and the central passport authorities were given wide powers to deport immigrants.¹⁰⁰ Those migrants had to have a residence permit before they were allowed to enter the country.

92 Ragnar Vogt: *Arvelighetslære og racehygiene*, Kristiania (Oslo) 1914, p. 123.

93 Koch: *Racehygiejne*, p. 47; Hansen, p. 44, p. 72.

94 *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

95 Alex Quaade/Ole Ravn: *Højre om! Temaer og tendenser i den anti-parlamentariske debat 1930–39*, no place of publication given 1979, p. 135.

96 Letter from the British Legation in Oslo to Foreign Office 30 December 1932, in: WL, SA/EUG/D226. Microfiche 2 of 2.

97 Roll-Hansen: *Norwegian Eugenics*, p. 156.

98 Nils Roll-Hansen: *Eugenics in Scandinavia after 1945: Change of Values and Growth in Knowledge*, in: *Scandinavian Journal of History* 24:2 (1999), pp. 199–213, p. 202.

99 Manuscript „Fem tusen jøder til Norge? Arbeiderpartiet kaster masken“, folio, in: NSA, RA/PA-0755/Fd/L0002/0043.

100 Olav Rovde: „... vi holder på å bli en av Europas søpelkasser.“ *Bonderørsla og innvandrings-spørsmålet i mellomkrigsåra*, in: *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Norway) 76:3 (1997), pp. 325–335, p. 327.

Roma and other travellers were prohibited *in toto*. In 1932 deportation was made even easier and the residence permit was only granted subject to passing a physical examination. Especially the Agrarian Party was hostile to immigration. In 1920, in its founding programme, there was a declaration that it wanted to defend “Norwegian family life and the character of the people” from “less desirable elements”.¹⁰¹ Hence there could be no immigration. At this stage, the justification given was purely emotional, but when eugenisists supported the party line, the Agrarians were delighted. Halfdan Bryn, a Trondheim-based physician and eugenist, gave “scientific” credence to what the party was claiming in a speech in 1931. Bryn was of a similar cast of mind to Mjøen, and worked on the Scandinavian Committee on Racial Matters. He said that the 66,728 persons who had emigrated to Norway between 1916 and 1929 “constituted a great danger to our people”.¹⁰² When so many of them came from Russia, Poland and the Baltic States, it only exacerbated the situation, according to his prejudices. It is conspicuous how influential eugenics was on debates relating to immigration. Writing a general history of early twentieth-century Norway, Knut Kjeldstadli quotes from contemporary opinion. Immigrants were regarded as “scum” and “trash”, whose “bad heredity” risked diluting the desirable Nordic race.¹⁰³

To be sure, Danish bourgeois opinion also worried about “Jewish and leftist” agitators who came to the country as immigrants.¹⁰⁴ The economist and eugenist Knud Asbjørn Wieth Knudsen gave a speech in Copenhagen in 1937 about Germany, in which he said criticism of that country for persecuting Jews was “misguided”.¹⁰⁵ He also stated that Russia would regain its stature as soon as it was run by “Russians and not a Jewish clique”. But while Denmark had a plethora of right-wing and even anti-parliamentary parties, it did not have an exact equivalent of the Norwegian Agrarians.¹⁰⁶ A party by that name (*Bondepartiet*) was founded on 19 January 1939, with a farmer, Valdemar Thomsen, at its head from the erstwhile *Det frie Folkeparti* (Liberal People’s Party, not to be confused with the official Liberal Party).¹⁰⁷ It gathered 3 per cent of the votes in parliamentary elections held that year. It does not seem to have been motivated by nationalism and racism to the same extent as its Norwegian counterpart. Olav Rovde, writing

101 *Ibid.*, pp. 327–328.

102 Rogaland 10 March 1931, in: NSA, RA/PA-0280/D/Da/L0075/0001.

103 Knut Kjeldstadli: *Et splittet samfunn 1905–35*. Aschehougs Norgeshistorie 10, Oslo 1994, p. 163.

104 Bent Østergaard: *Invandrerne i Danmarks historie*. Kultur-og religionsmøder, Odense 2007, p. 313.

105 Quaade/Ravn, p. 58.

106 See John T. Lauridsen: *Nazister i Danmark 1930–45*. En forskningsoversigt, in: *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Denmark) 95:1 (1995), pp. 99–142.

107 Quaade/Ravn, p. 44.

about the latter, believes that Swedish and Danish organised farmers were less influenced by eugenics than the Norwegian Agrarian movement.¹⁰⁸ This is interesting because he simultaneously declares that the Swedish and Danish nations integrated eugenics into academic and governing circles more completely than happened in Norway. No research has yet shown that Denmark sterilised anyone on the basis of ethnicity, but in Norway there were strong tendencies for the “Romany” people to be singled out for this measure. Estimates of the number of “Romany” sterilised range from 128 to at least 500, in the entire period when the sterilisation law was in force (1934–1977).¹⁰⁹

If Norwegian eugenic discourses and eugenic practice were more racist than its Danish equivalents, the question arises of why this should be the case. The first explanation is simply one of personalities. Mjøen studied the Sami people of Northern Norway, and he either came to it or went away from it with grave prejudices against this group. He was especially worried about those who were mixed Norwegian and Sami, starting from a boyhood memory of being driven in a reindeer sledge by one such individual.¹¹⁰ One of his contributions to eugenics was the argument that healthy individuals of good stock could nevertheless produce disharmonious children if they mated with someone of a different race.¹¹¹ Søren Hansen studied the Inuits of Greenland on expeditions in 1886, 1893, 1895, and later. Putting pen to paper after these, he described them even in 1895 as being of “the lowest stage of the entire species”.¹¹² But crucially perhaps, he thought the offspring of Danes and Inuits were an intermediate race, superior to the unmixed Inuits.¹¹³ This process of miscegenation continued, and by 1922 Hansen concluded that the Inuits had raised themselves to the level where they deserved self-rule.¹¹⁴ In the period which this article covers, there was accordingly a significant difference in racial attitudes between Mjøen and Hansen. Because the former had a profound influence on Norwegian eugenics, the doctrine as understood in that country was liable to be racist too. Then there is the existence of the Agrarians. They were the only mainstream Norwegian party to focus on immigration in their manifestos, but it resonated with a part of the population, including politicians of other parties. There was even a connection with Mjøen, as

108 Rovde, p. 333.

109 Haave: *Sterilisering*, p. 10.

110 Jon Alfred Mjøen: *Harmonic and Unharmonic Crossings*, in: *Eugenics Review* 14:1 (1922), pp. 35–40, p. 37.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

112 Poul Duedahl: *Dansk raceantropologi i Grønland*, in: *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Denmark) 103:2 (2003), pp. 335–357, p. 344.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 343.

114 *Ibid.*, p. 348.

the Agrarian movement (*Norges Bondelag*) appointed a genealogical committee in 1937 and named him as a consultant to it.¹¹⁵

A second possible explanation recognises that Mjøen, other eugenists, and the Agrarians were products of Norwegian history. The country only gained its independence in 1905. To a greater extent than Denmark, it contained ethnic minorities, especially the Sami and Finns in the north, who were seen as potential fifth columnists.¹¹⁶ There were significant cultural differences between city-dwellers and rural people. The latter felt that their way of life was under pressure. The result was an aggressive nationalism, often carried by the Agrarians, who defined “Norwegianness” as linked with the soil of the homeland. However, this causal analysis ignores that Denmark was involved in an actual (rather than imagined) territorial dispute, namely with Germany over Schleswig. A plebiscite in 1920 resulted in the northern part being ceded to Denmark, but the gain was precipitous and there were fears that the territory might be lost again. In the nineteenth century, scholars had worked to establish a Danish identity, defining it as different from “Germanness”.¹¹⁷ Danish eugenics in the twentieth century might therefore easily have continued along these lines, but did not. And Denmark had ethnic minorities too: Jews and the Roma people.

Thirdly, it should be remembered that while Norwegian eugenists argued for sterilisation on the grounds of race, no such *legislation* actually came into force. There may well have been conscious or subconscious ethnic criteria in the minds of the doctors who decided on these matters, but it was never an official policy. The Danish sterilisation figures may also hide that ethnic minorities had the operation performed on them to a greater extent than the majority population, as was the case in Norway and Sweden.¹¹⁸ No racial statistics were kept, even the censuses only distinguished by place of birth. That Danish eugenics was not very interested in race is the view of a secondary literature which has been written by only a few historians, although such a hypothesis has received support from what has been advanced here. If the comparison had involved solely the Institutes of Heredity at the universities of Oslo and Copenhagen respectively, it is probable that no difference would have been found. Kemp wrote that eugenics in Denmark had quickly left behind its *Sturm und Drang*-moment of naïve enthusiasm to focus on the noble goal of improving human health.¹¹⁹ That leaves unanswered what a study of this period in particular might have uncovered.

115 Rovde, p. 330.

116 Knut Einar Eriksen/Einar Niemi: *Den finske fare. Sikkerhetsproblemer og minoritetspolitikk i nord 1860–1940*, Oslo 1981, p. 323.

117 Anne-Lise Seip: *Nasjonens bygges 1830–1870*. Aschehougs Norgeshistorie, vol. 8, Oslo 1997, p. 26.

118 Francis Sejersted: *The Age of Social Democracy. Norway and Sweden in the Twentieth Century*, Princeton NJ 2011, p. 117.

119 Kemp: *Arvehygiejne*, p. 17.

Sterilisation and questions of race are the most obvious topics within Scandinavian eugenics, given that it was known as “racial hygiene”. Especially the first has been investigated at some length, while the recent acceptance of multiculturalism in those countries creates a demand to examine the past with reference to racial attitudes. A conclusion of this article is that Norwegian eugenics had a greater racial component to it than Danish. Since a pitfall of comparative history is to compare historiographies rather than “actual lived experience”, it cannot be stated with certainty that there was little or only mild racism in Danish eugenics.¹²⁰ But such primary evidence as has been used does nothing to dispel the notion of the authorities Bent Sigurd Hansen and Lene Koch that race was not a prime criterion. The sources do not leave in doubt that Mjøen was an arch-racist, while they and secondary literature indicate strongly that these attitudes were shared, to a lesser extent, by other Norwegian eugenicists. The scientific racism inherent in the Norwegian version might have been the basis for a popularisation of eugenics. That it came to nothing was probably by reason of a still relatively homogeneous population. The areas where ethnic minorities had a visible presence (especially Northern Norway) were sparsely populated, limiting the opportunities for communication.

On the other hand, it is clear that Danish eugenics was more deeply engrossed in the international discourse about the menace of the feebleminded. The significantly greater number of sterilisations in Denmark compared to Norway before 1950, reflect this. Eventually of course, the Norwegians sterilised 3.5 times as many people by their laws as the Danes (43,371 against 12,735), but in the last decade of the sterilisation laws, operations become truly voluntary and a means of permanent contraception.¹²¹ The figures until 1950 are of much greater relevance to eugenic practice.¹²² The higher numbers for Denmark in that period do not simply reflect earlier implementation, but also greater intensity. Denmark was the first nation to bring in sterilisation measures covering its entire territory. In practice, its policy was generally to sterilise people under the care of the authorities if those patients had a mental age below 12. The Norwegian law, more moderately, stated that prisoners or inmates should not be sterilised routinely if they had attained a mental age of nine.¹²³ Kemp justified the policies of his government in 1947 by stating that if the slightly fewer than 3,000 mental defectives, who had been sterilised, had been left free to reproduce, they would have had more than 5,000 children at that

120 Stefan Berger: *Comparative History*, in: Stefan Berger/Heiko Feldner/Kevin Passmore (eds.): *Writing History. Theory and Practice*, London 2010, pp. 187–205, p. 192.

121 Koch: *Tvangssterilisering*, p. 195, p. 372, p. 373; Haave: *Tvangssterilisering*, p. 143.

122 Mattias Tydén: *The Scandinavian States: Reformed Eugenics Applied*, in: Bashford/Levine (eds.), pp. 363–376, p. 370 f.; Roll-Hansen: *Eugenics in Scandinavia*, p. 209 f.

123 Haave: *Tvangssterilisering*, p. 142.

point.¹²⁴ Of those children, between a third and a half would themselves have been mentally defective, leading to many more such people in later generations. Denmark allowed abortion on eugenic grounds after its 1937 law was implemented two years later. In 1951 Kemp estimated that between 500 and 1,000 abortions in recent years had been eugenic in nature.¹²⁵ That Norway only allowed termination of pregnancy where the mother's life or health was at risk, also points to the Danish negative eugenic measures being stronger in intensity.¹²⁶

Conclusion

Practitioners of comparative history are clear that they do not simply wish to identify interesting likenesses and differences. The best writings in the field begin with an explicit question to which is sought an answer.¹²⁷ Or formulated another way, those likenesses and differences should also lead to causal explanations.¹²⁸ If, as seems likely, Norwegian eugenics was more racist and Danish eugenics was more hostile to the “feble-minded” than the other, what can be learned from that? It shows who was considered “the enemy” in each national context. Retaining the purity of the race is probably about not sharing opportunities and resources with outsiders. The Agrarians used biological arguments, but the Labour Party more explicitly let it be known what its concerns were. In a propaganda film from 1930 *Frem til Seier* (Forward to Victory), it warned that Norwegian seamen were being dismissed in favour of non-white people.¹²⁹ A reduction in the number of feble-minded, on the other hand, means making life more difficult for “rough” and “feckless” members of the working class or the underclass. This was stated openly by Steincke in his book from 1920. The welfare state which he desired would collapse under the burden of such individuals, so they were best left unborn. A later warning by him put it thus: “[...] the lowest layer of society, the out-and-out proletariat, criminals and the feble-minded of every type reproduce far more prolifically.”¹³⁰

124 Tage Kemp: Danish Experiences in Negative Eugenics, 1929–45, in: *Eugenics Review* 38:4 (1947), pp. 181–186, p. 184.

125 Kemp: *Arvhygiejne*, p. 58.

126 See memorandum by Mr Gascoigne to British Foreign Office 7 November 1929, in: WL: SA/EUG/D226. Microfiche 2 of 2.

127 Berger, p. 198.

128 Mary Hilson: *Political Change and the Rise of Labour in Comparative Perspective. Britain and Sweden 1890–1920*, Lund 2006, p. 18.

129 Archive and Library of the Labour Movement, Oslo. Video marked v. 324.5 (481) F.

130 Steincke: *Sociallovgivning*, in: *Tidsskrift for Den norske lægeforening* 3 (1929), p. 10, in: NSA, RA/PA-0280/D/Da/L0075/0001.

In broad terms, a comparison of Denmark and Norway is suited primarily to discover similarities, which may then be related to the existence or otherwise of possible causes in each country. (This is John Stuart Mill's "method of agreement".) Common causes are thus verified. The present comparison has been used to strengthen the contention that the progression of sterilisation resulted from preventive measures against sexual crime, not eugenics *per se*. The uptake of scientific eugenics (as opposed to popular application) seems to have been limited among Danish and Norwegian politicians. In Denmark the clout of Steincke in forwarding eugenic legislation was remarkable.¹³¹ It was he who set up the commission which report led to the sterilisation law of 1929. He advanced the bill which became the law of 1934 on the mentally retarded. The abortion bill of 1937 came from his department, though he was not its initiator.¹³² He put forward the bill of 1938 which restricted marriage for the mentally deficient. Thus, while Denmark did not have a strong eugenics movement, the passing of legislation furthering eugenic aims was surprisingly easy. Norway lagged a little behind, but had eugenic concerns of its own, namely immigration. The legislation, especially sterilisation, was justified in both countries with popular accounts which had little to do with scientific eugenics.

Such popular accounts, applying biology to everyday issues, existed in probably every nation, including those which did not have a eugenics society. It was this dichotomy between popular and scientific eugenics which, in a Norwegian context, Roll-Hansen conceptualised when he wrote about the controversy over Mjøen's *Racehygiene* in 1914.¹³³ It is possible that the dichotomy is equal in explanatory power to the Anglo-American concern with mainline and reform eugenics. Mjøen's opponents, Kristine Bonnevie and Otto Lous Mohr, were both future holders of the chair at the Institute of Heredity at the University of Oslo. They wished to preserve eugenics as a truly scientific creed. Tage Kemp at the University of Copenhagen shared the same attitude. In the Danish historiography, it is almost exclusively such eugenics which has been studied. The coast is therefore clear for researchers who would like the challenge of locating the popular version.

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131 Alain Drouard: Eugenics in France and in Scandinavia: Two Case Studies, in: Robert A. Peel (ed.): *Essays in the History of Eugenics*, London 1998, pp. 173–207, p. 194.

132 Koch: *Racehygiejne*, p. 123.

133 Roll-Hansen, p. 266 f.; idem.: *Norwegian Eugenics*, pp. 158–161. Also see Adams, p. 222, p. 224.

