

Eugenics: Critical historical and ethical reflections

Wednesday 21st January, 2015, 1:30 – 6pm

McCrum Lecture Theatre, Bene't Street, Cambridge

Eugenics and neo-Malthusianism: Infant life and death in the early twentieth century

Professor Alison Bashford, Faculty of History, University of Cambridge

This paper explores the connection between eugenic and neo-Malthusian thought. Although historians and other commentators often focus on the regulation of birth to explain eugenics, reducing very high infant mortality was a strong rationale as well, and one much harder to explain away.

Eugenics and the state: Historic practices and 'reparative justice'

Dr Véronique Mottier, Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge
Jesus College, University of Cambridge & Laboratoire de Sociologie, Université de Lausanne

In this talk I, firstly, discuss key features of eugenic practices in the case of Switzerland, which pioneered important eugenic policies. Secondly, I argue that a critical analysis of these practices raises analytical questions as to the notion of 'the state' and its responsibility in the history of eugenics, as well as political questions, as the failures and successes of current campaigns for 'reparative justice' illustrate.

Making better babies: Artificial insemination and eugenics

Professor Martin Richards, Centre for Family Research, University of Cambridge

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, there were many proposals to use artificial insemination as a tool for eugenic improvement. While such approaches were never adopted as part of national eugenic policies, they were influential in shaping clinical practices of insemination in Britain in the 1940s and 1950s. In the USA they led to the foundation of the so called 'Genius Sperm Bank', which pioneered some of the techniques for commercial sperm banking.

What is wrong with eugenics?

Professor Stephen Wilkinson, Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion, University of Lancaster

‘Eugenics’ is commonly cited as a major concern about, or objection to, contemporary genetic and reproductive science, but there is a lot of confusion and disagreement about what exactly the term means. This talk explores various definitions of ‘eugenics’ and, in the light of these, asks why eugenics is so often thought to be objectionable - especially given that one of its central aims, improving population health, is generally thought to be laudable. It also looks at the idea that we should abandon the term ‘eugenics’ altogether in bioethical discussions, given that it is so disputed and emotive.

Clinically-assisted reproduction: Eugenic and/or problematic?

Sophie Zadeh