

Book Reviews

Gerlach, who believed in a fusion among dendrites. Others, like Golgi, believed that the basic reticulum was made up of axon collaterals. According to Golgi, the nerve cell itself, like its dendrites, was not an essential element in neuronal organization, they had solely nutritive functions.

The book is of interest and importance for anyone interested in the history of the nervous system. At only a few points the text might tax the understanding of the non-neuroscientist. For example the discussion of gap junctions towards the end of the book would be difficult for someone without some relevant background in anatomy or physiology.

Shepherd's text emphasizes one of the pleasures of study of the nervous system; its international character. In addition to the Germans, Austrians, and Swiss, the Czech, Purkyne, the Italian, Golgi, and above all the brilliant Spanish histologist Santiago Ramón y Cajal contributed to this great series of discoveries upon which the neuron doctrine is based. The book is essential for every library which covers the history of biology or medicine, and a pleasure for those of us interested in the nervous system.

Mitchell Glickstein, University College London

NANCY LEYS STEPAN, *"The Hour of Eugenics": race, gender, and nation in Latin America*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1991, pp. x, 210, \$31.50 (0-8014-2569-7).

In a thoughtful and carefully researched book, Nancy Stephan examines the political, cultural, and scientific roles of eugenics in Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico from the 1910s through the 1940s. While Stephan employs European and North American examples for comparative purposes, her move to a new context greatly enriches our understanding of the social and ideological force of the theory of eugenics. By exploring the part played by eugenicists in discussions on race, national identity, and the role of women, Stephan meticulously demonstrates that eugenics in Latin America was not merely an absorption of the theories and activities of European eugenicists but an innovative adaptation of ideas on human breeding to a distinct setting. While eugenics was tied to the ideas of Mendelian inheritance in Anglo-Saxon countries, the neo-Lamarckian concept of the heritability of acquired characteristics continued to influence French and Latin American scientists well into the twentieth century. Thus, manipulation of the environment played a far larger role than concern about individuals' genes, and good sanitation and living conditions were believed essential to improving the human stock of Latin America.

In most Latin American countries the potency of the Catholic Church precluded the use of sterilization techniques to outbreed persons with undesirable qualities. Instead, "matrimonial eugenics", with its emphasis on puericulture—the scientific improvement of the circumstances surrounding conception and childhood development—played a leading part. Stephan suggests that because Latin American eugenics involved non-invasive regulation over marriage and reproduction, it has been overlooked by historians as a sideshow to the negative eugenics of the U.S. and Nazi Germany. Yet an alternate form of negative eugenics—the regulation of marriages through prenuptial medical certificates—was a key component of the conscious shaping of modern Latin Americans. Eugenic practices did not promote a uniform racial ideal but bent to nationalist requirements. In Argentina eugenicists pushed for a pure, Europeanized race. Elites in Brazil also fostered immigration to increase the white population, but there the mixing, or "whitening", of races was viewed positively. In revolutionary Mexico the strength of *mestizaje*—the fusion of all races—was hailed.

The author skilfully shows the ideological dualities resulting from eugenic practices. Eugenicists defined women primarily through their child-bearing function, believed by many to be an inherently anti-feminist project. Yet numerous reformers, including women eugenicists, believed that eugenics' focus on sex education and maternal and child care satisfied progressive aims. These debates reveal the flexibility of scientific ideas in the formation of social policy and political beliefs. At the turn of the century, immigration to Argentina was encouraged in the name of eugenic Europeanization of its people. Several decades later, as the economy soured, working-class European newcomers could be re-defined as a negative, low class influence on the Argentinian people.

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

Anne-Emanuelle Birn, The Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health

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

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

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

G. R. Searle, University of East Anglia

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

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