

## Book Reviews

once a popular movement emerged in the early years of the next century. Geoffrey Searle again highlights this conservatism, but he suggests that its practical achievements in the realm of social policy have been seriously exaggerated by historians, while its subsequent contributions to advancement in understanding of heredity, population problems, genetics, biometry and demography need to be acknowledged.

Lesley Hall questions the common assumption that eugenics and feminism were antipathetic and points to the many alliances with women's organizations over the potential common ground of motherhood and child welfare. This ideological repositioning is pushed furthest in Richard Soloway's analysis of the relationship between C P Blacker and Leonard Darwin and the emergence of a reform eugenics; though his failure to discuss the Society's support for sterilization surely weakens his case. In terms of new material for the English-language reader, probably the most valuable contribution comes from Alain Drouard in his account of eugenics in France and Scandinavia, where the support of radicals in the former and an alliance with the welfare in the state in the latter once again point to the problems with the conservative stereotype. Finally Daniel Kevles provides an overview of developments in the United States and Canada where he recognizes the attraction of eugenics to progressive social reformers and points to the genuine, though unsuccessful attempts to build protection of individual rights into the framework of eugenic legislation.

The essays on the history of demography, psychometrics, biometry, and human genetics, in contrast to the work of the historians, all avoid directly addressing the issues of social policy, ideology, and popular support; instead, they turn the history of eugenics into a history of its contributions to academic and scientific progress. The darker legacy of the past, is rarely confronted, apart from regretting the way it fuels an anti-eugenic sentiment and holds back the kind of eugenic "progress" which was simply impossible in the past and is now rapidly becoming possible through a

revolution in genetic understanding and the ready availability of prenatal screening. The lack of a critical perspective in these internalist histories and the obvious continuing potential for eugenics as a tool of social engineering suggests that the historian's role is more important than ever and in particular that it urgently needs to extend more seriously into the postwar period.

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**Doris H Linder,** *Crusader for sex education: Elise Ottesen-Jensen (1886–1973) in Scandinavia and on the international scene,* Lanham and London, University Press of America, 1996, pp. vi, 319, illus., \$46.50 (0-7618-0333-5).

Elise Ottesen-Jensen was a contemporary of the better known British and American campaigners for birth control, Marie Stopes and Margaret Sanger, but in spite of some similarities, comes across as a very different figure. She seems to have been an admirable woman, active in the provision of birth control and sex education (contextualized within a belief in the need for broader sexual reform), a pacifist and a committed friend to refugees from Nazi Germany. Her involvement with syndicalist socialism led her to advocate grass-roots self-help organizations and co-operative solutions rather than top-down models of either state or philanthropic intervention.

Norwegian by birth, married to a Swede and mostly active in Sweden (and internationally) during the latter stages of her career, she seems far more benign, less bitterly embattled, less defensively arrogant than her more famous contemporaries, a diplomat rather than a fighter, said to have been beloved by all who knew her (except perhaps Sanger, with whom she crossed swords over the direction of the policies of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, prizing individual self-determination over Sanger's increasingly conservative population-paranoia). To some

extent this may be attributable to the very different situation in Scandinavia: Ottesen-Jensen ("Ottar" to her friends and colleagues) was operating in smaller and far more socially homogenous countries than the UK or the USA, lacking in particular the powerful Roman Catholic lobby against which both Stopes and Sanger had to struggle. There is also, of course, a belief that the Nordic countries were far more sexually enlightened far earlier than the countries to the south, an image which this account does not entirely bear out. Leftists and female reform groups may have been discussing sexual issues with a freedom seldom found in comparable Britain or American circles, none the less Ottesen-Jensen discovered that openly advocating ideas which were part of the sexology of the time caused her to be spat on while riding the streetcar in Bergen. The Lutheran State Church and dissenting Protestant sects opposed birth control while pronatalist conservatives argued that a populous nation was a strong nation. In her work as a radical journalist and peripatetic lecturer Ottesen-Jensen uncovered a massive amount of sexual ignorance and suffering in supposedly enlightened Scandinavia.

Linder's book has retrieved an enormous amount of information, so much so that at times the reader is in danger of being bogged down in minutiae, and some passages read as if too literally translated from a Scandinavian original. The chapters on the internal machinations of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, while illuminating the rather different ideas about the role it should play among the European stalwarts of the birth control movement and those of the USA, perhaps do not entirely succeed in blending organizational and personal history. In spite of the amount of detail, there are a number of gaps. Much of Ottesen-Jensen's personal life remains shrouded in mystery. Her autobiography, written when she was nearly eighty, evaded such painful topics as the tragic history of her sister Magnhild, whose bearing of an illegitimate child, exile from the family, and consequent mental derangement had been influential in Ottesen-Jensen's break with the

beliefs of her clergyman father, and the difficulties of her personal life (it would appear that the archival record is also uncommunicative on this latter subject).

Before the First World War she entered a common-law marriage with the Swedish pacifist and socialist Albert Jensen, bearing him a child who died shortly after birth. In 1931 they finally married, following his divorce from the wife from whom he had been separated since 1904, but in 1935 she discovered that he was having an affair with a younger woman living in their household, and in spite of her pleas for a reconciliation, they separated in 1937. She later generously argued to sympathetic friends 'How could anyone be expected to stay married to a wife who was never at home?', referring to her active career as a lecturer and educator.

Apart from an early engagement, apparently terminated after the accident during her dental training which seriously damaged her hands, no other sexual or romantic relationships are mentioned, though many friendships are. Her own account emphasized passionate idealism and a desire to serve, rather than any personal needs influencing her choice of career, but perhaps this concealed any contradictions perceived between life and mission. Linder's title positions Ottesen-Jensen as "Crusader", suggesting a commitment to a cause transcending personal gratification, but perhaps, ironically, this dedicated fighter for sex education found pleasures and satisfactions other than the sexual were more important to her.

**Lesley A Hall,**

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**Alice Domurat Dreger, *Hermaphrodites and the medical invention of sex*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. xiii, 268, illus., £23.50 (0-674-08927-8).**

One would have expected the boom in historical studies of sexuality and gender to have begun with explorations of