

Gunnar Broberg

Geschichte der Eugenik in Schweden



Geboren in Hen, Schweden. Studien in Literatur und Geschichte, Ph. D. Uppsala. Dozent in Lund und Uppsala. Visiting Professor, University of California, Berkeley. Arbeitsgebiete: Naturgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts, Geschichte der Rassenhygiene. Adresse: Institutionen för idé- och lärdomshistoria, Box 256, S-75105 Uppsala, Schweden.

The interest in the history of eugenics is quite recent. Obviously, it could be a very delicate subject, not only because of the paradigmatic case of Germany but also because of unsettled business in other countries, matters which might account for some of this delay. But it is also possible to explain this current interest in the opposite way, as caused by some of the great moral issues of to-day: prenatal diagnosis, genetic engineering, sociobiology, population politics in the third world as well as in a modern metropolis like Berlin. We all live in a period of biological revolution, a fact which calls for historical explanation. To all that, the history of eugenics methodologically is a challenge to the historian, as he or she must dwell on the interrelationship between a number of scientific disciplines. He or she also confronts problems such as the questionable autonomy of eugenics as a science, indeed if it should be considered a technique rather than a science, she or he must dwell on its social context as well as on its impact on society. In brief, the interest in the history of eugenics is part of the development of history of science in the broad, sociological sense.

I came to Berlin with the intention of writing a book on the Swedish part of this story, and looking over my floppies it seems as if I almost did that. The early Swedish story seems to follow the general international pattern, with eugenic propaganda starting shortly before World War I, resting during the war, and then becoming institutionalized in the 20s. But in one way Sweden differs as it centered to a great extent around the Swedish State Institute for Race Biology, promoted by parliament and thus a matter for the tax payer. Eugenics in Sweden was part of public policy rather than the achievement of individuals. Still, the eugenic move-

ment changed in nature with the leaders of the institute in the 30s, from the traditional, even racist ideology of Herman Lundborg to the modernized medical genetics of Gunnar Dahlberg. (As in my case, writing institutional history often means acquaintances with easily disliked entrepreneurs; I have found my heroes and villains...) It is reasonable to stress the strong anthropological element of Swedish eugenics which could be explained by scientific traditions dating back to Linnaeus. Also, the remarkable fact that there could be such a thing as a *state* institute for race-biology, and that Sweden established the first of its kind. But it is also important to observe the taking over of reform anti-racist eugenics when central Europe moved in an opposite direction. This happened during the period of the modernized social democratic health program, which could be described as state-centered and supra-individualistic. Conclusions of this sort call for more work and comparisons with other traditions in the other Scandinavian countries as well as with Germany. Nils Roll-Hansen and I arranged a symposium on this topic and I also had fruitful contacts with colleagues at the Institut für Geschichte der Medizin (Freie Universität Berlin). At the moment German research on these issues is in a very important phase. Because of historical as well as current reasons Berlin is the right place for a historian of eugenics.

To get solid ground under my feet I also wrote a piece on early genetical concepts in Sweden, which up to this century mainly were Lamarckian. Paradoxically, such a state of affairs paved the way for the acceptance of Darwinism, but came into conflict with experimental biology. From time to time I also spent my day in the pleasant atmosphere of 18th century culture. A study treated the ambitions to create encyclopedic knowledge of nature as structured and comprehensive as possible. It was long overdue but it was only possible to write it in a final form with the encyclopedic facilities of the Wissenschaftskolleg. To me, the Wissenschaftskolleg became something of an updated version of that great Enlightenment encyclopedia of Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften and Künste*.