Journal of the History of Economic Thought,
Volume 35, Number 4, December 2013

BETWEEN PROGRESSIVISM AND INSTITUTIONALISM: ALBERT BENEDICT WOLFE ON EUGENICS

BY
LUCA FIORITO

> When the psycho-economic history of the years 1917 to 1921 shall be written by one sufficiently detached in time and sentiment, this sudden solicitude on the part of the ruling interests for the integrity of "American" ideals and viewpoints will doubtless be properly and fairly related to the fear of "radicalism" and the popular belief that "radicalism" and "foreign-language" are synonymous terms (Wolfe 1921a, p. 131).

Albeit concerned with the biological element in social evolution, Albert B. Wolfe was among the very few economists of the progressive era who openly expressed their concerns about certain implications of eugenic rhetoric for the social science. Specifically, Wolfe questioned the strong hereditary boundaries that more extreme eugenicists suggested about human beings. A careful examination of Wolfe's writings reveals that his reaction was rooted in the belief that many of the social problems that eugenicists attributed to hereditary limitations were actually imputable to the influence that the social, economic, and physical environment exercised on the individuals.

University of Palermo—Studi europei e della integrazione internazionale. Correspondence may be addressed to Luca Fiorito at luca.fiorito@unipa.it. I wish to thank Pier Francesco Asso, Thomas C. Leonard, Malcolm Rutherford, and Massimiliano Vatiero, and two unknown referees for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this note. The usual disclaimers apply.

ISSN 1053-8372 print; ISSN 1469-9656 online/13/04000449-469 © The History of Economics Society, 2013
doi:10.1017/S105383721300028X

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

I. INTRODUCTION: THE ISSUE

According to the received accounts, one of the distinguishing marks of the American Progressive era—the period of time from the second half of the 1890s to the early 1920s—was the broad popular consensus on the role of government as the primary agent of social change. To that end, an entire generation of young crusaders in public service seized and wielded new powers, and enacted a stream of new legislation, regulating markets for goods, labor, and capital, thereby protecting the less fortunate segments of American society from the consequences of unrestrained *laissez-faire* capitalism. Driving this activism was an almost unconditional faith in the role of science—including the emerging social sciences—to identify the nation's problems and implement wise plans to eliminate waste and inefficiency. Many interpreters have stressed the centrality of the ethical component in Progressive-era reformers' fervor. Acting as advocates for education, settlement houses, prohibition, immigration restriction, birth control, and political reform, progressive intellectuals sought to create a more democratic society. "They denied the liberal contention"—James Kloppenberg (1986, p. 173) pointed out—"that the pursuit of personal interest insures optimal social benefits. The public interest, like the ethical ideal, emerges from the concrete struggle among competing conceptions of the good." This ethical awareness was accompanied by an equally pervasive certainty that social progress requires government intervention. As Robert Prasch (1999, p. 223) has observed, "[a] unifying feature of Progressive era political economy was the belief that direct government action could serve the economic and moral needs of American people." Such contiguity between social science and reform was demonstrated by the fact that the American Social Science Association, formed after the Civil War, included both social reformers and social scientists (Ross 1991, p. 63).

Despite the wide acceptance of this narrative, recent historiography has shown that there are substantial reasons to question whether it accurately portrays the actual motivations leading many of the Progressive-era reformers. In a path-breaking 2003 article and in a series of other contributions, Thomas C. Leonard (2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2009) has offered a completely new historical account of the sources of Progressive-era labor legislation and the intentions of its promoters. Leonard's work indicates a significant role played by eugenic and "race improvement" ideas in the arguments made for policies such as minimum wages, restrictions on the hours of work of women, and restrictions on immigration. Specifically, Leonard ably documents that some of the leading economists of the time understood exactly that binding minimum wages would cause job losses. Nonetheless, they supported minimum-wage laws and other interventions into the labor market precisely because they would weed out those inferior workers—in particular, women, immigrants, and blacks—who earned less than an adequate standard of living and unfairly pushed down the wages of the more productive workers. Eugenics provided a "scientific" veneer for policies intended to promulgate racial, ethnic, or class prejudices. In this connection, Leonard writes, "the progressive economists … believed that the job loss induced by minimum wages was a social benefit, as it performed the eugenic service ridding the labor force of the 'unemployable.'" Accordingly, he quotes Sydney and Beatrice Webb's (1920, p. 785; quoted in Leonard 2003, p. 699) statement that "this unemployment is not a mark of social disease, but actually of social health." Further, he refers to Henry Rogers Seager (1913, p. 12; quoted in Leonard 2003, p. 702) of Columbia University, who affirmed that minimum

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

wages were necessary to protect workers from the "wearing competition of the casual worker and the drifter." In addition to Seager and the Webbs, Leonard mentions leading economists, such as Francis A. Walker, William Z. Ripley, John R. Commons, Simon N. Patten, Thomas N. Carver, Irving Fisher, Frank Fetter, William Willcox, together with several others, as adopting eugenic ideas.[1]

Interestingly enough, Leonard's lengthy list of eugenics supporters also includes the name of Albert Benedict Wolfe.[2] Wolfe, who would serve as president of the American Economic Association in 1943, can be defined as an institutionalist with progressive roots. As observed by Leonard (forthcoming), the first generation of American progressives was, in fact, born between the mid-1850s and 1870; while the public launch of institutionalism as a movement in American economics can be dated to 1918, when Walton H. Hamilton (1919) presented his famous institutionalist manifesto. Wolfe, who was born in 1876, just missed being of the original progressive generation, and was already forty-two in 1918. In the early 1920s, Wolfe became associated with the so-called "scientific wing" of American institutionalism (Rutherford 1999; Asso and Fiorito 2004). He contributed an essay to Rexford Tugwell's *Trend of Economics* (Wolfe 1924a), and participated in several American Economic Association roundtables representing the institutionalist point of view (Wolfe 1924b, 1926).[3]

Wolfe enrollments among the ranks of eugenic enthusiasts is based on his support for the "eugenic virtues of disemployment" (Leonard 2003, p. 703). Accordingly, in a passing comment, Leonard refers to the following passage from Wolfe's participation in an American Economic Association roundtable on minimum wages:

> The general toning up of industry that would result from universal minimum wage legislation would be noteworthy. If the inefficient entrepreneurs would be eliminated so would the ineffective workers. I am not disposed to waste much sympathy upon either class. The elimination of the inefficient is in line with our traditional emphasis on free competition, and also with the spirit and trend of modern social economics. There is no panacea that can "save" the incompetents except at the expense of the normal people. They are a burden on society and on the producers wherever they are. (Wolfe 1917, p. 278)

Wolfe's endorsement of minimum-wage legislation and its eugenicist consequences is not in dispute here. In this regard, Leonard's analysis is correct and pertinent.[4] Wolfe

[1]Leonard's list of eugenics supporters is quite heterogeneous and covers a broad range of American economics from conservative to progressive. Moreover, albeit all sympathetic to eugenics, these figures differed substantially in their views on the proper role and efficacy of eugenic policies (Rutherford 2005).

[2]Albert Benedict Wolfe (1876–1967) was born and reared in Illinois. He received his BA (1901) and PhD (1905) from Harvard. There he studied under Thomas Nixon Carver, who obtained for him a position of associate professor of economics and sociology at Oberlin College in 1905. From 1914 to 1923, he taught economics and sociology at the University of Texas, and then moved to Ohio State University as professor of economics. His doctoral dissertation, *The Lodging House Problem in Boston* (Wolfe 1906), won a David Ames Wells Prize at Harvard. This brief biographical sketch draws upon Dorfman (1959, p. 567).

[3]In the late 1920s, Wolfe's interests shifted to demography and population studies (see, for instance, Wolfe 1928a, 1928b, 1929).

[4]Wolfe was also a member, along with other academics such as Arthur N. Holcombe of Harvard, Herbert E. Mills of Vassar College, and Henry R. Seager, of a Special Committee on Minimum Wage Boards appointed by the National Consumers' League as early as in 1909 (Skocpol 1995, p. 405).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

agreed with many of his progressive fellows that a minimum wage had the positive effect of sorting the unfit, who would be expelled from the labor market, from the deserving workers, who would retain their jobs. There is one aspect, however, which I think deserves closer examination. Differently from most economists discussed by Leonard, he did not attach any racial, sexual, or classist connotation to the unfit or undeserving worker. Moreover, albeit concerned with the biological element in social evolution, Wolfe was among the very few economists of the time who openly expressed their concerns about certain implications of eugenic rhetoric for the social science. Specifically, Wolfe questioned the strong hereditary boundaries that more extreme eugenicists suggested about human beings.[5] As I will attempt to show in this paper, a careful examination of Wolfe's writings reveals that his reaction was rooted in the belief that many of the social problems that eugenicists attributed to hereditary limitations were actually imputable to the influence that the social, economic, and physical environment exercised on the individuals.

The paper is organized as follows: the first section presents Wolfe's general views on eugenics; the second and third sections discuss Wolfe's social psychology and its anti-eugenicist implications; the fourth section deals with Wolfe's criticism of Raymond Pearl's population growth theory; and the fifth section presents some conclusions.

II. WOLFE ON EUGENICS

Let me begin by pointing out that Wolfe showed a keen interest in eugenics since the early 1910s. This is confirmed by the large number of works on the subject he reviewed in leading academic journals (see, for instance, Wolfe 1910, 1911a, 1911b, 1913). The common theme of these reviews was an explicit skepticism toward the objectivity of the arguments advanced by eugenics apologists. Wolfe consistently challenged what he perceived to be the limitations of eugenics as a science: inadequate attention to environmental factors in the shaping of human nature, and overstated allegations about the inherited roots of social problems. In reviewing Caleb W. Saleeby's *Parenthood and Race Culture* (1909), for instance, Wolfe complained about the author's failure "to appreciate the initial difficulty, in both theory and practice, of distinguishing in any individual or any stock the characters due to organic heredity and those due to family and social tradition, custom, education, etc. This one fact should make us wary of accepting the conclusions of writers … whose enthusiastic discipleship outruns their scientific reason" (Wolfe 1911a, p. 132). In a similar vein, Wolfe believed that the position held in *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* (1911) by Charles Davenport—head

[5]Following Cooke (1998), by "extreme eugenicists," I refer to figures such as Charles Davenport Harry H. Laughlin, Henry F. Osbom, Madison Grant, and Leon Cole, who emphasized the strictly (mostly Mendelian) hereditarian aspects of eugenics, denying that environmental changes could significantly affect development. As noted by many interpreters, however, these views represented a harder edge of American eugenics—many more moderate eugenicists were willing to implement environmental reform measures and did not focus only on biologically inherited traits. This heterogeneous approach to eugenic reform, in part, reflected the varied interpretations of the meaning of the word "heredity" in early twentieth-century America (Leonard 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2009).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the Eugenics Record Office at the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory—overemphasized Mendel, and this enthusiasm had led him to unduly neglect the role of "social heredity" in the transmission of individual attitudes and abilities. As Wolfe put it in the pages of the *American Economic Review*:

> Seriously, we regret that Dr. Davenport did not wait a year or two before putting out this book. When a writer cites a family of yacht builders in which father, son, and grandson have designed and built cup-defenders, as a proof of the inheritance of specific mechanical ability, he has simply failed to think of the power of family interests and traditions, training, and above all of suggestion. No biologist should set his pen to eugenic paper until he has prayerfully brushed up his knowledge of modern genetic psychology and psychological sociology. He will then talk less glibly of the inheritance of specific mental abilities. By all means let us have all the light on heredity that scientific investigation, amply endowed, can give us, but in our enthusiasm in following out a new line of discovery let us not neglect to view scientifically all the factors that determine the character of the individual in society. A practically contemptuous attitude toward environmental influence, an ignoring of the tremendous power of "social heredity" and especially of the power of seemingly trivial suggestion on the young developing mind, cannot but injure, in the long run, the cause of racial improvement which Dr. Davenport has with such devotion and ability set himself to stimulate. (Wolfe 1913b, p. 168)

Environmental influences act upon individuals, according to Wolfe, through the intellectual and physical stimuli resulting from active cooperation among human beings, and this considerably decreased the impact of heredity.[6] It would decrease it, but it would by no means eliminate it. It should be noted, in fact, that although Wolfe criticized eugenicists for their lack of adequate attention to environmental factors, he did not deny *in toto* the influence of heredity in the transmission of human characteristics. As a telling example, Wolfe praised Henry H. Goddard's study into the inheritability of intelligence. According to Wolfe:

> *The Kallikak Family*, by the director of the research laboratory of the Vineland (N.J.) Training School for Feeble-minded Girls and Boys, is a book of another type. What investigations such as those into the Jukes and Edwards families failed to do—segregate environmental and hereditary influences and demonstrate the heritability of mental defects—this monograph does, beyond possibility of reasonable doubt. Not only is the hereditary character of feeble-mindedness proved with practical conclusiveness, but its economic significance is set forth calmly and sanely and with rare impressiveness. Every economist should read this book, whether he is interested in a dream of a future race, perfect in beauty and holiness, or not. (Wolfe 1913b, p. 169)

[6]Wolfe rejected also any deterministic account of human attitudes based on gender difference. In reviewing *The Task of Social Hygiene* by Havelock Ellis (1912), he observed that when the author "goes on to say that 'the really fundamental difference between man and woman is that he can usually give his best as a creator, and she as a lover, that his value is according to his work and hers according to her love,' we think he simply lets his literary ability get away with his science (1913a, p. 397). Similarly, commenting upon Thomas Nixon Carver's *The Religion Worth Having*, Wolfe lamented: "[w]e are left with a feeling that the author would go with some of the popular eugenists of the day and make a woman a mere reproductive organism rather than an integral part of this race, the progress of which is still to entail so much conflict and so much pain" (Wolfe 1912, p. 681).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Wolfe, thus, was mainly unsatisfied with the present status of eugenics as a scientific discipline but he did not exclude aprioristically the possibility of a fruitful cross-fertilization between eugenics and the social sciences. This led him to launch a plea for a "more productive cooperation in the future between biologists, sociologists, and medical men," and to concede that "in the general ideal of conserving human energy, which should be perhaps the economics ideal, the eugenics idea is so important, in promise, that economists cannot afford to ignore it" (Wolfe 1913b, p. 166).

Such an ambivalent attitude is confirmed by Wolfe's decision to include in his *Readings on Social Problems* (Wolfe, ed. 1916) a whole section on eugenics consisting of writings by Achille Loria, James A. Field, and Goddard. The section was preceded by some introductory remarks by Wolfe that deserve to be quoted in full length:

> Until recently the population problem has been discussed too much as if population were of unvarying potential quality, no matter how its quantity might change. If we are to regard the well-being of a whole people as the right aim of both individual and social endeavor, if we recognize that the material basis of this well-being lies in the power of men, within the limits set by natural laws, to utilize natural forces and materials in the most efficient and economical way, and if the psychical content of life derived from this material basis depends upon the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic sensitiveness of individual men and women, then it must be evident at once that a scientific study of the economy and efficiency of a population, in the largest sense, must include not only a study of the quantitative relation between a people and its natural resources, but a careful consideration also of the physical and mental qualities of the individuals, the families, and the stocks which compose the aggregate population. (Wolfe, ed. 1916, 135)

This passage reveals the essence of Wolfe's position, and its importance will appear more clearly below. It is thanks to eugenics, he argued approvingly, that the focus of demographic studies —and social sciences in general, we may add—could shift from mere *quantity* to *quality* of population. Current eugenics, especially in its extreme hereditary versions as epitomized by Davenport's work, was to be criticized for its unsatisfactory scientific content, and not for its philosophical premises; i.e., the hierarchical ontology of human nature it implied.

Apart from these scattered and fragmentary remarks, Wolfe's skepticism towards extreme eugenic views found its most complete and articulate expression in his own analysis of the psychological basis of social attitudes. Starting from the early 1920s, in fact, Wolfe authored a series of essays on social psychology (1919, 1921b, 1922a, 1923a, 1923b) that culminated in his *Conservatism, Radicalism, and Scientific Method* (1923c). There, he discussed major methodological issues of relevance for institutionalism and the social sciences in general, and proposed his own views on the nature of social conflict and the dynamics of institutional evolution. It is to these aspects, and their eugenicist implications, that we now turn our attention.

III. WOLFE'S SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

In order to assess systematically Wolfe's social psychology, a few preliminary considerations about his epistemological commitments become necessary. As already mentioned,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Wolfe belonged to the scientistic wing of institutionalism, together with people such as Wesley C. Mitchell, Morris Copeland, Rexford G. Tugwell, and Lawrence K. Frank, to name just a few. This current within the movement emphasized the scientific content of institutionalism as opposed to the metaphysical and pre-scientific character of received theory. In particular, as I have argued elsewhere (Fiorito 2009), it identified "science" with three main positivistic tenets: (1) empiricism in the extreme form of either phenomenalism or physicalism (i.e., the reduction of science to statements about directly observable facts); (2) naturalistic methodological monism (i.e., the view that social sciences have basically the same aims and methods as their natural counterparts); and (3) the emphasis on the social value of science and its practical applications to the problem of "social control."[7]

An important corollary of this general view was the adoption of behaviorism as the "scientific" psychological basis for social research. With its emphasis on demarcating science (observed behavior) from metaphysics (mental states), behaviorism could claim to establish a firm scientific link between the agent's objective situation (the condition, or conditioning) and the empirical observation of the corresponding behavior. Rather than concern itself with intentionality and introspection, behaviorists insisted, psychology should focus on aspects of behavior such as the stimulus-and-response sequence, habit formation, and habit integration. Psychological knowledge would then facilitate the prediction of behavior. As John B. Watson (1913, p. 167) put it, "In a system of psychology completely worked out, given the response the stimuli can be predicted; given the stimuli the response can be predicted." In this connection, Wolfe's enthusiasm for behaviorism was unequivocal. In his opinion, "[t]he lack of a mechanistic psychology, free from a priori philosophical and metaphysical presuppositions, based upon prolonged and disciplined observation and inductive analysis of human behavior …, has probably been the chief obstacle to the development of an objective treatment of human affairs." Such a "mechanistic" psychology, Wolfe optimistically continued, is now in the process of rapid development:

> Its methods and postulates aim to be scientific in the fundamental sense. It regards the human individual as a mechanism, and the key to its understanding an objective analysis of the mechanism of stimulus and response, from the simplest to the most complex aspects of the process. In a word, behavioristic or mechanistic psychology seeks the verifiable causes (sequences) of human activity. It aims to discover the facts as to the mechanism of human personality and the causation of the individual temperaments and attitudes. (Wolfe 1923c, p. 218)

Wolfe acknowledges the importance of an understanding of human purposes and motives for all the social sciences: "[h]uman life is also shot through and through with the purposes of human individuals.… Consequently the social scientist cannot dodge, if he would, the necessity of including motives in his factual data." In another passage, he insists: "[t]here is scarcely a department of social science, economics, jurisprudence, social psychology or what not, in which investigations of social organization and social process does not involve, or at any rate ought not to involve, a study of

[7]In his proposals for an objective, scientific approach to the study of human behavior, which drew upon the methods of the natural sciences, however, Wolfe was far more cautious than people such as Morris Copeland or Lawrence K. Frank. See Wolfe (1922a, 1923b).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

motives." But, he immediately adds in typical behavioristic jargon, "motives are to be regarded as links in the stream or nexus of the general mechanistic causation of social phenomena" (1923c, p. 234); "purposes are but a part of the mechanism" (1923c, p. 242). For the behaviorist, the notion of teleological behavior must be expunged from the dominium of scientific inquiry. Motives and desires are unobservable, and should be reinterpreted in terms of general empirical laws based on systematic observation of the correspondence between stimulus and response. Accordingly, Wolfe defined a desire as "the result of stimulus, and the stimulus always leads to some sort of bodily or psycho-physical activity." Any stimulus, he explained, "produces a disequilibrium, which is normally balanced by the appropriate reaction or response" (1921b, p. 282). It should be emphasized, however, that Wolfe's own version of behaviorism was not completely coherent from a methodological point of view. Differently from orthodox behaviorists à la Watson, in fact, Wolfe did not completely reject consciousness, and retained a vital role for instincts, mostly interpreted as hereditary stimulus-reaction patterns and proclivities. This led Harvard's social psychologist William McDougall to argue that what Wolfe means by 'behaviorism' "is merely the balanced psychology which does not, like so much of the intellectualistic psychology of the last century, concern itself exclusively with facts and problems of consciousness, to the almost total neglect of the facts of conduct. But to call such psychology 'behaviorism' is merely to confuse the reader, at the small gain of seeming to be in-step with a current fashion" (McDougall 1924, pp. 717–718; see also Dickinson 1924).

Coherently with his "behavioristic" creed, Wolfe proposed an explanation of social attitudes based on the interaction between the individual and his/her environment. For example, he argued that radicalism arises through the blocking of some (behavioristically conceived) desire, and shows itself in an attempt to change the environment. In Wolfe's own words:

> The normal, healthy conservative lives a life of short-cycle routine (largely habitual) in which organic disequilibria, physical or mental, are balanced, and the energy of desire or unrest released in a fairly regular rhythm. In individuals who become radicals, this short-cycle ebb and flow of disequilibrium and equilibrium, of desire and satisfaction, of stimulus and releasing reaction, is broken into by desires or interests which do not find release or expression in normal rhythmic response. *A state of more or less chronic unrest ensues, and may become the basis for definitely formulated desire for fundamental change in the environment.* (Wolfe 1921b, p. 281; emphasis added)

When an individual is confronted with the necessity of readjusting himself to his environment, he may either modify his desires and accept the situation or he may make an attack upon the environment. Readjustment may take place through one of three processes: (1) repression, which is not likely to produce radical attitudes; (2) transference and substitution; the individual may engage in some radical movement that symbolically represents the repressed desire; (3) reinforcement, through attention to the obstacles. This latter is the center of radical motivation, and it gives the drive and the consistency to radical movements. It should be noted also that, for Wolfe, there are positive instincts (i.e., inborn reaction patterns) that motivate innovators.

An exhaustive treatment of the psychological basis of Wolfe's analysis of social attitudes would go well beyond the limits of this paper. What is significant to the present discussion is the fact that in adopting an explicit behavioristic perspective, Wolfe

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

clearly reaffirmed his distance from the extreme eugenicists' views of human nature. Wolfe made clear his position in a paper—emblematically entitled "Eugenics and Social Attitudes"—read before the second international congress of eugenics in New York. "Contrary to the general trend of sentiment among orthodox eugenicists"—he affirmed in 1921—"I venture to think that the main cause of our failure to make the great Society safe for human life, freedom, and happiness, lies not in deficient mental capacity but in a lack of will and of the right attitudes" (1923d, p. 414). Wolfe then went on to elaborate to its full extent the criticism of eugenics he had already advanced in his earlier reviews. I cannot forbear quoting his paper at some length:

> [I]t appears to me that the main attention of eugenicists—of all but the most highly specialized genetic investigators—should now be directed primarily to the environmental causes of these obstructive social attitudes, and to the cultural means of their elimination. Such a shifting of attention and effort will by no means be contrary to the broader spirit of eugenics as conceived by its founder. For we need to keep in mind that Francis Galton [1904, p. 1] defined eugenics not only "as the science that deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of the race" but "also with those that develop them to the utmost advantage." Insomuch as Galton's work, and the work of most of the men who took their inspiration from his leadership, fell victim to the period when biology was going through its most striking development and when it was having a most profound influence on sociological theory and social ideals, it is not strange that Galton and his followers lost sight of the second half of his definition and that some contemporary scholars like [Karl] Pearson in England and Davenport in America have practically denied significance to environmental influence and ontogenetic development. Today, however, with the advances continually being made in behavioristic psychology, social psychology, and psychoanalysis, we should be more than unscientific did we not turn attention back to the neglected half of the definition and of the task of eugenics in this broader sense. (Wolfe 1923d, p. 416)

In reviewing the fallacies of eugenics, Wolfe contested the identification between the economic elite and the biological elite. Economic superiority cannot, in any case, be assumed to be the reflection of psychophysics superiority. "Paradoxically," Wolfe maintained, "the real dysgenic element of our population today … is to be found in strongest force not in the classes where it is usually assumed to lie, but in the well-to-do, middle classes." It is among these higher strata of society

> that we find the unquestioning acceptance of archaic philosophies and a hypertrophy of the unsocial instincts of acquisitions and combat and of class consciousness. Here, more than anywhere else, the individualistic social selection has put a premium on commercial "success," upon inability or unwillingness too closely to distinguish between production and predation, and upon warship at the golden sign of the dollar. (Wolfe 1923d, p. 417)[8]

[8]Wolfe failed to mention that many eugenicists rejected easy correlations between hereditary fitness and an hereditary aristocracy at the top of the social ladder. Charles Darwin himself had warned of the evil consequences of primogeniture's perpetuating the mental and physical weaknesses of elder sons while superior younger progeny were often unable to marry. In a similar vein, Galton argued that younger sons were usually more intelligent and successful than their eldest brothers, a contention he thought to be empirically reinforced by his biometric studies. See Solaway (1995, pp. 73–75) for a reconstruction of the debate on primogeniture and eugenics.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Such a perpetuation of "archaic" attitudes, he concluded, is not imputable to any "deficiency in native mental capacity." Rather, it is the consequence of the fact that, in these higher classes, "the whole weight of antiquated conventions, ideals, attitudes, and institutions is thrown with least relief and counteraction upon relatively defenseless youth" (Wolfe 1923d, p. 417). The Veblenian flavor of this whole line of reasoning is easily identifiable. Not surprisingly, in his writings, Wolfe repeatedly referred to Veblen's works, especially to the *Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* (1914). Significantly, in his later recollection, Wolfe himself acknowledged the influence of Veblen during his formative years: "[i]n all my student days at Harvard, I never heard of Walras or Pareto, or of a concept called 'general equilibrium'…. Institutionalism, in the shape of Veblen's first two books, was only a wisp on the horizon, not an ominous cloud" (Wolfe 1946, p. 848).[9]

IV. TOWARDS A SCIENTIFIC ETHICS

Moving from these metdological premises, Wolfe developed a whole analysis of the nature and causes of social conflict. Here, the pervading influence of Veblen becomes even more manifest. John Dewey's instrumentalism was pointed out as another influential source of inspiration (Young 1925, p. 160). The central thesis of Wolfe's social philosophy is that the principal source of progress in man's estate has been science and its fruits, while the main source of contemporary social problems is the failure of the habits and institutions that most directly determine social attitudes to develop as rapidly as those that guide scientific inquiry. According to Wolfe, it is primarily by means of intelligence, manifested and applied in scientific inquiry, that men have gained control over nature. As a consequence, he continued (1923c, pp. 276–277),

> unless there is some scientific reason for supposing that man is not part of nature, and is therefore exempt from its laws, the scientific method of investigating and ordering human relations may be expected, when really applied, to yield results far preferable to those produced by the motor-habituations, the superstitious sentimentalism, the dogmatic loyalties, and the weddedness to rationalized illusions which have thus far been man's chief guides to social organization and social process.

Unfortunately, however, antiquated habits of thinking and acting with respect to economic, social, political, and moral matters stand in the way of such an application of the "scientific method" to the organization of society. These habits originated long before the "scientific age," yet they continue most directly to determine the nature of the social and economic arrangements under which men live. "We are the victims," Wolfe (1923c, p. 301) pointed out, "of a social inheritance from the individualistic political and economic philosophy of the eighteenth century, a philosophy which is still used, great as have been the modifications, with popular, apologetic effect by those who oppose the development of a new and more social-minded liberalism." In turn, these antiquated habits of thoughts are fostered by institutions with vested

[9]At the University of Texas, Wolfe was a colleague of Max Handman, who had been close to Veblen at Missouri.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

interests. These institutions embody pre-scientific views of man and his place in nature and society. At the root of their dogmas are metaphysical doctrines based on ideas of the individual as social atom, changeless absolutes, fixed essences, and final causes. As examples, Wolfe referred to the "linear reasoning" bias—"the besetting sin of 'one-track' minds"—that contaminates much of received social thought, "from the economic man and Ricardo's theory of value to the frictionless static state and Clark's specific productivity." In this connection, eugenic thought makes no exception:

> Eugenics literature is shot through and through with linear reasoning. Less than formerly, but still, to all intents and purposes, the eugenicists, like their precursors the selectionists, are so keen to trace out the influence of heredity that they constantly take for heredity much that non-linear observation would show to be due to ontogenetic variation under environmental influences. If human life is ever reduced to a mathematical equation it is safe to say it will not a simple linear equation. Causation does not work in lines. (1923c, p. 249)

It is, thus, in this contradiction between the backward social and moral habits and the progressive science and technology that is to be found the underlying cause of the present social unrest and of the "moral confusion" that fuels contemporary social conflict. Wolfe's reconstructive program is suggested by his very characterization of the problem as the lag of habits and institutions directly affecting social attitudes behind the habits that guide scientific inquiry.[10] The former must become scientific. Men must learn to shape and control their social and moral habits by "the method of science." They have to develop an authentic scientific attitude based on the assumptions that "human life, like the rest of nature, is completely and dependably mechanistic" (1923c, p. 242).

We have already discussed Wolfe's conception of science in the previous section. The relevant aspect here is that the application of science to social organization not only involves the behavioristic study of human conduct, but also leads directly to the problem of social ethics. As he (Wolfe 1924a, p. 479) put it in his contribution to Tugwell's *Trend of Economics*: "[i]f behavioristic psychology … shall prove capable of giving us a really scientific analysis and understanding of human nature, as I believe it will, it should point the way to a fundamental, objectively scientific, ethical norm, or ultimate end of life." Further, ethics, like economics, is "also fundamentally a science of means and ends" (1924a, p. 477), and a truly scientific ethics must be based on the assumption that the *means* of living are social while the *ends* are strictly individual. "An ethics grounded in a hard-headed objective psychology," Wolfe explained, "will have to regard the individual as the only possible end." Whenever "some metaphysical absolute (like God or the 'race') or some figurative thing like 'social' welfare is set up as an end, ethics gets into logical difficulties with the known facts of motivation and breaks company with scientific psychology" (1923c, p. 253).

[10]Wolfe's emphasis on the progressive role of science and technology, as opposed to the conservative inertia exercised by habits and institutions, may appear as an important step toward an Ayresian dichotomous conception of institutional evolution. In spite of some undeniable parallels between the two men's social philosophies, Wolfe (1944) wrote a particularly critical review of Ayres' *Theory of Economic Progress* (1944).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Wolfe's notion of scientific ethics is based on the assumption that the individual acts in obedience to the strongest impulse or combination of impulses, and that "the strongest urge is, if conscious, the one obedience we believe or feel will give us the greatest happiness or the least unhappiness under the circumstances" (1923c, p. 257). In spite of this apparently utilitarian jargon, Wolfe developed his argument in non-strictly hedonistic terms.[11] First, he defined happiness as "that psycho-physical state or tone which results from, and accompanies, the full, free, and healthy functioning of the individual powers and capacities, to whatever extent and intensity and in whatsoever directions do not interfere with a like functioning of the powers of other individuals" (Wolfe 1923c, p. 258; see also Wolfe 1919, 1923a). Then, he argued that the total amount of individual happiness depends on the amount of possibilities for self-realization he enjoys and to the extent he contributes to the creation of these opportunities for other individuals. While, in fact, the "narrow egotist" pursues his own happiness "as he himself were the only end," the "broader egotist" may, because of his sympathetic attitudes, "suffer all the miseries he sees others suffer, but he also vicariously enjoys the happiness of others," and, by sharing their experiences, he "may live an infinitely larger life than the narrow egotist ever has the capacity to conceive" (Wolfe 1923c, pp. 258–259).[12] This allows Wolfe to distance himself from a purely individualistic conception of human nature. The individual, he wrote,

> may be regarded as a sort of dynamo, in which enter a multitude of lines of social influence, which are there transformed into currents of energy and personality that, then, flow out from him to the external world. The amount and character of his self-expression and happiness depend on two things, (1) the amount and kind of energy of which he is the locus, and (2) the outlets for this energy as transformed and re-co-ordinated by his personality. The first we may summarize under the term *opportunity*, the second under *service.* (Wolfe 1923c, p. 261; emphasis in original)

Wolfe's final step was to discuss the most efficient allocation of these socially created opportunities for happiness among individuals. We have just seen that he considered every individual, because of his power of conscious self-expression, not only an *end*, but also a *means*, since he can maximize his happiness only to the extent he contributes to the collective creation of opportunities for every individual. But, Wolfe warned, "neither as ends and means are individuals of equal worth and importance"

[11]Wolfe himself recognized that "the term happiness has acquired such a coating of 'grossly hedonistic' connotation, and is so indefinite in its popular meaning, that it would be desirable to substitute another term if we would find one. Yet, I am content to keep it, because I believe it possible to give it some approximation to the essential scientific definiteness" (1924a, pp. 480–481).

[12]Wolfe follows Adam Smith in considering sympathy not as mere altruism—"there is no such thing, in the last analysis, as altruism" (1923a, p. 400)—but as a working cause, just as self-interest, that contributes to the final goal of individual happiness: "So social is the nature of man … so much is our life widened by sympathy, and so happy a field for the satisfaction of gregariousness and workmanship do mutual aid and 'altruistic' co-operation afford, that my life should be broadened, my self-expression multiplied, and my happiness increased in the proportion that I not only refuse to live at your expense (equally refusing to let you live at mine) but equally in the proportion that I co-operate with you to widen your sphere of self-expression and to increase your happiness" (1923c, p. 259).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

(1923c, pp. 264–265). Individuals differ both in their capacity for self-expression and in their ability to provide service for the production of opportunities: "They differ actually, not only because their organic inheritances are diverse, but because the opportunities for development which they have had have been different. They differ potentially, 'naturally,' to the extent that their hereditary endowment differ" (1923c, p. 265).[13] In spite of such explicit recognition of differences in the inborn capacities of individuals, however, Wolfe did not miss the chance to reiterate his criticism of eugenics. Wolfe believed that the position held by Pearson, Davenport, and his fellow extremists focused too much on innate limitations. Instead of viewing human beings as the sole product of their heredity, Wolfe argued, a truly scientific ethics should grant initial equal opportunities to every individual and also take into account the development that could exist despite heredity. Heredity, according to this view, provides a foundation to be assessed, rather than an insurmountable limit unscientifically set upon individuals:

> While no reasonably informed person to-day would attempt to defend the thesis that all individuals are equal by hereditary endowment, there has been on the other hand an immense output of unwarranted conclusions as to natural inequality and the scarcity of hereditary capacity, drawn from investigations which have purported to isolate and measure hereditary capacity (mental as well as physical). In most cases such investigation can be shown to be grossly oblivious of the presence of probable environmental influences in the creation of talents or defects which has been taken as hereditary. Whatever may be the truth about natural inheritances—whether we are as different in natural endowments as eugenicists like Pearson and Davenport would have us to believe, or are more nearly equal than any one now believes we are, this much should be clear: *we cannot on scientific ground condemn an individual to inferior status and deprive him of opportunity before he has been tried out for a time under opportunities equal to those granted others.* (1923c, p. 265; emphasis added)

Human characteristics are far too complicated to control through simplistically conceived biological principles for breeding, and, even more importantly, human beings provide a special case in which environment plays an essential role in the final product. Since environment had its greatest effect during the formative years of the development of any organism, Wolfe argued, "[a]ll individuals would have to be given as nearly equal environmental stimulus (education, etc.) as possible, clear through the formative years of childhood and adolescence." At the conclusion of such a period, "the psychological testers could be called in, vocational experts

[13]By admitting differences in the inborn endowment of the individual's capacities, Wolfe further distanced himself from a strictly Watsonian brand of behaviorism. Watson, in fact, maintained that environmental stimuli were the sole cause of differences in human behavior and explained that "nurture—not nature" was thus responsible "for what the child becomes." "Give me a dozen healthy infants"—as he baldly affirmed in his celebrated *Behaviorism* (1925, p. 82) —"and I'll guarantee to take anyone at random and train him to become any kind of specialist I might select—doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors."

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

summoned for advice, and the sheep definitely separated from the goats" (1923c, p. 274).[14]

All this led Wolfe to formulate the four propositions defining a democratic organization of society based on a scientific ethics. These propositions are:

> (1) individuals and only individuals are ends; (2) individuals differ in potential natural capacity and hence are not all ends of equal magnitude; (3) economy of limited resources therefore demands that opportunity be distributed to individuals *pro rata* first to their potential, and later to their developed capacities; (4) efficient production and economical distribution of opportunity cannot be obtained by any *laissez faire* system of individualistic acquisition, they can be obtained only by intelligently planned, rationally co-ordinated, social co-operation. (1923c, pp. 272–273)

V. WOLFE'S CRITICISM OF RAYMOND PEARL'S "LOGISTIC CURVE"

A few final words should be devoted to Wolfe's contributions to population studies. What concerns us here is Wolfe's criticism of the law of population growth and density that Johns Hopkins biologist Raymond Pearl, along with Lowell J. Reed, had introduced in a series of papers published during the early 1920s (Pearl and Reed 1920, 1923, 1924).[15] In these works, Pearl and Reed argued that human population growth over time appears as an S-shaped curve that they called the "logistic curve."[16] The shape of the curve reflected the "long-run tendency of any population whose growth rate, beginning at zero, rose slowly until the midpoint of a cycle, where the curve increased at diminishing rate until the cycle was completed at a point of population saturation" (Ramsden 2002, p. 866). This discovery was vital to human (and non-human) demographics because it provided a simple graphical and mathematical principle to the idea that population growth is self-limiting and that population will cease to grow on reaching its "carrying capacity"; i.e., the population size that can be supported by the environment. Pearl and Reed's analysis was based, among other things, on the assumption that, given a limited area into which the population could expand, the rate of increase at any time was proportional to two things: the magnitude of the population at that time, and the "still unutilized potentialities of support existing in the limited area"

[14]Wolfe considered education as the crucial part of that individual process of adjustment to the environment "which may be called ontogenetic adaptation" (1923c, p. 45). This raises the question whether Wolfe was also reasoning along Neo-Lamarckian lines in which acquired characteristics could be transmitted from parents to their offspring. Unfortunately, Wolfe is rather elusive on this point, and does not provide an exhaustive discussion of his own views on heredity. In one crucial passage, however, he seems to lean implicitly toward Neo-Lamarckism. Wolfe quotes with approval Veblen's contention that whenever an habitual line of action "is enforced upon the group or the race by a selective elimination of those individuals and lines of descent that do not conform to the required canon of knowledge and conduct …, *the acquired proclivity passes from the status of habit to that of aptitude or propensity. It becomes a transmissible trait* …" (Veblen 1898, p. 195; quoted in Wolfe 1923c, p. 44; emphasis added).

[15]Reed, a mathematician, supplied the statistical analyses behind these papers, but the topic itself and the conclusions drawn from them more properly belonged to Pearl (Kingsland 1995, p. 64).

[16]The name "logistic" explicitly recalled the work of the Belgian Pierre-François Verhulst, who, more than eighty years earlier, had described population growth in a similar way, and in 1845 had called his curve of growth "logistique" (Kingsland 1982).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

(Pearl and Reed 1920, p. 281). In this case, "unutilized potentialities" could best be understood as simply the normalized difference between the existing and the limiting population. In Pearl's later writings (1924, 1925), this statement became equivalent to the assumption that the growth of a population decreases in linear fashion with the density of population.

According to Pearl and Reed, the logistic curve was not only a predictive model for population growth but also a "universal mathematical law" for most forms of biological growth (Kingsland 1982, 1995; Ramsden 2002).[17] This led Pearl to hold a relatively deterministic position about the biological attributes of the logistic curve. As he made it clear in his *The Biology of Population*, the curve demonstrated that "plainly all growth, including that of population, is fundamentally a biological matter" (Pearl 1925, p. 3). Consequently, environmental factors—broadly conceived—might cause minor fluctuations in the logistic curve but would not cause it to deviate substantially from its shape of a logarithmic parabola. "In the face of the considerable evidence now at hand, which could be still further multiplied," Pearl explained, "it is irresistibly borne in upon one that all the complexities of human behaviour, social organization, economic structure, and political activity, seem to alter much less than would have been expected the results of the operation of these biological forces which basically determine the course of the growth of populations of men, as well as those of yeast cells" (Pearl 1925, p. 18).

Pearl's position on the biological determinants of the logistic curve as a "population law" fueled much criticism from those scholars, the majority numbered among the social sciences, who believed that social factors were the primary influences on population growth. "For social scientists"—notes Edmund Ramsden (2002, p. 860)—"Pearl's logistic curve represented all that was wrong with the biologist's attempt to study population dynamics, and moreover, epitomized the threat of biological imperialism and determinism to social science and social reform." Wolfe (1925, 1927a, 1927b, 1929) took an active part in this reaction. Wolfe acknowledged that no contribution to the theory of population in the last decades had attracted the attention that Pearl's logistic formula had received since its appearance. The reasons for such popularity were to be found in Pearl's scientific fame as a biometrician, in the post-war revival of interest among biologists in demographic problems, and in the fact that the new "law" of population growth seemed to liberate the world from the old Malthusian threat of overpopulation. As importantly, the logistic curve appeared to be in line with the contemporary "scientific fashion"; that is, "the extraordinary postwar development of mathematical statistics and the attempt to apply statistical methods to all sorts of problems, not always with adequate attention to the question whether they are amenable to valid methods of statistical analysis" (Wolfe 1928b, p. 679).

Wolfe went on attacking both the technical features of Pearl's population-growth theory—such as the curve-fitting procedure employed and statistical significance of the coefficient of correlation between birthrate and density—and the more general epistemological foundations of his approach. The latter aspects are those relevant to the present discussion. In order to make his point, Wolfe quoted a passage from Pearl stating that the use of the logistic curve as a long-term forecasting tool depended on the assumption that "the conditions which led to the law according to which that particular growth has occurred in the known past will continue to operate" (Pearl 1924,

[17]The word "law" appears a dozen times in Pearl and Reed's 1920 paper; at one time they suggest that their fitted curve captures the "true law of population growth" (Pearl and Reed 1920, p. 286).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

pp. 566–567; quoted in Wolfe 1927b, p. 574). Wolfe (1927b, p. 576) accused Pearl of not taking his methodological caveat seriously enough: "one could be tempted by the inference that Pearl is driven by the fine frenzy of pure intellectual play, did he not in his later writings broadly hint that he feels himself to be on the trail of a great discovery—a 'rational,' 'mathematico-biological' law of population growth, universally valid." For Wolfe, Pearl's inconsistency was due to the impossibility to state such a *ceteris paribus* clause with respect to population growth, where many external factors—social, economic, political, and religious—can come into play in an unpredictable fashion. No simplistically conceived mechanical formula could, therefore, capture the complexities of the stimulus-response patterns determining human behavior (including breeding). Consistently with his methodological premises, Wolfe phrased once again his recurrent argument in behavioristic terms:

> Human behavior, however, while it is doubtless electrochemical in ultimate mechanistic analysis, is not so direct and simple. Human actions and attitudes are no doubt conditioned by the physical state of the individual, but they are also resultants of very complex stimuli from the environment, physical, economic, political, and socio-psychological. The problem of population growth is therefore more directly and significantly a problem of social psychology than one of bio-chemistry. Such considerations are all too frequently overlooked by biologists, Pearl included. The higher the organism, the greater the complexity of its structure and functions and the more variable its stimulus-response relation to its environment. The higher the organism, also, the more complex is the environment to which it responds. In the case of human beings, at least those above the lowest cultural level, there are many practically unmeasurable and unpredictable variables which influence vital phenomena—marriage, birth, death, and migration—and thence the rate of growth of population. (Wolfe 1927b, p. 584)

There is something ironical here. At the same time Wolfe was criticizing Pearl's population-growth theory, using substantially the same line of argument he had adopted to condemn eugenicists such as Davenport and Pearson, Pearl was waging his own famous attack on eugenics. Exactly in 1927, in fact, Pearl published his landmark essay "The Biology of Superiority," where he argued that eugenics had "recently fallen in some degree into disrepute," due to the "ill-advised zeal" of "devotees" who explained "poverty, insanity, crime, prostitution, cancer, etc." with a simple and utterly hypothetical Mendelian mechanism. These contributions have reduced eugenics to a "mingled mess of ill-grounded and uncritical sociology, economics, anthropology, and politics, full of emotional appeals to class and race prejudices, solemnly put forth as science, and unfortunately accepted as such by the general public" (Pearl 1927, p. 260).[18]

[18]Pearl pointed out that several recent discoveries in the field of genetics had severely challenged Galton's eugenic notion of "ancestral heredity." Drawing upon Edward M. East's and Donald F. Jones' inbreeding and outbreeding experiments (1919), Pearl argued that continuous inbreeding of organisms from generation to generation leads ordinarily to decline of vigor, increase of death rate, sterility, and even sometimes deformity. Inbred lines, however, could be reinvigorated by breeding them with organisms from other hereditary lines. Thus, close interbreeding—the animal counterpart of the eugenicists "racial purity"—was shown to be genetically deleterious. Though a member of the Galton society, the eugenics movement's inner circle founded by Davenport, Pearl became dismayed with much of eugenicist doctrines by the early 1920s. See Mezzano (2005), and Little and Garruto (2010).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Still in this connection, there is a further aspect that should be taken into consideration. Although Wolfe had criticized Pearl's biological determinism on the basis that human intervention was capable of interfering with the laws of nature, he did retain some explicit form of biological orientation in his assessment of population shifts. In the eyes of Wolfe, in fact, Pearl's analysis was guilty of focusing exclusively on the quantitative aspects of population growth, neglecting the qualitative side of the process. As he put it:

> Pearl, and his disciple, [James S.] Sweeney, regard the vital index—or we may say more simply the rate of natural increase—as a measure of the "biological soundness" of a population. All that this means is that the population which is autogenously increasing shows its ability to increase. The converse is not true, of course. A population that is decreasing is not necessarily biologically or in any other way "unsound." *It seems unfortunate to use the term "biological soundness" in this connection, for a population which is increasing may nevertheless be composed of individuals of low physical health and vitality and of low mentality. Surely "biological soundness," if it means anything, means more than mere spawning capacity.* (Wolfe 1929, p. 103; quoted in Ramsden 2002, p. 870; emphasis added)[19]

For Wolfe, Pearl's logistic formula reflected the unfortunate consequences that result when biologists, with no background in economic and sociological theory, face broader sociological issues. Significantly, Wolfe concluded in 1927, it is this neglect of environmental factors—as epitomized by Pearl's contribution—that have hampered the development of eugenics as a science:

> The biologists themselves, by their persistent refusal or inability to recognize the profound bearing of the psychology of the learning process and the significance of differential opportunity, have done much to retard the progress of eugenics as a science, and to turn many against it as an art. If now they are to turn their attention to the problem of the quantity of population and propose "scientific" solutions on lines of analogy, and mathematical statistics which take no account of the significant factors peculiar to human culture, we may perhaps well wish that the slight debt which biology owes to economics, through Darwin's chance reading of Malthus, may be allowed to run. Population theory is not likely to be benefited by such repayment. (Wolfe 1927b, pp. 593–594; quoted in Ramsden 2002, p. 884)

VI. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this paper, we have portrayed Wolfe as an institutionalist with progressive roots. This twofold (and somehow conflicting) nature of Wolfe's social thought is reflected

[19]In spite of these reservations, Wolfe relied on Pearl's prediction of population growth in order to demonstrate the compelling need of efficient birth-control policies in post-war America: "In a remarkable series of papers, Professor Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins University, has shown by mathematical and statistical analysis that the upper limit of population in the United States, at anything like our present standard of living is below 200,000,000. At the present rate of growth we shall reach that point in a few decades…. It would seem … that Birth Control is a matter to which the Disarmament Conference might with benefit to the future prospects of civilization, devote some slight attention" (Wolfe 1922b, pp. 28–29).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

in his criticism of extreme eugenic views. From progressivism, Wolfe took the hierarchical view of human nature, according to which individuals differ in their inborn endowments of capacities. Although human evolution is a process that involves both phylogenic and ontogenic adaptation, the latter appears to be impossible or incomplete in those individuals who lack the proper phylogenic traits. "[T]he hereditary feeble-minded"—he sentenced—"are phylogenetically unfit for successful individual adjustment to the demands of life in modern society" (1923c, p. 43). Moving from these premises, Wolfe looked with favor at eugenics as a scientific effort to take into adequate consideration the qualitative characteristics of the social aggregate in the analysis of population dynamics. Wolfe phrased his eugenic arguments in non-racial terms, and emphasized the efficiency side of the problem. Since human capacities are scarce and unequally distributed, their allocation, he argued, "is a matter of economy as well as of ethics—if indeed the two be not synonymous. Opportunity should be put where it will do the most good" (1923c, p. 408). In this connection, Wolfe's endorsement of minimum-wage legislation and his condemnation of the unemployables should be seen as an attempt to allocate efficiently opportunities among individuals equipped with different inherited characteristics.[20]

At the same time, inspired by Dewey and Veblen, Wolfe held that the methods of science could be successfully used to refix habits of belief and action and to reform institutions in ways that will contribute to social efficiency. Accordingly, like many of his fellow institutionalists, Wolfe embraced the emerging behaviorist creed, and argued that many eugenic claims were not adequately informed about the role of environmental agencies in causing disease and disability. "There is much that goes for hereditary feeble-mindedness," he wrote, "which is due to malnutrition and adenoids" (1923c, pp. 265–266). Although Wolfe did not deny the role of physical and mental inheritance in determining the quality of individuals, he also believed that environment complemented heredity in efforts to advance the human population on the path of social progress. Education, in particular, could move human beings forward in their social and intellectual capabilities. Experience had proven that education could provide advancement in individual ability, while relying exclusively upon heredity neither had a firm scientific foundation, nor afforded reliable methods to predict exact inheritance and development. As Wolfe himself put it, in the closing passages of his *Conservatism, Radicalism, and Scientific Method*:

> It is not our hope that the undesirable sentiments of conservatism, radicalism, and popular-mindedness can be eliminated over night; that a near approach to, and diffusion of, the scientific attitude is soon to be looked for. *But insofar as we secure the needed attitudinal modification at all, it will not be through segregating a few feeble-minded or exhorting the well-to-do to have larger families. It will come through functional, courageous, progressive education*. (1923c, p. 333; emphasis added)

[20]It should be noted that Wolfe was well aware of the welfare implication of an endorsement of minimum-wage legislation and the consequent exclusion of the unemployables from the labor force. "The real question," he wrote, "is whether the inefficient are less burden if we permit them to be employed at low wages and thus tend to fix the wages of the normal workers at the same low level, or whether they would be less burden if we definitely prohibit the employment in industry of any person who can not earn a standard wage, and set such persons aside for special treatment, much as we do backward children and subnormals in the schools" (Wolfe 1917, p. 278).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

REFERENCES

Asso, Pier Francesco, and Luca Fiorito. 2004. "Human Nature and Economic Institutions: Instinct Psychology, Behaviorism, and the Evolution of American Institutionalism." *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 26 (4): 445–477.

Ayres, Clarence E. 1944. *The Theory of Economic Progress*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Carver, Thomas N. 1912. *The Religion Worth Having*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Cooke, Kathy J. 1998. "The Limits of Heredity: Nature and Nurture in American Eugenics before 1915." *Journal of the History of Biology* 31 (2): 263–278.

Davenport, Charles B. 1911. *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics*. New York: H. Holt and Company.

Dickinson, Z. Clark. 1924. "Wolfe's *Conservatism, Radicalism, and Scientific Method*." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 38 (4): 682–686.

Dorfman, Joseph. 1959. *The Economic Mind in American Civilization*. Volumes 4 and 5. New York: The Viking Press.

East, Edward M., and Donald F. Jones. 1919. *Inbreeding and Outbreeding; Their Genetic and Sociological Significance*. Philadelphia, London: J.B. Lippincott Company.

Ellis, Havelock. 1912. *The Task of Social Hygiene*. Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Fiorito, Luca. 2009. "Frank Knight, Pragmatism and American Institutionalism: A Note." *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 16 (3): 475–487.

Galton, Francis. 1904. "Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope, and Aims." *American Journal of Sociology* 10 (1): 1–25.

Goddard, Henry H. 1912. *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness*. New York: Macmillan.

Hamilton, Walton H. 1919. "The Institutional Approach to Economic Theory." *American Economic Review* 9 (1): 309–318.

Kingsland, Sharon E. 1982. "The Refractory Model: The Logistic Curve and the History of Population Ecology." *Quarterly Review of Biology* 57 (1): 27–52.

Kingsland, Sharon E. 1995. *Modeling Nature: Episodes in the History of Population Ecology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kloppenberg, James. 1986. *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Leonard, Thomas C. 2003. "More Merciful and Not Less Effective: Eugenics and American Economics in the Progressive Era." *History of Political Economy* 35 (4): 709–734.

Leonard, Thomas C. 2005a. "Mistaking Eugenics for Social Darwinism: Why Eugenics Is Missing from the History of American Economics." *History of Political Economy* 37 (supplement): 200–233.

Leonard, Thomas C. 2005b. "Retrospectives: Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19 (4): 207–224.

Leonard, Thomas C. 2009. "American Economic Reform in the Progressive Era: Its Foundational Beliefs and Their Relationship to Eugenics." *History of Political Economy* 41 (1): 109–141.

Leonard, Thomas C. Forthcoming. "From the Progressives to the Institutionalists: What the First World War Did and Did Not Do to American Economics." *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology*.

Little, Michael A., and Ralph M. Garruto. 2010. "Raymond Pearl and the Shaping of Human Biology." *Human Biology* 82 (1): 77–102.

McDougall, William. 1924. "Review of *Conservatism, Radicalism and Scientific Method: An Essay in Social Attitudes* by A. B. Wolfe." *American Economic Review* 14 (4): 714–718.

Mezzano, Michael. 2005. "The Progressive Origins of Eugenics Critics: Raymond Pearl, Herbert S. Jennings, and the Defense of Scientific Inquiry." *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 4 (1): 83–97.

Pearl, Raymond. 1924. *Studies in Human Biology*. Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins Company.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Pearl, Raymond. 1925. *The Biology of Population Growth*. New York: Alfred Knopf.
Pearl, Raymond. 1927. "The Biology of Superiority." *American Mercury* 12 (November): 257–266.
Pearl, Raymond, and Lowell J. Reed. 1920. "On the Rate of Growth of the Population of the United States since 1790 and its Mathematical Representation." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 6 (6): 275–288.
Pearl, Raymond. 1923. "On the Mathematical Theory of Population Growth." *Metron* 3 (1): 6–19.
Pearl, Raymond. 1924. "The Probable Error of Certain Constants of the Population Growth Curve." *American Journal of Hygiene* 4 (3): 237–240.
Prasch, Robert. 1999. "American Economists in the Progressive Era on the Minimum Wage." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13 (2): 221–230.
Ramsden, Edmund. 2002. "Carving Up Population Science: Eugenics, Demography, and the Controversy over the 'Biological Law' of Population Growth." *Social Studies of Science* 32 (5/6): 857–899.
Ross, Dorothy. 1991 *The Origins of American Social Science*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Rutherford, Malcolm. 1999. "Institutionalism as 'Scientific' Economics." In Roger Backhouse and John Creedy, eds., *From Classical Economics to the Theory of the Firm: Essays in Honour of D. P. O'Brien*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 223–242.
Rutherford, Malcolm. 2005. "Comments on Four Papers on Economics and Human Heterogeneity." *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 64 (3): 881–886.
Saleeby, Caleb W. 1909. *Parenthood and Race Culture: An Outline of Eugenics*. London: Cassell and Co.
Seager, Henry R. 1913. "The Minimum Wage as Part of a Program for Social Reform." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 48 (July): 3–12.
Skocpol, Theda. 1995. *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*. New York: Harvard University Press.
Soloway, Richard A. 1995. *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
Veblen, Thorstein B. 1898. "The Instinct of Workmanship and the Irksomeness of Labor." *American Journal of Sociology* 4 (2): 187–201.
Veblen, Thorstein B. 1914. *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts*. New York: Macmillan.
Webb, Sidney, and Beatrice Webb. 1897. *Industrial Democracy*. London: Longmans Green, 1920.
Watson, John B. 1913. "Psychology as the Behaviorist Views It." *Psychological Review* 20 (2): 158–177.
Watson, John B. 1925. *Behaviorism*. New York: W.W. Norton.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1906. *The Lodging House Problem in Boston*. New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1910. "Review of *Responsibility for Crime: An Investigation of the Causes of Crime and a Means of its Prevention* by Philip A. Parsons." *Journal of Political Economy* 18 (2): 147–149.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1911a. "Review of *Parenthood and Race Culture* by C.W. Saleeby." *American Journal of Sociology* 17 (1): 131–133.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1912. "Review of *The Religion Worth Having* by Thomas Nixon Carver." *American Economic Review* 2 (3): 679–681.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1913a. "Review of *The Task of Social Hygiene* by Havelock Ellis." *American Journal of Sociology* 19 (3): 395–398.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1913b. "Review of *Problems in Eugenics*; *Heredity and Eugenics* by W. E. Castle, J. M. Coulter, C. B. Davenport, E. M. East, W. L. Tower; *Heredity in Relation to Eugenics* by Charles B. Davenport; *The Social Direction of Human Evolution* by William E. Kellicott; *The Kallikak Family* by H. H. Goddard; *Race Improvement or Eugenics* by La Reine Helen Baker; *The Task of Social Hygiene* by Havelock Ellis." *American Economic Review* 3 (1): 165–170.
Wolfe, Albert B, ed. 1916. *Readings in Social Problems*. Boston: Ginn.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1917. "Some Phases of the Minimum Wage: Discussion." *American Economic Review* 7 (1): 275–281.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1919. "Some Psychological Aspects of Industrial Reconstruction." *Publication of the American Sociological Society* XIV: 64–78.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Wolfe, Albert B. 1921a. "Review of *Immigration and Americanization* by Philip Davis." *American Economic Review* 11 (1): 130–132.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1921b. "The Motivation of Radicalism." *Psychological Review* 28 (4): 280–300.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1922a. "Emotion, Blame, and the Scientific Attitude in Relation to Radical Leadership and Method." *International Journal of Ethics* 32 (2): 142–159.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1922b. "Some Sources of Sentiments Against Birth Control." In *Birth Control, What it Is, How it Works, What it Will Do, Proceedings of the First American Birth Control Conference*, New York, 11, 12 November 1921. New York: Graphic Press, pp. 21–29.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1923a. "Individualism and Democracy." *International Journal of Ethics* 33 (4): 398–415.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1923b. "The Role of Sympathy and Ethical Motivation in Scientific Social Research." *Journal of Philosophy* (20) 9: 225–234.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1923c. *Conservatism, Radicalism, and Scientific Method: An Essay on Social Attitudes*. New York: Macmillan.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1923d. "Eugenics and Social Attitudes." In Charles B. Davenport, ed., *Eugenics in Race and State*. Scientific Papers of the Second International Congress of Eugenics. Held at American Museum of Natural History, New York, 22–28 September 1921. Volume 2. Baltimore: Williams & Williams, pp. 413–418.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1924a. "Functional Economics." In Rexford G. Tugwell, ed., *The Trend of Economics*. New York: Alfred Knopf, pp. 443–482.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1924b. "Economic Theory." *American Economic Review* 13 (1): 142–145.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1925. "Review of *Studies in Human Biology* by Raymond Pearl." *American Economic Review* 15 (3): 542–545.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1926. "Economic Theory." *American Economic Review* 16 (1): 246–247.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1927a. "Review of *The Biology of Population Growth* by Raymond Pearl." *American Economic Review* 17 (2): 347–350.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1927b. "Is There a Biological Law of Human Population Growth?" *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 41 (4): 557–594.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1928. "The Population Problem Since the World War: A Survey of Literature and Research." *Journal of Political Economy* 36 (5): 529–559.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1928b. "The Population Problem Since the World War: A Survey of Literature and Research (Continued)." *Journal of Political Economy* 36 (6): 662–685.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1929. "The Population Problem Since the World War: A Survey of Literature and Research (Concluded)." *Journal of Political Economy* 37 (1): 87–120.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1946. "Review of *The Theory of Economic Progress* by Clarence E. Ayres." *Political Science Quarterly* 59 (4): 622–624.
Wolfe, Albert B. 1946. "Discussion." *American Economic Review* 36 (2): 848–852.
Young, Allyn A. 1925. "The Trend of Economics, as Seen by Some American Economists." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 39 (2): 155–183.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S105383721300028X Published online by Cambridge University Press