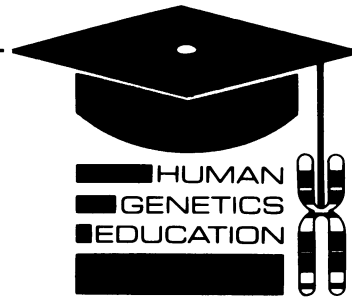


## Letters to the Editor

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*Am. J. Hum. Genet.* 51:222, 1992

### Historical Review of Eugenics

*To the Editor:*

The historical review of eugenics by Garver and Garver (1991) provides some useful cautions with respect to the ways in which science and pseudoscience can be used to support a variety of unethical actions by individuals and governments in the name of eugenics. The implications and conclusions of the authors are, however, overly broad and do not advance the process of development of a national and ethical basis for eugenics and euthanasia.

The history of civilization and what is called human progress is a history of evolution and change: physical, sociological, political, and ethical. The argument that compulsory application, by the Nazis, of direct medical killing of individuals whom the state decided were undesirable is in any way equivalent to assisting suicide, on request, of persons who find their own lives not worth living is inappropriate and unacceptable. The merits of the latter are certainly supported by many intelligent and morally acceptable arguments. The euthanasia movement in the United States and United Kingdom has been, in the main, an exercise in supporting individual liberty and autonomy and has not been motivated by negative eugenics.

The fact that new genetic knowledge and technology can be applied in discriminatory ways does not mean that it cannot be applied in nondiscriminatory ways with great benefit to both individuals and the society at large. The genetic community needs to be reminded of the mistakes of the past but must move on to open debate on changing values, as more is learned about the genetic contribution to the nature of man.

222

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### Reference

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Garver KL, Garver B (1991) Eugenics: past, present, and the future. *Am J Hum Genet* 49:1109-1118

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*Am. J. Hum. Genet.* 51:222-223, 1992

### Reply to Cunningham

*To the Editor:*

We respect the thoughtful comments from our respected colleague, George Cunningham, concerning our recent article, "Eugenics: Past, Present and the Future" (Garver and Garver 1991). We would, however, like to clarify the statements in our article to which Dr. Cunningham refers in his letter.

Dr. Cunningham brings up the issue of assisted suicide; however, we did not refer to this particular aspect of euthanasia. We reviewed the history of euthanasia in Germany beginning in 1939, which involved active euthanasia of severely defective children and severely affected psychiatric patients. Shortly after Germany's invasion of Russia in 1941, many of these "medical euthanasia" units moved to the eastern front, where they were set up as death camps for the elimination of