

## 5th International Workshop

5th International Workshop in the History of Human Genetics, Nuremberg Germany, 21-23 June, 2012.

The fifth historical satellite workshop of the European Society of Human Genetics (ESHG) “The Biological Future of Man: Continuities and Breaks in the History of Human Genetics, Before and After 1945” was held this June in Nuremberg, Germany. The meeting began at the Nuremberg Documentation Centre in the former Congress Hall at the Nazi Party Rally Grounds. Participants were introduced to the Documentation Centre by Director Hans-Christian Täubrich and then toured the permanent exhibition “Fascination and Terror” which included subjects such: the events which took place at the Nazi Party Rally Grounds; the passing of the Nuremberg Racial Laws in 1935; the events of the Holocaust and the Second World War; and the Nuremberg Trials which took place in 1945/6. A reception followed the tour.

Workshop sessions began the following day at the Nuremberg Convention Center Ost. The 35 participants were welcomed by workshop organizer Heike Petermann (University of Muenster). The first invited lecture was given by Nils Roll-Hansen (University of Oslo) who spoke on “Eugenics and the Science of Genetics.” Roll-Hansen argued that human genetics, in comparison to plant and animal genetics, remained underdeveloped and backward until the 1960s. This allowed leeway for



Opening Reception

eugenic legislation to be enacted through the 1950s for eugenic and family planning purposes. His talk centred mainly on Sweden where eugenic sterilization legislation was passed in 1934 and remained in place through 1975.

The conference covered three main topic areas. The first was “Human Genetics Before 1945” and 5 speakers spoke to the subject over three sessions using a variety of approaches and covering a number of geographic areas. Alan Rushton’s (Flemington, New Jersey) talk on Charles Eduard of Saxe-Coburg related the story of how Queen Victoria’s grandson became a member of the Nazi Party and head of the German Red Cross. Charles Eduard remained a supporter of Nazi policies even though his own niece Princess Karoline Maria was

killed by the Action T4 euthanasia programme. In her talk on IQ tests, Yuriditzi Pascacio-Montijo (University of Bielefeld) challenged the use of intelligence testing to reify a subjective observation and questioned the biological assumptions that underlay the use of the test. Philip Wilson (Penn State University College of Medicine) discussed the collection and use of human pedigrees by the US Eugenics Record Office as both subjects of study and objects used to persuade the public of the scientific validity and usefulness of eugenics. Judith Friedman (National Institutes of Health) explored different approaches taken by physicians and scientists in the study of hereditary disease before the Second World War. Pim Huijnen (Utrecht University) related the construction of a new data-mining tool which will allow researchers to search through the contents of digitized newspapers in order to analyze how key eugenic words and phrases were used in public discourse.

In the afternoon following the coffee break, the first of the papers discussing the second main conference topic "Continuities in the History of Human Genetics" began with Pascal Germann's (University of Zurich) analysis of the work of Ernst Hanhart a pioneering Swiss medical geneticist. Germann argues that despite publically opposing the use of race as a genetic category after the Second World War that Hanhart continued to use older eugenic categories like race in his research into the 1960s. In their talk "Genome: Twisting Stories with DNA" Ricardo Noguera-Solano (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) and Juan Manuel Rodriguez-Caso (Leeds University) explored the different meanings of the term 'genome' and the ways that it has been used by scientists from the 1920s to the present.

The first day of the workshop closed with the second



Conference organizer Heike Petermann welcomes workshop attendees



The audience

invited lecture given by Paul Weindling (Oxford Brookes University) titled "The Nuremberg Trials and Their Implications for Human Genetics." Weindling primarily discussed the Nuremberg medical trial and noted that several key actors including Ernst Rüdin, Otmar von Verschuer, and Fritz Lenz were not among those tried. The medical trial included the testimony of victims and witnesses and the judges' declaration at the conclusion laid the foundation for the idea of the informed consent of research subjects. However, none of those tried had their medical credentials stripped from them. In fact one of the defendants, Helmut Poppendick, even went on to complete his MD thesis after the war after only serving a small portion of his 10-year sentence.

At the end of the second day of the workshop the participants met for dinner at the Lederer Kulturbrauerei, an old former brewery where we enjoyed buffets of Franconian and Mediterranean food. The beer garden of the restaurant was packed with a boisterous local audience watching Germany win the Euro 2012 semi-final.

The final day of the workshop began with an invited lecture by Stephan Kolb (Klinikum Nürnberg Nord) who spoke on the topic "Informed consent – an Essential of Medicine. Consequences of the Nuremberg Doctor's Trial." Kolb raised the issue that despite the principles set forth by the judges at the trial that the voluntary consent of subjects was essential for ethical medical research, many research projects carried out over the following decades failed to take this into account. He argued that even today informed consent is not taken as seriously as it should be by doctors and scientists.

The remaining sessions dealt with the final workshop topic "Human Genetics After 1945." Susanne Doetz

(Charité-Universitätsmedizin Berlin) examined how human genetics developed within the context of the socialist society in the German Democratic Republic and how ideology shaped policies towards genetic counselling and prenatal diagnosis. In her talk, Christine Scholtz (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Humangenetik) looked at the professionalization of the field of human genetics in Germany over the last 50 years and how institutional settings and the development of new specialties like 'clinical genetics' and 'clinical laboratory specialists' have affected the profession. Richard Aspin (Wellcome Library) introduced the workshop participants to an exciting new on-line resource currently under development by the Wellcome Library. This portal will serve as a digital archive making materials related to the 'foundations of modern genetics' available to researchers from around the globe. The final talk was by conference organizer Heike Petermann (University of Muenster) who traced continuities and breaks in the development of human genetics in Germany before and after 1945 in the context of institutions, researchers, and topics. She noted that certain individuals involved in eugenic research before the war continued in the field after the post-war reconstruction but that the meaning of eugenics shifted from a wider social one before the war to a more individual one after 1945.

At the end of the day the participants agreed that



Paul Weindling

future historical workshops should continue to be held in conjunction with the European Society of Human Genetics meetings. Heike Petermann and Judith Friedman agreed to co-organize the next workshop. The 6th International Workshop on the History of Human Genetics will be held in Milan, Italy, 29-30 May 2014.

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Photographs courtesy Danilo Schramm (University of Muenster)

The 5th International Workshop Programme can be viewed on the GenMedHist at the following link:  
<http://www.genmedhist.info/Workshops/2012-ESHG-Workshop-Programme>

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