

# EUGENICS AND SOCIALIST THOUGHT IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA: THE CASE OF JAMES MEDBERY MACKAYE

BY

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*The aim of this essay is to assess James Medbery MacKaye's contribution to socialist thought during the Progressive Era. Largely forgotten today, MacKaye proposed a special version of socialism, which he called "Pantocracy," based on a peculiar blend of utilitarian and eugenic assumptions. Specifically, MacKaye held that biological fitness mapped to the capacity for happiness—biologically superior individuals possess a greater capacity for happiness—and saw the eugenic breeding of "a being or race of beings capable in the first place of happiness" as a possibility open by the advent of Pantocracy. Incidentally, this essay provides further evidence that the influence of eugenic and racist beliefs upon the American Progressive Era political economy was so deep-rooted and pervasive that it did cut across traditional ideological boundaries.*

"The Economy of Happiness," working through the rigid precision of scientific method, is a philosophy which finds its ultimate justification in the joy of men and the laughter of a child.

—Walter Lippmann, "All the MacKayes"

## I. INTRODUCTION: THE ISSUE

The influence of eugenicist and racist beliefs upon the American Progressive Era political economy was so deep-rooted and pervasive that it cut across traditional ideological boundaries. As Thomas C. Leonard (2016, p. xiii) recently pointed out, not only progressives such as Richard T. Ely, John R. Commons, and Edward A. Ross, but "conservatives and socialists also drank deeply from the seemingly bottomless

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American wells of racism, sexism, and nativism,” and they, too, made use of eugenics and its discourses of heredity and hierarchy to support their agenda.<sup>1</sup> Among American socialists, the Wharton School’s radical economist Scott Nearing is probably the most striking illustration. Nearing was among the most outspoken supporters of eugenics of his time; while in London in 1911, he even made a point of visiting Francis Galton’s eugenics laboratory at the University of London (Saltmarsh 1991, pp. 66–67). The following year, Nearing published a little volume entitled *The Super Race: An American Problem* (1912), in which he advanced a large-scale reform program founded on three pillars: “Eugenics, the science of race culture; social adjustment, the science of molding institutions; education, the science of individual development” (1912, p. 24).

Nearing, however, was by no means an isolated case. Mark Pittenger (1993) has amply documented how many other American socialists of the time, intellectuals and political activists alike, were no less entranced with eugenic and racial ideas. Among these, a unique (and hitherto neglected) case is offered by James Medbery MacKaye. MacKaye was certainly an eclectic character.<sup>2</sup> Born in New York City in 1872, he attended the local Packard’s Business College, before obtaining a Bachelor of Science degree from Harvard in 1895.<sup>3</sup> In 1899 MacKaye joined the Boston firm Stone & Webster, where he worked as a research engineer for twenty-eight years. It was during this period that, as an amateur scholar, he laid down in three books the foundations of his own brand of socialism: *The Economy of Happiness* (1906), his major work; and *The Happiness of Nations* (1915) and *Americanized Socialism* (1918), two small volumes intended for a popular audience.<sup>4</sup> MacKaye entered the academic profession only in the fall of 1924, when he accepted a visiting lectureship at Dartmouth. In 1929 he achieved nationwide notoriety after announcing, at the twenty-ninth annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association held at Columbia University, an alternative to Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity.<sup>5</sup> In 1931 he moved to Rollins College in Florida, but in the fall of the following year he returned to Dartmouth as a full professor of philosophy, a position he held until his sudden death in 1935.

<sup>1</sup>On the history of eugenics in the United States, see, among many others, Kevles (1995), Allen (1983), and Paul (1995). On the relationship between economics—and social science in general—and eugenics, see Cot (2005), Fiorito (2013), Leonard (2003), Peart and Levy (2005a).

<sup>2</sup>Biographical information concerning MacKaye is incomplete and fragmentary. Our brief sketch draws from Anderson (2002), and from the obituaries published in the *New York Times* (“Prof. J. M. MacKaye, Scientist, Dies,” p. 62, 1935) and in the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine* (Wright 1935).

<sup>3</sup>James M. MacKaye was a member of a notable family: the son of actor Steele MacKaye and Mary (Medbery) MacKaye, and brother of poet Percy MacKaye and conservationist Benton MacKaye (Anderson 2002).

<sup>4</sup>MacKaye’s works were regularly reviewed in the academic journals (see, for instance, Small 1907 and Fairchild 1915) and widely debated in the major progressive periodicals of the period, such as *The Outlook*, *The Arena*, and *The Independent*. While at Stone & Webster, MacKaye also lectured on a regular basis. In 1911, for instance, the “Notes” section in the opening issue of the *American Economic Review* reported that MacKaye had given a series of eight lectures on the “Philosophy of Socialism” at Harvard (“Notes” 1911, p. 207).

<sup>5</sup>Contrary to Einstein, MacKaye proposed a dynamic universe, suggesting that all space is filled with an ethereal radiation field capable of explaining all physical phenomena (MacKaye 1930 and 1931). MacKaye’s criticism of Einstein hit the national press: “A Heretic Who Doubts the Theories of Einstein,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1931.

The aim of this essay is to analyze in some detail MacKaye's socialism and its relation to eugenics.<sup>6</sup> MacKaye's socialism was far from being "orthodox," and deserves our attention in many respects. George L. Arner (1919, p. 147), one of the leading radicals of the period, described it as "socialism without Marx," a socialism, that is to say, in which "the reader is not mystified with surplus value, is not distressed with the class struggle, and is not terrified by the social revolution." As will be discussed below, MacKaye's socialist theory combined an extreme version of hedonism with a typical Progressive Era emphasis on efficiency and social engineering. More importantly, and this is what mostly concerns us here, MacKaye's socialism was inherently eugenic. While, in fact, socialist concerns with race improvement were expressed more frequently as a scientific rationale for immigration restriction and Black discrimination (Pittenger 1993, p. 168), for MacKaye, heredity represented the main road towards a new kind of social organization—which he called "Pantocracy"—founded on the Benthamite principle of maximum happiness.

## II. THE ECONOMY OF HAPPINESS

Frank W. Taussig (1911, pp. 478–479) correctly pointed out that MacKaye "advocates socialism in a train of rigorous utilitarian reasoning." In his magnum opus, *The Economy of Happiness*, MacKaye adopted a form of radical utilitarianism that neatly distanced him from the bulk of his contemporaries. The utilitarian framework endorsed by MacKaye mainly relied on the classical Benthamite notion that happiness is the ultimate moral good—at an individual as well as a social level—and that happiness is a "balance" between the sum of pleasure enjoyed by the individuals in question and the sum of their pains.<sup>7</sup> "By an act absolutely right," he asserted (1906, p. 130), "I shall mean that act among those at any moment possible which results in the greatest surplus of happiness. By an absolutely wrong act I shall mean any of the alternatives of an absolutely right act." The principle of happiness so becomes the only criterion against which all actions must be tested: "[T]otal happiness should or ought to be the only ultimate end of voluntary acts . . . no other end can justify any means, and this end justifies all means" (p. 151). MacKaye contrasted utilitarianism with intuitionism—i.e., the presumption that "right and wrong may be distinguished by a moral faculty or conscience" (p. 253). Taking subjective conscience as the ultimate ground of moral permissibility as the intuitionist does, he objected, is arbitrary and unscientific, and it should be substituted by an appeal to objective, and "self-sustaining" standards—the only plausible criterion of this kind being the principle of happiness.

<sup>6</sup>Outside academia, Victor Berger, Robert Hunter, Ernest Untermann, and other socialist activists loudly opposed Asian emigration on the grounds of eugenics, while John Spargo and Arthur M. Lewis considered Native Americans as an obstacle in the path of Euro-capitalist progress. In general, Pittenger (1993) argues, American socialists were not more critical than their progressive and conservative counterparts of the popular racism, sexism, and nativism that were commonly underwritten by science.

<sup>7</sup>Oddly enough, MacKaye did not provide any definition of happiness. He described it as an "elementary experience," incapable of expression in terms of other kinds of experience, "just as we could never explain what is implied by the words red or green to a man unfamiliar with the sense of sight, or express the taste of sugar in terms of sound" (1906, p. 105).

MacKaye also followed Bentham in assuming that happiness from different sources is always reduced to a single measurable quantity—i.e., no additional value is afforded to pleasures from particularly moral or culturally sophisticated sources. According to MacKaye, “happy or unhappy experiences can vary in kind, but in every case their hedonistic interest per se is measured, not by the kind of experience, but by the quantity of happiness or unhappiness it contains” (pp. 51–52). The amount of happiness (or unhappiness) produced by any single act is thus always quantifiable, so that “the total quantity of happiness experienced by an individual in a given time is the algebraic sum of the several quantities experienced during that time, happiness being expressed as positive, and unhappiness as negative happiness.” As importantly, quantities so obtained can be added across individuals, such that “the happiness of two or more individuals over a given interval is simply the algebraic sum of the happiness, positive and negative, experienced by them during said interval.” In general, argued MacKaye, the “happiness of mankind” means “the sum of the several quantities of happiness, positive and negative” experienced by the individuals who compose humankind in the present and “during the indefinite future, or rather during so much of the future as can be taken cognizance of by the previsionsal power of science” (1915, pp. 50–51).

To simplify matters, MacKaye (1906, p. 189) assumed the existence of a fictional being, whom he called “Justice,” “whose happiness curve at the present time coincided with that representing the happiness of humanity.” The total amount of happiness produced by society (or by Justice) is then a direct function of its “efficiency” in converting “human life into a source of happiness” and this, in turn, depends on its capacity, first, “to eliminate as far as possible useless and harmful acts,” and, second, “to increase the intensity and duration of positive consumption and pleasurable production,” and “decrease the intensity and duration of negative consumption and pleasureless production in the average member of society” (1915, p. 151).

MacKaye’s notion of efficiency was based on a strict form of labor cost theory of value. Accordingly, he defined “efficiency of production” as “the ratio of a given amount of product to its labor cost,” while by “efficiency of consumption” he referred to “the ratio of the amount of happiness produced by consumption to the consumptive rate required to produce it” (pp. 148–149).<sup>8</sup> The main problem with traditional economics, he argued, lays in its misplaced emphasis on “commercial” efficiency—that is, “the ratio of an amount of wealth (or service) to the money cost (instead of the labor cost) of securing it.” Such a ratio has a non-univocal relation to utility, in the sense that its decrease is as likely to be useful as its increase because “there are so many ways of making wealth cheap which make happiness dear.” Ultimately, MacKaye concluded, “it is folly to attempt to use the concept of commercial efficiency in guiding the economic policy of nations, as is the common practice today” (pp. 150–151).

Although MacKaye clearly indicated the maximization of aggregate happiness (he often referred to “the happiness of mankind”) as the criterion of rightness of action,

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<sup>8</sup>MacKaye expressed labor cost in terms of the consumptive rate—“the ratio of a given amount of product consumed to the time taken to consume it” (1915, p. 149)—necessary to maintain a laborer over a certain period of time.

he deliberately did not include any case for equality in the distribution of happiness.<sup>9</sup> To MacKaye, “equality of distribution is the best distribution only where each unit in which happiness is to be generated, i.e., each human being, is like every other unit.” This, however, is never the case in practice, for the “rate of consumption which will contribute most to the greatest total yield of happiness is different in different persons.” MacKaye argued that, to the extent to which the difference can be recognized, there should be a departure from equality, the direction of which, however, should normally be “toward increasing moderately the consumptive rate among persons of high efficiency of consumptive conversion, rather than increasing immoderately the rate of persons of low efficiency, as is the general practice today” (pp. 169–170).

This idea of departure from equality reveals two crucial aspects of MacKaye’s thought. First, it shows that he was clearly reasoning in terms of a hierarchical ontology of human nature, where people are supposed to differ in their ability to experience happiness from consumption.<sup>10</sup> Second, this led him to suggest a redistribution of the means of happiness (such as wealth) towards those individuals with a “higher efficiency of consumptive conversion.” Both points will be taken up below.

### III. PANTOCRACY

MacKaye’s subsequent step was to assess the effects of capitalistic competition against the utilitarian background he had established. In other words, he asked: What are the consequences of competition on the factors affecting the total production of happiness? MacKaye equated competition with the Darwinian idea of natural selection. Natural selection, he argued, is a process of “the survival of the fittest to survive,” but individuals, or individual characteristics, are useful only to the extent to which “they tend to increase the total happiness.” However, those individuals “who are fittest to survive are not necessarily those fittest to increase the total happiness” (1906, p. 370). It is true, MacKaye admitted, that competition rewards superior individuals, but it is also evident that it results in widespread poverty—and, in the process of selection, “unintelligence” and “lack of will” tend to “become the characteristics of the poorer classes.” Problems emerge when one considers that the poorer and uneducated classes “are the very ones which breed the fastest,” while wealthy and educated people don’t want large families and no amount of persuasion will change their mind. Locating the good part of intelligence and potential in the “prosperous slow-breeding” class, MacKaye concluded that “race deterioration is inevitable”: under competitive conditions, and their higher death rate notwithstanding, it is the members of the “less prosperous fast-breeding class” who are “best fitted to survive.” The basic issue was that those best fitted to survive were “not those best fitted to produce a happy community”: “Hence the competitive process of the survival of the fittest to survive results in

<sup>9</sup>“But, as we have already seen, utilitarianism is concerned only with the total quantity of happiness. Distribution does not concern it” (1915, p. 72).

<sup>10</sup>On the history of the idea of differential capacity for happiness, see Sandra Peart and David Levy (2005b).

the survival of the unfittest to produce happiness. We may call this the law of the survival of the incompetent” (pp. 372–373).

Until some other way to stop such a dysgenic drift is found, MacKaye concluded, “we must regard the abolition of poverty itself as the only just remedy for this source of race-degeneracy” (p. 373). MacKaye called his remedy for poverty “Pantocracy,”<sup>11</sup> by which he had in mind a hybrid kind of planned economy capable of securing “socialism in production” while preserving “individualism in consumption.” On the one hand, he explained, in production “economy is best attained by restricting the acts of the laborer to specific operations”—a clear reference to the principles of scientific management. In consumption, on the other hand, “economy is best attained by the absence of restriction to specific acts or operations, permitting these to be determined by the immediate desires or impulses of the moment” (p. 346).<sup>12</sup>

MacKaye listed eight distinguishing features of Pantocracy, organized under the following headings (p. 433):

- (1) public ownership of the means of production; retention of the wage system and abolition of profit
- (2) organization of a system of distribution, whereby supply of, and demand for, products may be adjusted
- (3) organization of a national labor exchange, whereby supply of, and demand for, labor may be adjusted
- (4) organization of an inspection system, whereby the quality of products may be maintained at a definite standard
- (5) application of labor to production
- (6) organization of invention
- (7) old age insurance
- (8) reform of education

It is not necessary here to analyze in detail each of these points. In the end, MacKaye saw Pantocracy as the product of science—the application of engineering methods to industrial production and business management—a then recurrent theme among social scientists (Leonard 2016). Like many of his Progressive Era fellows, he denounced the disorder, inefficiency, and unfairness of “uncoordinated”—a then common pejorative synonym for “free”—competition. The partial consolidation of industry under the new scientifically managed and vertically integrated

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<sup>11</sup>It was named “Pantocracy” because “it involves the control of human activities in the interest of all” (1906, p. 433). MacKaye did not coin the term: a treatise entitled *Pantocracy; or, The Reign of Justice* had been published in 1892 by James Seldon Cowdon.

<sup>12</sup>Although MacKaye granted individual freedom in consumptive acts, he did not refrain from criticizing the consumption of luxuries on a strictly utilitarian basis. For instance: “The production of one expensive diamond may represent the severe labor of several lifetimes, yet its power of producing happiness is very slight. Its labor cost is millions of times its happiness value. Had the same amount of labor cost been expended in producing toys for children, for example, the result would probably be to cause as much happiness to each of thousands of human beings as by the production of the diamond was caused to one. Such industries as diamond mining can never be self-supporting. They are hopelessly uneconomic” (1906, p. 327).

firm, he admitted, “has done something toward abolishing this source of productive inefficiency,” but “the complete organization of industry under public monopoly would do very much more” (p. 479).<sup>13</sup> As a system of publicly owned consolidations, MacKaye insisted, Pantocracy would still work under the “general laws of supply and demand,” but instead of “leaving to chance such things as the provision of capital, the training of producers, their means of information about available work, and their freedom from pressure of needy competitors, as capitalism does,” it would determine all these aspects “as parts of a definite plan having a definite purpose” (1915b, p. 14).

To preserve self-interest as a driving motive, MacKaye devised a complex system of individual incentives created to align the interests of everyone involved in Pantocracy. Among other things, this would solve the labor problem; for “the interests of the laborer and of the director of labor would be identical.” Accordingly, the remunerations of the public officials in charge of industrial production would be divided into a) a fixed part; and b) a “conditional compensation,” linked to increases in efficiency. In MacKaye’s schema, the only way in which officials could acquire additional compensation would be to shorten the hours of labor through an increase in efficiency, while leaving nominal wages stationary—“this taking place in all industries means raising the real wages of every one in the community.” Once shown that workers and management shared the common enemy of inefficiency, “the cause which has given rise to the labor problem would no longer exist” (pp. 479–480).

#### IV. EUGENICS AND THE CAPACITY FOR HAPPINESS

We have seen how MacKaye condemned competition for its dysgenic effects on the overall quality of population. It is now legitimate to ask, as he does, “How does Pantocracy compare with competition in its effects upon the first element of happiness—the quality of the sentient agent?” (p. 473). MacKaye articulated his answer in two steps. First, he argued that by reducing poverty, Pantocracy “would thereby suspend the operation of the law of the survival of the incompetent by bringing competent and incompetent into the prosperous, educated, slow breeding, class”; or, to put it differently, “it would cause the prudential restraint upon propagation to operate upon all natural classes of the population instead of upon the naturally competent alone” (pp. 473–474). This would result in a progressive increase of the quality of population and in a general decrease of its quantity.

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<sup>13</sup>The functioning of the “Pantocratic mechanism” implied the establishment of a rather intricate administrative machinery, composed of a series of agencies such as the Department of Output Regulation and the Distributing Department, created with the intent of coordinating the activities of each publicly owned branch of the industry; a National Labor Exchange, devoted to granting laborers the “greatest liberty in choosing or changing their employment”; a Bureau of Inspection, whose function should be to “keep the quality of all products at a required standard”; and a National Board of Improvement, in charge of “advancing the industry of the nation” (pp. 434–437).

Second, and more importantly, Pantocracy “would open the way to a practical means of improving the human breed by some such method as that proposed by Galton.”<sup>14</sup> For, once the increase of population can be controlled, argued MacKaye, it becomes possible to improve “the sentient agent itself—an agent at present wretchedly adapted to its end.” Humankind “is not only weak, stupid, and egotistic,” but also “thousands of times more sensitive to pain than to pleasure,” and this is “precisely the reverse of what an efficient happiness producing mechanism should be.” Pantocracy, by contrast, by working upon the factor of inheritance, “offers the opportunity of conferring upon posterity the unequalled blessing of an increasing superiority of parentage—a heritage greater than wealth or power—or even knowledge” (p. 474).

Among the qualities of the “sentient agent” to be eugenically promoted, MacKaye listed will, altruism, intelligence (by which he meant means-end rationality), and adjustability—this last being a function of three separate characteristics: a) simplicity of taste, “the ability to obtain pleasure from simple things, requiring little or no labor to attain”; b) variety of taste, “the ability to obtain pleasure from many different things”; and (c) adaptability of taste, “the ability to modify tastes or needs to meet the exigencies of life” (pp. 196–197).

In order to fully understand the extent of MacKaye’s support of eugenics, it is necessary to briefly review his views on heredity and human nature. Although eugenics had developed out of the intertwining of Darwinism and the Lamarckian theory of the transmissibility of acquired characteristics (Leonard 2016), MacKaye decisively denied that traits developed from environmental influences could be inherited: “The instances of acquired characters which are testable and have been tested include mental as well as physical characters, injuries, functional variations, and environmental effects, yet among them not a single unmistakable case of inheritance is to be observed” (p. 222).<sup>15</sup> MacKaye’s strong hereditarianism led him to downplay the importance of education and to assert that “the laws of inheritance apply as uniformly to mental and moral characteristics as they do to physical ones” (p. 201).<sup>16</sup> In this connection, African Americans (the “Negro race”) provided him with a conspicuous source of reprehensible examples:

The individual may be elevated by education but not the race. If, for example, we assume that the negro race is an inferior one—is congenitally deficient in intelligence and character as compared with the white race ...—then the conclusion we have established entitles us to predict that unless some other means than mere changed environment, including education, is adopted, that it will permanently

<sup>14</sup>MacKaye repeatedly referred with approval to Galton’s paper “The Possible Improvement of the Human Breed under the Existing Conditions of Law and Sentiment” (Galton 1901).

<sup>15</sup>Interestingly, MacKaye’s strong hereditarianism distanced him from a socialist like Scott Nearing. In spite of his open support of eugenics, Nearing (1912, p. 73) affirmed that “reared in an unfavorable environment,” eugenic advances “cannot produce their highest results.”

<sup>16</sup>This was reflected in his firm belief that “the offspring of a man of congenitally weak character or intelligence will tend to be weak in the same particulars, while the offspring of a man of congenitally strong character or intelligence will tend to be strong in character or intelligence likewise; just as the offspring of a small man tend to be small and of a tall man tend to be tall” (MacKaye 1906, p. 201).

remain congenitally deficient in intelligence and character; that the negro child born after ten or one hundred or one thousand generations of education will start from exactly the same point as the child whose ancestors received no education at all. (pp 223–224; see also pp. 496–497)<sup>17</sup>

Eugenics was thus seen as the sole way to overcome the limitations imposed by heredity and to convert the sentient agent into a more efficient generator of happiness. “Nothing could so augment the power of the sentient world to produce happiness as thus to increase the efficiency of the sentient agent itself” (p. 206). In this regard, MacKaye held, America found itself in a privileged position from which to start. He saw, in fact, the “American race” as characterized by certain essential qualities such as health, intelligence, altruism, and will—“qualities which every person would wish to inherit from his parents and transmit to his offspring” (p. 500). If contaminated by an inferior race through crossbreeding, the American stock could only deteriorate. MacKaye’s nativist stance was so harsh and explicit, even compared with that of many eugenics enthusiasts of his time, that we cannot forbear to quote him at length:

The probability that our immigrants are, on the average, the inferiors of the people at present inhabiting America is considerable, and were it necessary, evidence tending to establish such a presumption might be presented. ... Failure to adduce reasons for believing the incoming races superior to our own is sufficient to answer the question whose answer we seek. Simple common sense is all that is required. When a prudent farmer has a good and well proved variety of cattle, he will not permit them to breed promiscuously with any that may come along. The possibility that his breed might not be deteriorated by such a blend would not be sufficient for him—he would want a probability, and a very strong one, against deterioration before he risked the permanent qualities of a breed already well above the average. Now the qualities of men are surely as important as those of cattle, and the prudence which every farmer exercises with respect to his herds should at least be exercised when the qualities of a human breed are in question. (p. 501)

For MacKaye, the “factor of race” was of crucial importance to political economists because of its fundamental role in determining the “destiny” of any nation: “for with an inferior population, an inefficient breed, no nation can do otherwise than decay”—although, he could not resist adding, “if its decay involves the extinction of the race the sooner it decays the better” (p. 502).

From this perspective, MacKaye emphasized the opportunity that immigration restriction offered to control America’s future racial developments: “All immigrants of the laboring class who tend to swamp the labor market should be kept out

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<sup>17</sup>Speaking of the Hottentots, a people native to southwestern Africa, MacKaye abandoned any form of caution and asserted: “Between the intellect of a Newton or an Aristotle and that of a Hottentot there is probably a greater discrepancy than between that of a Hottentot and that of a horse” (1906, p. 204). As observed by one reviewer: “Because acquired characters are not inheritable, the author feels himself entitled to predict concerning the negro race, for instance, that unless other means than mere changed environment, including education, is adopted, the race will permanently remain congenitally deficient of intelligence and character” (Albertson 1906, p. 670). In this connection, MacKaye’s position shows strong similarities with views expressed by W. R. Greg, the co-founder (with Galton) of the eugenics movement; on ‘lower races,’ see Peart and Levy (2003).

as completely as the Chinese are now. An exclusion law operating for say ten years, and renewable at the end of that period, should be passed, and rigidly enforced” (p. 508). MacKaye’s remedy, straightforward as it was, was far more radical than the literacy test, or similar measures, advocated by many Progressive Era restrictionists.

## V. THE COMMON LANGUAGE OF EUGENICS

We introduced this essay with an observation as to the pervasiveness of eugenic reasoning in Progressive Era social science. Our discussion of MacKaye’s peculiar brand of socialism offers us a further element of reflection on this theme—especially if compared with the contribution of a somewhat distant character such as Thomas Nixon Carver.<sup>18</sup> MacKaye and Carver can be positioned on the antipodes of the political spectrum: the latter was far more conservative than the vast majority of his contemporaries and probably the most outspoken opponent of socialism of the time. Interestingly, Carver was of those who took MacKaye seriously. Not only did he critically discuss MacKaye’s socialism in his classes, but he also singled him out for a vitriolic comment in his *Essays in Social Justice*.<sup>19</sup>

So long as we had learned books written on the “economy of happiness” and the “efficiency of consumption,” in which everything is expressed in terms of consumers’ satisfactions, so long as it was conceived to be the chief end of industry and human effort to enable men to fill their bellies with the husks of material wealth, the rivalry would be unethical and unchristian no matter what form it took, whether it were political rivalry, military rivalry, or economic rivalry. (Carver 1915, p. 128)

As a devoted upholder of the Christian ideals of thrift and hard work, Carver saw MacKaye’s radical utilitarianism as a sign of moral decay. Yet, in spite of such a divergence in philosophical premises, the two men converged on three concepts that Thomas Leonard (2016, p. 108) places at the heart of Progressive Era eugenic discourse: “the primacy of heredity, human hierarchy rather than human equality, and the necessarily illiberal idea that human heredity must be socially controlled.” Carver was an individualist who espoused eugenics and considered biological fitness as equivalent to higher capacity to produce.<sup>20</sup> He believed in competition as a biologically selective mechanism and held that “the man who produces nothing but consumes lavishly has a negative net value to the country as a whole, that is, the country is better off when he dies than when he lives” (1915, p. 174). MacKaye moved from opposite grounds. He phrased his arguments in rigorous hedonistic terms and saw Pantocracy as a policy that

<sup>18</sup>On Carver’s economics and his support of eugenics, see Fiorito and Orsi (2017).

<sup>19</sup>Carver included MacKaye’s *The Economy of Happiness* in the reading list for his course “The Economics of Socialism.” In the syllabus he pointed out: “Probably the only socialistic work since Marx’s *Capital* which seriously tries to lay the foundations of socialism on the recognized principles of economics. As Marx tried to build on the economics of Ricardo, MacKaye tries to build on the economics of the modern school” (Teachers in Harvard University 1910, p. 172).

<sup>20</sup>Carver’s *Essays in Social Justice* had been hailed by the *Journal of Heredity* as a “very important step in the coordination of the various sciences which make up applied eugenics” (“Economics and Eugenics” 1917, p. 120).

would make the United States the “greatest contributor to the happiness of humanity of any nation on earth” (p. 520). As with Carver, however, MacKaye’s approach was strictly hereditary and far from being egalitarian. Embracing a form of collectivism that elevated the importance of the aggregate (‘Justice,’ in his own jargon) over its particular parts, MacKaye (1906, p. 362) condemned the “unrestricted” individualism that lay at the core of traditional classical liberalism. In a Pantocratic regime, aggregate happiness becomes the only normative guide for the social planner with no regard to individual rights or conditions: “[R]ight and wrong are determined only by the presumption of happiness, independent of distribution” (p. 146). Here is where eugenics enters the scene. Pantocracy was based on the “gospel of efficiency” so typical of the period, and eugenics was seen as the ultimate social engineering tool for achieving maximum aggregate happiness. MacKaye (1906, pp. 206–207) leaves little doubt about this connection: “Were Justice ever to find herself in a position to breed men in some such manner as that suggested by Galton, her prospects might be compared to that of an engineer who having been, by the backward condition of the arts, compelled to generate steam in an earthenware retort, finds himself in a position to utilize a modern tubular-boiler.” He held that biological fitness mapped to the capacity for happiness—biologically superior individuals possess a greater capacity for happiness—and saw the eugenic breeding of “a being or race of beings capable in the first place of happiness” as a possibility opened by the advent of Pantocracy (1915, pp. 229–230). MacKaye established a hierarchy of races—with the American stock on top—and he even considered the extreme case of the people of India, whom he identified with such low capacity for happiness that he deemed their pleasure from consumption to be more than offset by their pain at producing goods. “If the whole population of India were wiped out by some cataclysm tomorrow”—MacKaye bluntly concluded—“the world’s daily output of happiness would doubtless shoot upward like a rocket” (1915, pp. 162–163).

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