

Mazdaznan, Eugenics and the Future of the “White Race”

O Mazdaznan, a eugenia e o futuro da “raça branca”

Richard Cleminson*

ABSTRACT

This article examines the reception of eugenic thought among the followers of the Neo-Zoroastrian Mazdaznan movement primarily in North America and Britain, with respect to their ideas on “race”, the role of women in eugenics, and the question of environment versus heredity in eugenic thought. It focuses on the work of Dr. Otoman Zar-Adhust Ha'nish, the movement's founder, and some of his supporters in the first four decades of the twentieth century. The article argues that Mazdaznan, when explicit about eugenics, held much in common with other “radical” or “life reform” movements of the time. It also examines how Mazdaznan connected with movements that favoured the purification and exaltation of the “white race” as the maximum expression of human and spiritual attainment. Finally, it examines the role of women in the production of this “regenerated” “race” as part of the eugenic project.

Keywords: Mazdaznan; Eugenics; Life reform; “Race”; Women.

RESUMO

Este artigo examina a recepção do pensamento eugênico nos seguidores do movimento Neo-Zoroastriano, o Mazdaznan, principalmente na América do Norte e na Grã-Bretanha, no que diz respeito à “raça”, ao papel da mulher na eugenia e à relação entre meio ambiente e hereditariedade no pensamento eugênico. Toma como foco o trabalho do Dr. Otoman Zar-Adhust Ha'nish, fundador do movimento, e de alguns de seus seguidores, nas primeiras quatro décadas do século XX. O artigo argumenta que Mazdaznan, no que concerne à eugenia, tinha muito em comum com outros movimentos “radicais” ou de “reforma da vida” em voga na época. Também examina como o Mazdaznan se conecta com movimentos que favorecem a purificação e a exaltação da “raça branca” como expressão máxima da realização humana e espiritual. Finalmente, analisa o papel da mulher na produção desta “raça” “regenerada”, como parte do projeto eugênico.

Palavras-chave: Mazdaznan; eugenia; reforma da vida; “raça”; mulheres.

* University of Leeds, Leeds, West Yorkshire, UK. r.m.cleminson@leeds.ac.uk <<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6241-4888>>

INTRODUCTION

On 23 July 1928, *The Manchester Guardian* reported on a singular occurrence at Sunshine Hall on Deansgate in the city's centre: "a marriage according to the picturesque ceremonies of the Mazdaznan Order" (Anon, 1928, p. 11). A first for England, the ceremony was officiated by the head of the European section, Lt. Col. A. F. Gault, "familiarily known in the order as 'Daddy Guromano'" (Anon, 1928, p. 11). Approximately 300 celebrants attended from the local area, from other cities, including Birmingham, as well as from other parts of Britain. Although the couple had previously committed to one another during a marriage ceremony at a local non-denominational Unitarian Church, the Mazdaznan wedding was equally important as a confirmation of the couple's love in the minds of those present. In addition to reaffirming a non-conformist tradition through the Unitarian celebration, the ceremony was openly eclectic and partook of some of the rituals and symbols employed by other world religions: seven candles burned on the silk-covered altar and each partner gazed into a mirror to behold the other's image. They were bound together in a figure of eight by a thread, woven around them by two children. The thread was set alight at both ends by a candle before the celebrant declared that the couple would live in harmony, peace, happiness, and prosperity. The *Manchester Guardian* article finished its account of the wedding by declaring that the Mazdaznan Order advocated rhythmic breathing and exercise to produce the most favourable conditions for the human constitution.

The Mazdaznan Order, a kind of Neo-Zoroastrianism, was established in Britain before the First World War, after its inception in the United States, and it spread throughout the country, making up approximately forty branches by the early 1930s (Twigg, 1981). The movement reached its peak in Britain in 1937 with fifty-two centres, the majority of which were based in the North of England, particularly in industrial towns such as Bradford, Halifax, and Leeds. The groupings apparently met regularly, as suggested in the order's publication, *The British Mazdaznan Magazine*, and their sessions were held in a variety of venues, including Temperance and Co-operative Halls, Theosophical Rooms, and even the Liberal Club.

The founder of Mazdaznan, Dr. Otoman Zar-Adhust Ha'nish (born Otto Hanisch, 1844; died 1936¹), claimed that the system followed by the order descended from ancient Zoroastrian foundations. Similar to Christianity, which had probably been influenced by Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism held a view of the world that was sharply divided into good and evil, concepts established by

the Persian poet Zoroaster around 1500 BCE (Marshall, 1992, p. 111). Gnostics emphasized salvation through the secret “knowledge of the true nature of things’ (*gnosis*)” (Marshall, 1992, p. 112), an outlook shared by Mazdaznan. The division of the world between good and evil reflected what Éva Forgács described as the dualism of Mazdaznan in the context of the struggle of humans between the forces of light and darkness². The movement’s watchword derives from the Persian *Mazda* for “master” and *Znan* for “thought”, combining in the “Master Thought” of Mazdaznan (Furness, 2000, p. 171)³. Founded by Ha’nish in the United States, the movement, blending various religious and scientific currents as a “New Thought” religion⁴, spread to Austria, Britain, Canada, Germany, Hungary, India, and Switzerland⁵.

A life lived in harmony with nature was one of the central aspirations of Mazdaznan, and there was no overarching authority guiding the Order despite an allegiance to God and Christian principles (Twigg, 1981). Breathing exercises, vegetarianism, self-regulation, glandular therapy, emphasis on thought as practice, and autonomy were core elements of the movement. However, these were not the only components that characterised Mazdaznan. By the mid-1910s, the movement’s founder, Ha’nish, had published detailed accounts of eugenics in a series of texts in the movement’s US-based journal, *Mazdaznan* (Hanish, 1916a, 1916b, 1916c, and 1917)⁶. A much summarised version of this series of articles was published in London by the British Mazdaznan Association as the short pamphlet *Mazdaznan: Science of Eugenics* after the death of the movement’s leader in 1936 (Ha’nish, 1937a)⁷. In addition to some short, mainly anonymous pieces, the other principal source of Mazdaznan eugenics in the same US review came from the musings of Maria Rose Ruth Hilton, known as “Mother Maria”, the movement’s High Priestess⁸. The reception of eugenic ideas, along with what often amounted to a paean to motherhood and the qualities and need to maintain the “white race”, are aspects that are rarely alluded to in analyses of the movement’s central premises⁹. The overlap between Mazdaznan, eugenics, and the promotion of the “white race” forms the core concerns of this article, primarily as read through Ha’nish’s and Hilton’s discussions of eugenics from 1916 onwards.

The interrelations between religion and spirituality, both “orthodox” and alternative, and eugenics should come as no surprise (Rosen, 2004; Baker, 2014). Nor should the differences in approaches to eugenics adopted by individual religions be puzzling. Different receptions by religions drove acceptance or opposition to eugenics within national scenarios (Levine; Bashford, 2010, p. 18). Eugenics, as has been pointed out repeatedly, shared a social and

scientific terrain with what may have initially appeared to be unlikely bedfellows, ranging from socialism to naturism, as well as with fascism and racism (Freedon, 1979; Paul, 1984; Adams, 1990). By understanding the appeal of eugenics across all these fields, we can see how potent, varied, and seductive its message was (Rutherford, 2022). Despite evidence of opposition by some Catholics to certain teachings of eugenics, particularly those advocating birth control or “negative” eugenics, many, such as the Hungarian Tihamér Tóth, incorporated an expression of “positive” eugenics within Catholic thought as part of a “humanitarian” approach in accordance with respect for religion and God’s plan for humanity (Tóth, 1940; Leon, 2013)¹⁰.

In addition to the different approaches adopted by some Catholic theologians towards eugenics in the early twentieth century, the intersection between the Mormon religion and eugenics in the USA provides another noteworthy case. Some sectors of early Mormonism adopted a flexible approach to aspects of eugenics, making them compatible with the religious precepts and scientific theories of the time (Stuart, 2016). Joseph Stuart has demonstrated how the American public often associated the polygamy of the Latter-day Saints as a reflection of practices more closely associated with the “primitive” and racially marginalized American Indians. At the beginning of the twentieth century, American Mormons attempted to dispel this association by presenting plural marriage as racially beneficial and as a mechanism for the reproduction of “better” moral and physical individuals. One result of this interpretation was the reaffirmation of whiteness and the assertion of a superior, highly racialized moral perspective. The central tenets of eugenics were, in the process, employed by Mormons to foster greater public acceptance of their religion: “A willingness to engage with eugenics, evolution, and more broadly, science, symbolized Mormonism’s quest for religious acceptance and simultaneously made a case for Mormonism to identify itself as ‘white’” (Stuart, 2016, p. 6). During this process, many of the more contentious scientific foundations of eugenics, such as the issue of the mechanism of inheritance, along with their practical or moral implications, were downplayed in favour of an account that emphasised the supposed social benefits and the potential for eugenics to improve humanity. Birth control was rejected by Mormonism, and the perceived higher rates of reproduction among immigrants were identified as a threat to the survival and dominance of the “white race” (Stuart, 2016, p. 29).

In addition to Mazdaznan’s commonalities with some of the “new” religions of the late nineteenth century in the United States, which emphasised inner change, improvement, and reproduction, it also shared concerns over

bodily and spiritual integrity with other contemporary movements that embraced leftist politics. Many of these movements examined issues related to inheritance, so-called perfectionism, and radical change (Sears, 1977). One example of a movement founded before Mazdaznan was the Oneida Community, established near Oneida, New York, in 1848 under the leadership of John Humphrey Noyes. In the case of Oneida, the doctrine of “stirpiculture”, the reproduction of certain types deemed superior, and the role assigned to women in this process were concerns that originated in the 1860s and transitioned into eugenics in the first decades of the twentieth century (Prince, 2017). Noyes, through his theory of “companionate marriage”, combined the ideas of Darwin, Charles Lyell, Plato, and Galton within a Christian worldview, arguing that the community must actively strive for perfection. In this context, women had limited rights, with designated roles and partners as part of Noyes’ theory of “scientific combinations” (Prince, 2017, p. 81).

In what follows, the discussion of Mazdaznan is guided by a set of questions that situate its acceptance of some eugenic premises within the wide range of possibilities entertained by those who advocated this “science.” While it is difficult to ascertain the acceptance of eugenic ideas by all movement affiliates, the fact that eugenics was often mentioned in passing and that Ha’nish’s work featured prominently in the movement’s publications suggests a general consensus about the appeal of the new science. Several questions are asked to elucidate Mazdaznan’s approach to eugenics and to place it within other prevalent varieties at the time: What was the role of women within the form of eugenics advocated by Mazdaznan? How did Mazdaznan assess racial differences, and what role did it assign to the “white” or Aryan race? What models of inheritance did Mazdaznan advocate, and what was its stance regarding the debate on the relative importance of heredity and environment, an issue that was prominent in scientific discourses on eugenics and evolution since the late nineteenth century?

MAZDAZKAN: CORE IDEAS

Before delving into answers to these questions, further elaboration of the main ideas held by Mazdaznan is necessary. Colin Spencer has noted that Mazdaznan was a revival of Mazdakism from the sixth century. This was an offshoot of Zoroastrianism established by the Zoroastrian mobad or cleric, Zardusht. Hanisch adopted the cleric’s name, thus establishing a direct link between contemporary Mazdaznan and earlier manifestations of this religion.

The late nineteenth-century revival of the religion under Ha'nish was largely outlined in his work *Inner Studies: A Course of Twelve Lessons*, published in 1902, in Chicago (Ha'nish, 1902). It is important to note that in this volume, which served as a textbook for the practice of Mazdaznan, Ha'nish did not explicitly mention eugenics, unlike his later writings in 1916 on the subject. Nevertheless, there were many aspects of the lessons in *Inner Studies* that displayed connections with what would become eugenics in the 1910s and 1920s, such as advice on marital compatibility and the pursuit of "perfection." *Inner Studies* can only be retrospectively qualified as "eugenic", as it was by the British leader of Mazdaznan, A. F. Gault, in 1914 (Gault, 1914).

Inner Studies, despite its lack of explicit mention of eugenics, was replete with elaborations on the values of Mazdaznan, such as its desire for higher attainment and purpose, its notion of culmination, and responsibility towards creation as a foundation for the future (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 3). Bodily treatments, including sun exposure, hot baths, water treatment, the use of oils, and the incorporation of different food combinations into the diet, along with breathing exercises and a deep understanding of the body, were presented as elements of a spiritual and physical "purifying" (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 28) or "etherializing" process (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 83) that would elevate the body and bring one closer to divine perfection. The mechanics of procreation, the sexual act, and reproduction were also central issues within Mazdaznan, and women were considered the most significant factor in all manifestations of life (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 35). Although Ha'nish was not more specific, "the race" was deemed of utmost importance in terms of care and improvement (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 35). Furthermore, to a somewhat excessive degree, the "organs of generation" were venerated, and "abuse" was criticized (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 54), with care for the genitalia, including the "sun-bath" of the organs, deemed essential for their preservation (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 75). Love, sex, and the "sex magnetism" between the sexes were acknowledged (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 94), although monogamy was prescribed (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 107). It was also accepted that two men could love one another (presumably chastely) (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 138), while love between women was not mentioned. Ejaculation should not occur outside of reproduction (Ha'nish, 1902, pp. 178-179), and Mazdaznan was opposed to birth control (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 181). The articulation of these concerns and their explicit reference to enhancement and improvement certainly prepared the ground for the acceptance of eugenic tenets by Ha'nish in later years.

MAZDAZNAN IN THE UNITED STATES: 1913-1922

It was in the United States in the mid-1910s that Ha'nish elaborated upon his ideas contained in *Inner Studies*, bridging the gap between more general bodily instructions and actual eugenics. Mazdaznan's national affiliates created their own publications. The British chapter published the *British Mazdaznan Magazine*. A French-language publication, *Mazdaznan. Maîtresse-Pensée*, covering Belgium, France, and Switzerland, represented a relaunch much later in 1954¹¹. The US Mazdaznan, in its publication *Mazdaznan and The Messenger*, based in Lowell, Massachusetts (later shortened to *Mazdaznan* and based in Los Angeles), made multiple allusions to these questions, increasingly within the framework of eugenics and using the language of racial improvement. As Nancy Ordover has illustrated in the case of American eugenics generally, “deviant” bodies, questions of “race”, and particularly the “dangers” of blackness were at the core of the country's eugenic concerns (Ordover, 2003). As the 1910s and 1920s progressed, the significance of race and eugenics within the US Mazdaznan became increasingly pronounced and sophisticated, with discussions on the role of women in reproduction, the laws of eugenics, and the destiny of the Aryan race. While the review for 1913 made no significant mention of eugenics, by the 1919 issue, eugenics was mentioned some twenty-eight times.

Even before Ha'nish's statement in 1916, in November 1913, the British Mazdaznan leader, Lt. Col. A.F. Gault, had sent a letter to the *Montreal Star* and *Montreal Herald* in support of the Canadian Mazdaznan Association based in this city protesting about the vilification of the order and its leader, Ha'nish, orchestrated from the press in Chicago (Gault, 1914). In this letter, Gault asserted that Mazdaznan, contrary to several sensationalist reports, was not a sect or a vulgar money-making business, but a spiritual association with goodness at its core (Gault, 1914, p. 29). At the centre of the controversy was the content of Ha'nish's *Inner Studies*. Due to the more explicit sections, Ha'nish had been charged with sending obscene literature through the post (Gault, 1914, p. 30)¹². Gault, however, argued that this volume was not guilty of such accusations. Instead, it dealt “in the most Scientific and refined way” with the subject of eugenics (Gault, 1914, p. 30). Aside from the accusation of obscenity, Gault's assertions were revealing in terms of the language used. He, and presumably other members of Mazdaznan, viewed *Inner Studies* as a clear ex-

pression of eugenics. The work by Ha'nish thereby was thus incorporated into Mazdaznan's increasingly positive and explicit acceptance of eugenic ideas.

The association between Ha'nish's work and eugenics continued to be affirmed in the review. In 1915, numerous allusions were made to the importance of eugenics. An overview on foodstuffs and cooking methods stated that women's domestic tasks should be facilitated to allow them to spend less time than men did in their office jobs. This would allow them to concentrate more on domestic science and the implementation of eugenic measures (Anon, 1915, p. 7). Following this gendered association between women and eugenics, the links between Aryan racial integrity and the new race science were confirmed later that same year. In a reproduction of a speech given by Ha'nish on "Mazdaznan (Zoroastrianism)", the following can be read: "With such inspiring and elevating objects before it, Mazdaznan has become the Savior of the Aryan race, purporting to redeem all the tribes that constitute the race by expounding fixed laws in Eugenics. The application of these alone shall turn the generations to come into saviors" (Ha'nish, 1915, p. 237).

While it was Aryans who would be the race to be "redeemed", rather than other ethnicities, a certain egalitarian spirit operated within the confines of this closed system. In a short piece printed in 1916, Ha'nish argued that all were born equal, men and women, and should be considered of equal value to society and themselves. If, however, not all were treated equally, the cause for one's misfortune should be investigated. This would entail examining the individual's circumstances before birth and "the *modus operandi* in conception". Such a statement led to the assertion: "We need to know Eugenics from an evolutionary standpoint, which would disclose to us the powers of heredity and environment and how to cope with them until intelligence can control even those most hidden forces in Nature" (Hanish, 1916a, p. 82). Ha'nish's detailed thought about eugenics is now examined.

OTTOMAN ZAR-ADUSHT HA'NISH'S "EUGENICS"

The series of articles written by Ha'nish in 1916, their summary in the pamphlet from 1937, together with the shorter pieces by Hilton, provide the most extensive account of eugenics within the movement's press. Consistent with the ideas put forward in *Inner Studies* on the subject of rejuvenation and regeneration, eugenics was declared by Ha'nish to be "not only the science of perpetuation of one's kind; it is not only the science of reproduction, but also that of *re-creation*, of *re-generation*" (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 3). It was a science that

was admittedly broad but one that was relevant to all stages of life, from the earliest “zymotic motion of substance” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 3), to its continuation throughout the whole process of creation and the classification of beings.

Eugenics, akin to genesis or creation, Ha'nish wrote, drew on the Greek stem “eu-” meaning good and noble. Eugenics, therefore, could be described as “the science or study which aims to make, improve and bring the act of creation to a degree of nobility” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 3). Although Ha'nish did not actually quote any exponents of eugenics explicitly, such a formulation had at the very least echoes of the original Galtonian description. Fundamental to the understanding of eugenics, Ha'nish further argued, were the laws that appertained to what he termed the “procreation of kind” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 3). These laws would be instigated to create not only the regeneration and recreation of the body; they would also entail something that was at the centre of the teachings of Mazdaznan: the “bringing forth [of] consciousness of the higher nature”, which Ha'nish had described earlier in the century as the “etherealizing process” (Ha'nish, 1902, p. 83).

THE LAWS OF NATURE

Ha'nish argued that nature was undeviating in the application of its own guiding laws. All life that emerged had already been set by these laws, and “nature can never change or bring about a change from that which has already been established or created”; indeed, “nature has to follow that routine” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 4). If laws were “absolute and set” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 4), however, it may appear at first sight that there was no scope for any improvements in the make-up or biological progress of a particular species. Ha'nish observed that this was why it could easily be understood that a particular race may not “change an iota” in its mental concept or customs over time (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 4). Was this an impasse and, in fact, an impediment for eugenic progress? Not at all, Ha'nish appeared to suggest. It was important to study the “principal factors of evolution” in the perpetuation of kind, as this would allow for “each succeeding generation to bring about an improvement in the general level of the race” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 4). Although not explicitly stated, it may be understood that these principal factors of evolution must emanate from the established laws of nature. The operations of evolution, essential to the study of eugenics, must be understood, for evolution “plays the most important part in the perpetuation of kind” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 4), and, importantly, allowed for “each succeeding generation to bring about an improvement in the general

level of the race” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 4). Although somewhat convoluted in its reasoning, such an observation appears to assert the value of environmental improvements in regenerating the race. As in the piece written by Noyes on stirpiculture, his 1870 *Essay on Scientific Propagation* (Prince, 2017, pp. 84-88), great store was set on the acquisition of positive character traits in the ongoing elevation of the “race.” Ha'nish's thought thereby, without referring to them explicitly, coincided with the tenets of “neo-Lamarckism” in respect of the value and the transmissibility of environmental improvements.

Such an accretive and progressive model was also substantiated by Ha'nish's words on the process of human gestation. Here, by employing a theory similar to Ernst Haeckel's theory of “recapitulation” (Gould, 1977, pp. 78-85), whereby the individual member of a species in its embryonic development was thought to pass through the stages of evolution of the animal's remote ancestors and of more “primitive” species, Ha'nish described the conception, gestation, and birth of human beings. Haeckel expressed this formulation in the phrase “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”, where the former refers to the individual gestation process and the latter to the evolution from the animal's remote ancestors. While Lamarck had argued that environmental influences could be incorporated into adult animals, affecting evolution or “transformism” from one generation to the next, here the emphasis was placed on the development of the embryo. Darwin, in contrast, had argued that all beings developed from a small set of common ancestors but did not suppose that any embryo at any stage necessarily represented an ancestor. Ha'nish argued in favour of the recapitulation of humankind in a strict manner following Haeckel: “the nucleus – once it is formed after conception – has to pass through all the phases of the evolutionary process, from the very protoplasm through the accretion of the various cells and tissues in the whole human organism through every form, through every phase of the fish in the seas, through every phase or line of the birds in the air, through every phase or line and make-up of the beasts of the wild woods, up to the form of the human being” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 5). Aside from its by now largely questioned or even discredited scientific leanings, the openness to complex models of human evolution, even in a somewhat undigested form, was common in movements not explicitly dedicated to scientific endeavour. The adoption of concepts such as these functioned not only as a means of providing scientific respectability to the principal ideas predominant in Mazdaznan but also served to present to the world the suggestion that the movement was aware of the need to engage with ideas being debated in broader society. There was a great deal of coher-

ence within this train of thought, and Mazdaznan could thus show how it was connected to ideas common in “nature-oriented” movements of the early twentieth century where “man” was viewed as belonging to a natural chain of life and existence. A “return” to nature, or the expression of supposedly “natural” forms, was at the heart of these movements’ philosophies.

At the heart of Mazdaznan’s ideas was the importance of the mother. Eugenic movements, particularly where they overlapped with health initiatives that promoted maternalism and child-centred practices such as puericulture, concentrated on healthy motherhood as a foundation stone of their ideas. These expressions of eugenics were also often connected to understandings of the mechanisms of heredity that drew either explicitly or implicitly on Lamarckian premises, whereby the environment was deemed to play a major role in the healthiness and eugenic capacity of the individual, whether born or yet unborn. Exponents of eugenics advocated a careful consideration of the conditions of procreation, and these included the qualities of both mother and father.

As we have seen, Ha’nish elaborated on the role of the mother in his *Inner Studies*, and he returned to this subject in his *Science of Eugenics* (Ha’nish, 1937a, pp. 5-6). Further extending the influence of the environment in the procreative process, Ha’nish pondered on the degree to which mothers were aware of the personal characteristics of the father. If they were aware of his attributes – wisdom, knowledge, and power – the “different characteristics of manhood”, these impressions would be “transferred unto the forming child” (Ha’nish, 1937a, p. 5). After this opening assertion, Ha’nish went on to detail the ways in which this process would occur. In tune with some other currents that accepted eugenic ideas in the early twentieth century, Mazdaznan subscribed to a “folk” concept of inheritance that relied on suggestion and thought by the mother in the process of transmission of desirable and undesirable traits. Ha’nish wrote that the process of transference from mother to child “depends upon the power of the mind or thought, it depends upon the impression that [the mother’s] belief makes upon her own brain, that all these moments are now transferred correspondingly to the foetus” (Ha’nish, 1937a, p. 5).

Ultimately, the level of awareness on the part of the mother with regards to the father’s attributes depended on her own qualities and the conditions in which she lived, an aspect that earlier advocates of puericulture, such as Adolphe Pinard, would reaffirm (Turda; Gillette, 2014, pp. 33-37). This emphasis on the social circumstances of the mother and child was made explicit by Ha’nish once again: “Where the prospective mother’s tendencies or circumstances, surroundings, conditions, and environments are of a low nature, then

the lowness of that nature will impress itself very strongly upon the foetus in every thought-wave” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 5). Further and more negative still: “if a strong wave of a bestial nature enters the mind of that mother, or is in the mind of the mother, or has been suggested to her, through conditions and environments” over and above any other “thought-wave” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 5), this would mean that the “process of evolution comes to a standstill” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 6).

THOUGHT WAVES AS POWER

The importance of thought had not been addressed in the volume *Inner Studies* by Ha'nish. In the statement on eugenics, however, it became a central element within the Mazdaznan programme for human improvement. In tune with some alternative movements of the time, including spiritualism and theosophy, Ha'nish put great store on the power of thought. Such a stance certainly placed Ha'nish apart from the more hereditarian models of eugenics that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century. Ha'nish coincided more closely with environmental models of the transmission of moral qualities, acquired defects, and uterine influences along the lines of theories such as that of Prosper Lucas's idea of “imitation” (Noguera-Solano; Ruiz-Gutiérrez, 2009) or, indeed, Lamarck himself. As in some nature-based movements, nature too was understood to possess tremendous powers and the power to heal ailments. In nature, Ha'nish observed, “*everything* is positive, *everything* becomes positive, for there must be absolute law” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 6). If a person's “good side” in their disposition was negative, however, there would be no effect on nature. This statement may appear to contradict somewhat the previous discussion of the important influence of the environment for good or bad. The internal disposition of the person, however, cannot be confused with the external factors that the environment may impress on the human being. This distinction made, the comments by Ha'nish on the influence of the mother's thoughts, particularly if these were “bestial”, would still appear to be contradictory. Perhaps the key to the argument was in the consequences of such thoughts and dispositions: mothers' bad thoughts may not reverse evolution or introduce negative traits, but they could certainly paralyse the process. A further extract from *Science of Eugenics* would seem to argue in favour of such a distinction: “One can readily see now and understand how it is possible for a whole nation for a thousand years to be absolutely the same, and that they never change; for two and three and five thousand years they can be identical-

ly the same” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 6). The result of this would be “that the generation of to-day would be absolutely the same as it was five thousand years ago – all because of a certain *standard* set, certain *ideas* set, certain *customs*, *environments* and *conditions* being the same – for like causes produce like effects” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 6). Enlightenment concepts of progress could thus be arrested, according to Ha'nish; there was no automatic or teleological mechanism whereby human beings would improve, hence the need for eugenic intervention coupled to the bodily and spiritual adaptations of Mazdaznan thought and practice.

In order to proceed beyond merely standing still in evolutionary terms or reproducing individuals of the same kind, Ha'nish evoked a “higher eugenics” that would be devoted to a process of what he termed “*eugeneration* or *regeneration*” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 6). Within this section of the pamphlet, Ha'nish reiterated the process of recapitulation or repetition within the evolutionary cycle. Given the sophistication of the human type, Ha'nish argued that the foetus had to pass through “all the other lines that are necessary to bring forth a perfect human being” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 7). Nature, “in her blindness”, was compelled to follow fixed laws, and where the characteristics of the animal were strongest, these characteristics would become dominant in the type of human produced. It was here that we can detect the central nature of the eugenic message elaborated by Ha'nish. Leaving nature to its own devices or its own “blind forces” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 7) and forgetting that human beings had powers to influence developments was, in his view, a criminal act – although Ha'nish does not spell out the consequences, we can adduce that such a *laissez-faire* approach would result in human beings of “lesser quality”.

It was up to the mother to realise the importance of her own thought and the transference of that thought to influence the foetus. Ha'nish expressed this as a form of telepathic communication between the foetus and the mother and her own spirit, ego, or “divine spark” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 7), a modern take on “pre-scientific” notions of the influence of good and bad thoughts on the developing human in the womb. The character of the foetus was also dependent on a process that Ha'nish termed the “momentum” of the gestation. The later the momentum set in after the passing through the various animal types, the more developed, intellectual, and bright the child would be (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 8). This was presumably because it had reached a higher, or more human, plane as it had had the “opportunity to go on and to pass through the higher strata of animal development” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 8). During this phase, it accumulated greater additions to its animal propensities and had reached the

highest kind of animal development – “the way has thus been opened more readily unto further development” (Ha'nish, 1937a, p. 8).

MOTHERHOOD AND EUGENICS

In tune with some other eugenic movements, Mazdaznan placed a great degree of emphasis on women as the vehicle for environmental and biological change. Motherhood, within a paradigm that can be understood as part of “maternalist” eugenics, was at the centre of the movement’s regenerative stance¹³. As will also become clear, motherhood was viewed as paramount for the regeneration of the Aryan “race”. In her regularly featured column, “Mother’s Voice”, Maria Rose Ruth Hilton addressed the interrelation between motherhood, the race, and the perpetuation of the species. In a section of her column dedicated to eugenics, she argued that it was the right of every child to be “well born”; in order to achieve this aim, every parent should be aware of the laws of procreation (Hilton, 1919a, p. 363). Parents must represent perfection in themselves (Hilton, 1919a, p. 363). Women must also, she declared, seek perfection while men stood beside them as their “guiding hand” (Hilton, 1919a, p. 364).

Hilton remarked that the “real woman” would find salvation through childbearing, and it was here that birth control advocates such as Margaret Sanger would find their truth rather than simply limiting, presumably, the quantity of newborns (Hilton, 1920, p. 159). Women’s role in reproduction was twinned with the lead provided by the “chosen race”, the Avestans¹⁴. This race had always led in human developments, Hilton averred, so it was natural that they should lead in the greatest of all achievements – the “upliftment of the race” and the emancipation of women from superstition (Hilton, 1921, p. 49). A woman, Hilton argued, needed to recognise herself and know her own role: this would allow her to appreciate that she held the treasures of heaven and earth in her palm, that is, the birth of children (Hilton, 1921, p. 49). The unit in which such a vision would come to pass was the family as referred to in the Mazdaznan Confession, which had been handed down over generations and which provided, according to Hilton, the clearest statement on eugenics (Hilton, 1921, p. 50). Here, it was stated that in the countenance of man was the male creative principle of God the Father, and in the woman, there was present the procreative female principle of God the Mother. In the Child, there is realized the “perpetuative [sic] principle of destiny” as “our Savior through life” (Hilton, 1921, p. 50). Eugenics, Hilton had argued previously, was the basis for

such a higher civilization and a higher conscience; these attainments would brush aside "the last remnants of those racial encumbrances that have for ages stood as barriers in the pathway of progression" (Hilton, 1919b, p. 552).

RACIAL DESTINY AND ARYANISM

The role of eugenics in buttressing the qualities of the Aryan race was alluded to often in Hilton's column on motherhood and elsewhere in Mazdaznan publications. Although, in fact, Ha'nish seemed to place less emphasis on this subject, others sealed the relation between eugenics and racial superiority and whiteness. In a series of articles on the proposed "federation of nations" that Mazdaznan envisaged, uniting the dispersed "tribes" of old, Nellie Wheelwright decried miscegenation and established a colour hierarchy¹⁵. In a piece from April 1919, Wheelwright noted that colour was "evolutionary" and not climatic, and that miscegenation had implanted "estrangements" in the "White Race", leading to brute force and hostility (Wheelwright, 1919, pp. 240, 242). Despite the loss of purity, some figures came forth from the "chaos of miscegenation"; these were saviours who were not limited to one tribe or nation but were present in all tribes and nations (Wheelwright, 1919, p. 242). While the effects of miscegenation had been serious for the white race, delaying progress and resulting in lethargy, this race's higher consciousness spurred it on to finding solutions (Wheelwright, 1919, p. 243). Which races, according to Wheelwright, had been responsible for this decline? The Mohammedan and Moorish invasions had left traces of inferiority in Latin tribes. Such a process, however, had not occurred with "Semitic blood", "to a great extent considered Aryan" (Wheelwright, 1919, p. 245)¹⁶. In a later discussion, Wheelwright stated plainly that the "black race" was of lower intelligence and that the "Olive-Green" or Malaysian peoples possessed intellectual qualities but were "chaotic." The "White race" had intellectual qualities and needed to realize them in order to become the "Race Transparent" and lead the world out of confusion (Wheelwright, 1920)¹⁷.

In other instances, Mazdaznan expressed views on racial questions and eugenics that were not always consistent with the premises discussed earlier. For example, Professor Lambert, from the Department of Biology at Colorado College, was quoted as stating that three "great races" had dominated European history, and the future of humanity would depend on judicious mixtures. This would, in turn, rely on an understanding of inheritance, largely explained by Mendel's theories (Anon, 1920a). The work of Adolphe Pinard in favour of

“enlightened procreation” through the dissemination of ideas on physiological and pathological heredity was also highlighted (Anon, 1920b), as was the thought of Robert Ingersoll. In a speech given at Hollis Theatre, Boston, on 2 June 1899, Ingersoll declared that reform was useless against the “torrent” of ignorance, poverty, and vice. Rather than through persuasion or force, however, Ingersoll advocated placing “science” in the hands of women to save humanity (Ingersoll, 1920).

CONCLUSION

The “High Priestess” of US Mazdaznan, Maria Rose Hilton, argued in 1919 that education was vital in achieving eugenic objectives. However, it was deemed insufficient, as an undercurrent of nefarious inherited tendencies would “continue to arise and assert itself, as much as weeds in a well-cultivated field” (Hilton, 1919c, p. 161)¹⁸. Sickness, sin, and sorrow, furthermore, would continue to proliferate within civilization “until the white man awakens to the fact that he is to prove himself superior to the inferior races and must learn to use the only and last resort at his command to eradicate all error from his kind” (Hilton, 1919c, p. 162). For Hilton, and evidently for others connected to Mazdaznan, this “last resort” resided in eugenics. What means were to be employed to “eradicate all error”? Less emphasis should be placed, Hilton argued, on birth control and more on what she termed “sex control.” In this way, the less desirable could be “emasculated by common consent” (Hilton, 1919c, p. 162). Herein lay the means to achieve eugenic perfection: the knife was used on plants to excise diseased growth; it could also be directed at those at the bottom who struggled with the thousand evils that beset humanity (Hilton, 1919c, p. 163).

Such an interventionist programme was, nevertheless, tempered in a later statement by Hilton in her column on “Mother’s Voice: Science in Eugenics.” In mid-1922, Hilton noted that everyone was in agreement as to the “hopelessness” of attempting to regulate human mating by legislation. Instead of regulation, human beings should pursue genuine “love marriages” as these were favoured by eugenics and were “arranged by nature” (Hilton, 1922, p. 428). The advances of eugenic science permitted this very outcome. According to Dr. Davenport at the Eugenics Record Office at Cold Spring Harbor, Hilton wrote, knowledge of inheritance was now robust enough to guide marriages between ideal persons. The Record Office had already been called upon to determine claims based on doubtful parenthood (Hilton, 1922, p. 429). Such a

voluntary approach for eugenics, in contrast to her previous remarks, evidently met with Hilton’s approval.

What implications did a more environmentalist and voluntary programme of eugenics have for the acceptance by Mazdaznan of certain theories of inheritance? As will be clear from the analysis contained in this article, Ha’nish and Hilton, and probably many followers of Mazdaznan, believed in the supreme action of the “natural laws” to bring about the judicious matching of parents while at the same time seeking to maximise the positive qualities of the mother’s surroundings. As part of this broadly environmentalist approach, Mazdaznan coincided with a maternalist expression of eugenics that was akin to Adolphe Pinard’s doctrine of puericulture as pre-natal care and improvement. Mazdaznan was also indebted to what may be termed “folk” understandings of the transmission of inherited traits such as goodness.

In this sense, Mazdaznan was typical of many “life reform” movements of the turn of the century in North America and Europe. These movements accepted the basic need for eugenic improvement as a diffuse response to a perceived process of degeneration of the population and the need for judicious parenthood within a shifting framework that combined environmental and hereditarian explanations of “nature”. Such movements cannot, therefore, easily be labelled “Neo-Lamarckian” despite their emphasis on environmental inheritance; they favoured social and educational improvements, the care of the mother, and a propitious upbringing for the child, but rarely were theories of inheritance or advocates of eugenics cited to substantiate their cause. In Mazdaznan, eugenics was driven by a deeply racialist narrative that understood the “white race” as superior, the inheritor of a sacred mission for humanity, and simultaneously under threat from decay and miscegenation. Such racial supremacy was not, of course, uncommon in both strongly environmentalist and hereditarian eugenics movements.

Mazdaznan, while falling into the broad category of “life reform” movements of the period, also displayed innovative elements in its conception of eugenics. To the amalgam of influences on the foetus and newborn were added more spiritualist conceptions, such as the importance conceded to telepathic communication between mother and child. Such a process would allow, in Mazdaznan thought, for goodness to come to the fore and for darkness to be eliminated. Elements of modernist thought, drawing on notions of magnetism and electric attraction between individuals, combined in Mazdaznan with “pre-scientific” thought on the development and persistence of human traits. Through the bringing to bear of Mazda as light and the purification of

the “white race” through eugenics, humanity could finally attain its redemption and meet its destiny.

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NOTES

¹ Introvigne and Zoccatelli (2010) write that Hanisch was born in 1844, probably in Teheran, to a Russian father and German mother. His adopted surname, deliberately Orientalised, was written both as Hanish and Ha'nish. These are listed separately in the article's bibliography.

² Forgács (1995, p. 51), in the context of the uptake of Mazdaznan in some circles of the Bauhaus movement in the 1920s and 1930s, remarks that Ahura Mazda, the creator of light, was in battle against Angra Mainyu, the creator of darkness, according to its followers.

³ “Thought” in Mazdaznan literature was commonly spelled “Thot”.

⁴ As I was completing the final version of this article, the piece by Bernadett Bigalke (2023) was published. Bigalke emphasises the cross-over between new religious movements, scientific ideas, “life reform” movements and new concepts of the body with some references to eugenics.

⁵ On “intentionality” and the appropriation of traditions to form “new religions”, see Stausberg and Tessmann (2013).

⁶ These pieces reproduced a lecture by Ha'nish on eugenics.

⁷ It is from this summarised document that we draw our main insights on Mazdaznan's eugenics as it bestows greater clarity on Ha'nish's thought on eugenics in a more accessible form. Much of the wording and the principal ideas contained in the 1937 pamphlet are almost identical or the same as his more diffuse 1916 account. The British movement published other works by Ha'nish to accompany this text on eugenics. These included: *Mazdaznan: The Power of Breath*; *Mazdaznan: Science of Dietetics*; *Mazdaznan: The Valley of Ghan* (Ha'nish, 1937b; 1937c; 1939). The fact that the British association published Ha'nish's thoughts on eugenics in 1937 also displays the durability of eugenic thought (in addition to Mazdaznan) well into the 1930s.

⁸ On Hilton's role as “High Priestess” of Mazdaznan, see the news item, Anon (1913).

⁹ Twigg (1981) does mention these aspects briefly without going into much detail. Whittlesea (2012, p. 65) provides a short section on the issue of eugenics. Desponds (2008) focuses extensively on the role of women in the movement in the 1940s.

¹⁰ On Tóth, see Turda (2015, pp. 252-258).

¹¹ See International Association for the Preservation... ([n.d.]).

¹² This charge was made in March 1912 after Ha'nish sent his *Inner Studies* to a woman in Missouri. Other allegations followed, including sexual impropriety and assault. See Spitzzeri (2022). Ha'nish was convicted at the end of December 1913 and sent to prison for six months in Chicago.

¹³ The review carried short resumes and adverts for Mazdaznan publications, including Mary Barteau's *Pre-Natal Duty*, which contained sections on eugenics and motherhood. See Anon (1921).

¹⁴ Those peoples of Persia who spoke the Zoroastrian language.

¹⁵ "Cousin Nellie" wrote of the twelve tribes that formed the Aryan "race" and their embracing of eugenics in Nellie (1917).

¹⁶ Introvigne and Zoccatelli (2010) point out that the movement was accused of racism and anti-Semitism but also that it was outlawed by the Nazis in 1935. Whittlesea (2012, p. 65) argues that the movement, despite being racist, was not anti-Semitic and viewed the Aryan race as a combination of Jews, Indians and Persians. He also remarks that the anti-Semitic *Judenkenner* reported on the suppression of the Leipzig branch of Mazdaznan as a "front for International Jewry".

¹⁷ Hilton also referred often to the "Race Transparent". See, for example, Hilton (1920, p. 41), where she states that the Lord God Mazda has given the task of regeneration to those already regenerated. Having conquered the limitations of the White Race, the redeemed ones become the "progenitors of the Coming Race, the Race Transparent".

¹⁸ The "gardening" metaphor of eugenics was common at the time. See Mottier (2008).

