Eugenics
April 4th

Reading: Daniel J. Kevles, "International Eugenics," in *Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, for the Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2004), pp. 40-59.
Paul Lombardo and Gregory Dorr, "Eugenics, Medical Education, and the Public Health Service: Another Perspective on the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 80 (Spring 2006): 291-316, forthcoming.

The topic of eugenics has loomed in the background of several issues we have discussed so far, especially euthanasia (fears that legalization of euthanasia would lead to euthanasia of 'undesirables') and optimizing offspring (fears that giving parents control over their offspring will lead to a 'Brave New World' of government controlled reproduction). Many of the fears have weight because of the history of Nazi Germany, where many of these slippery slopes actually occurred. This week we tackle eugenics and slippery slopes directly. For Tuesday's lecture, focus on the Kevles article (the print is small, but there are lots of pictures -- unfortunately these didn't photocopy and scan well). You can skim much of the Lombardo and Dorr article, except the two sections noted below.

"International Eugenics": Daniel Kevles is a leading historian of science, now at Cal Tech. He has written the definitive history of eugenics (*In the Name of Eugenics*). This chapter, which provides a broad context to a book (*Deadly Medicine*) that focuses on Nazi eugenics, covers many of the highlights. Try to get a sense of the broad outlines of eugenics, from its origins in 19th century Darwinism to its demise during the Nazi era. Note the role of scientists and other celebrities (e.g. Charles Davenport, Alexander Graham Bell, Winston Churchill), the broad political support (both liberals and conservatives), and the international comparisons. Why were people in so many countries so concerned about race (and class) purity? Why did so many states in the US support sterilization laws? Kevles does not focus on the ethical implications of eugenics. Try to imagine yourself as a scientist in the 1920s and 1930s: would you have considered eugenics to be unethical? Looking back at the eugenic movement from our modern perspective, in what ways was it ethically problematic? Why did eugenics lose popularity in the US in the 1930s? Since the emergence of molecular genetics in the 1950s, observers have worried that new genetic sciences will lead to a revival of eugenics (e.g. p. 59). Is this a realistic fear or just a fear-mongering slippery slope argument?

"Eugenics, Medical Education, and the Public Health Service": Paul Lombardo is a prominent ethicist and legal scholar at the University of Virginia; Greg Dorr, a former student of his, is now a post-doc in STS. This essay (not yet published -- you are reading the galley proofs) is a contribution to the massive literature about the Tuskegee syphilis study. In this study, widely considered to be the most infamous medical research project in US history, the US Public Health

Service enrolled 400 black men in Macon County, Alabama in an observational study of the course of untreated syphilis; participants were misled into believing they were being treated; when penicillin (which cures syphilis) became available in the 1940s, it was withheld from the participants. The study continued into the 1970s, when publicity forced the PHS to shut it down. Many historians and ethicists have tried to explain how such a patently unethical study (by our standards, by the standards of the 1930s, 1940s, etc.) could have taken place. Lombardo and Dorr trace it to the background of the study organizers, particularly their training at the University of Virginia, a stronghold of eugenic ideology. The most relevant portion is pp. 296-300, which shows how the ideology of eugenics complemented the ideology of public health in the 1920s and 1930s. pp. 300-303 give you a sense of what you would have been taught if you had been a student at UVa in the 1920s.