Martin S. Pernick, *The Black Stork: Eugenics and the Death of "Defective" Babies in American Medicine and Motion Pictures in America Since 1915*, Oxford University Press, 1996. Reviewed by Harvey Fenigsohn.

Though little known today, Dr. Harry J. Haiselden, a Chicago physician shocked the nation in 1915 by boldly revealing that he practiced what some would call infanticide. The doctor defiantly defended his right to withhold medical treatment of so called "defective" newborns. Inciting a firestorm, Haiselden began a widespread publicity campaign to convince the medical world and the general public of the morality of his actions—eliminating those infants he considered "unfit" to live.

Haiselden's most effective publicity was his sensational film, *The Black Stork*. Pure propaganda, the melodrama extolled the advantages of selective breeding and warned of the danger of couples with genetic disorders marrying and having children. His film dramatized the health benefits of not treating "defective" newborns, leaving them to die for their own good, the good of their parents, and the good of society. In his engaging book of the same title, medical historian Martin Pernick skillfully analyzes the powerful effects of *The Black Stork*. Using examples from other motion pictures and the popular press, he reveals how the mass media both reflected and shaped America's attitude toward eugenics and euthanasia.

The first half of Pernick's book provides a sweeping history of the medical and moral issues surrounding eugenics and euthanasia. Derived from the Latin, i.e., eu="good" and thanatos="death", euthanasia can be passive when treatment is withheld to relieve suffering, or active when actions are taken to bring about death in a so called "mercy killing." When Haiselden brought the subject to public attention through his film, the nation was sharply divided. Some well known figures such as Clarence Darrow and Helen Keller took the side of the doctor, while eminent social reformers including Jane Addams of Hull House opposed his advocacy of passive euthanasia. Pernick shows how these conflicted attitudes toward euthanasia continue today as Americans still grapple with questions of who should live and who should die.

Through the second half of his engaging and original study, in addition to *The Black Stork*, Pernick uncovers over a hundred now forgotten films, showing how they influenced and revealed popular thinking about complex moral issues. Lucidly composed and thoroughly researched, Pernick's book establishes the close connection between euthanasia and eugenics, the attempt to produce superior human beings by improving hereditary traits.

To that end, in the 1920s the U.S. government passed laws banning supposedly undesirable immigrant groups from entering the country. In addition, by 1939 an estimated 20,000 of the "unfit" had been sterilized, including African Americans, alcoholics, the immoral, criminals, prostitutes, and the mentally ill. Pernick traces how America's interest in eugenics can be linked to the Nazis' willingness to use murder to purify the race. He regrets that a movement in this country to overcome inherited diseases degenerated into what he considers "genocide," all because of hatred based on race, class, ethnicity, and gender.

Pernick exposes the limitation of the progressive era's belief that objective science could resolve troubling ethical dilemmas. Subtly influenced by culture and tradition, even seemingly objective science is value laden, yet the public has tended to leave grave decisions about life and death to those whose judgments are all too subjective. The author maintains that scientists, alone, are not equipped to decide about the treatment of those whose lives might never be normal, but who arguably deserve the right to life.

The controversial Baby Doe cases in the early 1980s brought about federal attempts to prohibit euthanasia but the Supreme Court overturned these laws and left such regulations to the states. Today, doctors have been left with a great deal of personal discretion. However, because of the patient's rights movements of the 1970s, rather than the involuntary euthanasia of the past, it is now more common for the withholding of treatment to be authorized by advanced directives. Nevertheless, as Pernick reveals so well, controversies that divided America in 1910 remain to trouble us as we argue questions about quality of life and how it may be achieved. He shows how such questions are complicated by new discoveries in genetics and advances in bioengineering, as we continue to confront perplexing issues of science and morality, life and death.