

DIALOGUE SECTION

Biopolitics and the Social Control of the Multitude

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ABSTRACT The categories of biopolitics and biopower were invented by Michel Foucault, who wanted to underline a shifting in state political power toward the caring of biological life of the entire social body. This transformation of political power allowed a combination of techniques that aimed to control the individual body and the standardised multitude of bodies. This paper analyses the biopolitical mechanisms and how did they work during the era of totalitarian states, and how do they act today. During the totalitarian era, biopolitics became a tool of surveillance and regulation of the social body, shifting toward racism. During the second half of the 20th century, biopolitics sought to minimise social risks. Criminal and underclass policies, as well as new genetics, are all aspects of the new authoritarian biopolitics. Far from being a neutral tool to improve people's well being, the spectre of eugenics casts a shadow over the new biopolitics.

Introduction

In outlining the categories of biopolitics and biopower, Michel Foucault highlighted the shift in social policies, which began at the end of 18th century. From this perspective, political power has taken over care of the biological life of the entire social body, showing a new juridical principle leading this transformation. While in ancient laws sovereignty 'gives death and abandons people to their faith in life' under the new laws a new type of regulations appears, which 'gives life and abandons people to their death'.¹ This transformation of political power has simultaneously permitted a metamorphosis in disciplinary techniques. Techniques to control the individual body were integrated into biopolitical techniques that sought to control the standardised multitude of bodies or the statistical 'middle-man' that represents this standardised being. On the one hand, there is an 'anatomy-politics' of the individual body, which centres on the body as a machine, on disciplining it, optimising its capabilities, extracting its strength to the fullest, increasing its usefulness and level of obedience and on integrating it, this standardised body, into efficient and economic systems of control. On the other hand, there is

1. TM. Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société*, translated in Italian as: *Difendere la società. Dalla guerra delle razze al razzismo di stato* (Florence, Ponte alle Grazie, 1990), p. 160.

the 'biopolitics' of a population, which focuses on the size and quality of the population, on human sexual reproduction, on conjugal, parental and familial relations, on health and disease and on birth and death. Biopolitics has been, and still is today, a set of social technologies adopted so as to keep the social body safe from its own internal dangers.²

Mortality and morbidity were key areas for developing the concepts of biopolitics. The politics of health was underpinned by the collection and analysis of statistics and other numerical information about populations, which was then analysed in terms of frequencies and probabilities.³ This approach, called at the time a 'moral statistic' approach, as first suggested by Le Play, was the rationale for health and hygiene strategies that tried to identify, manage and reduce aggregate levels of morbidity and mortality. Such ideas about the regularity and predictability of illness, accidents and other misfortunes within a population were central to the birth of the very idea of society, and to the emergence, in different countries, of social insurance strategies for the spreading of the risks, entailed in the very activity of living, across an insured national population.⁴

The fact that there are two overlapping power mechanisms, one which disciplines, the other that regulates, has been made possible because of the idea of an evolutionary continuum between individual and social body, an idea espoused at the time by many sociologists, doctors and biologists, which has allowed biopolitics to act jointly upon individual and society, resolving the classical Hobbesian problem of social order, by means of the control of the reproduction of the social body through time and its regulation in space.⁵

The main applications of biopolitics so far can be found within the totalitarian states that flourished between the two world wars, which provoked a sort of 'State racism', but are now still running, in a different manner, all over the world. Biopolitics is nowhere linked to many crucial social processes, such as the implementation of segregationist urban policies, race discrimination, criminalisation and imprisonment of poor people, in a word, the definition of underclass label. Biopolitics is also crucial for managing the new unskilled labour market, to control immigration flows into Western countries,

2. On it see D. Padovan, 'Ereditarismo e ambientalismo nel discorso sociologico sulla razza tra le due guerre', in A. Burgio (Ed.), *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d'Italia 1870–1945* (Il Mulino, 1999), pp. 443–454. D. Padovan, *Saperi Strategici. Le scienze sociali e la formazione dello spazio pubblico italiano tra le due guerre mondiali* (Franco Angeli, 1999); D. Padovan, 'Biopolitica, razzismo e scienze sociali', *AltreRagioni*, No. 8 (1999), pp. 127–142; D. Padovan, 'Le scienze sociali durante il fascismo fra razza e nazione, biologia e cultura', *Razzismo e Modernità*, No. 1, gennaio giugno (2001), pp. 74–97.
3. About Italian statistic and demography during totalitarian era, see Carl Ipsen, *Demografia totalitaria. Il problema della popolazione nell'Italia fascista* (Dictating Demography: The Problem of Population in Fascist Italy) (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997); David Horn, *Social Bodies. Science, Reproduction and Italian Modernization* (Princeton University Press, 1994).
4. N. Rose, 'The Politics of Life Itself', *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 18, No. 6 (2001), pp. 1–30.
5. B. Turner, *The Body and Society* (Basil Blackwell, 1984).

to exclude people at risk from welfare benefits, measures taken by means of medical definitions and genetic instruments. In short, this paper analyses how biopolitical mechanisms functioned during the period of totalitarian states and how it acts today in modern societies. Finally, one of the main interests of this paper is to enlighten some key properties of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in general,⁶ which stemmed, and still stem, from the racial and racist thought developed during the totalitarian era and transferred in different aspects to the post-war period.

Earlier stages of biopolitics

During the second half of the 19th century experts in public health and hygiene, biologists and doctors were involved in major efforts to combat human 'degeneration' and to resolve the conflict between *wealth* and *health*, mainly because this conflict threatened the peaceful process of enrichment of industrial bourgeoisie. The towns and cities were largely populated by the poor and underprivileged, by beggars and other human relicts, there were criminals, prostitutes, tricksters, the insane and suicidal at every turn, the unequivocal symptom both of the degeneration of society in general and, obviously, of its members. The fact that wealth was threatened by non-security and by poor health and hygiene, and that the conflict between *wealth* and *health* was so clear, demanded a radical and active response. People had to be made more 'healthy' and educated, air and cleanliness should prevail everywhere, cities should be rebuilt, sewers dug, fountains, schools, parks, gymnasiums, chemists and hospitals were all required, if public health were to improve. Both doctors and public health officials realised that human life could not be lived fully unless there were some changes in the way in which wealth itself was produced.⁷ Instead of dealing only with individual pathologies medical and public health activities were extended to include social pathologies too, which meant altering both state policies and the social role of knowledge of medical and hygiene questions. By the end of the 19th century the medical viewpoint had become part of public knowledge. The medical theory of regeneration was 'so enormously successful in integrating the usual, factual litany of social pathologies into a broader discourse on national decline that it allowed clinical terminology to escape from its 'prison' and to be thrown into the arena of public debate'.⁸

Initially biopolitics was influenced by reformist ideas because it was inspired—even partially—both by the Socialist movement and the newly emerging feminist

6. For a complete analysis of the authoritarianism concept, see G.E. Skoulas, 'The Theoretical Dimensions of Authoritarian Rule In Our Time', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2003), pp. 263–283.
7. B. Latour, *Les microbes: guerre et paix* (Métailié, 1984); translated in Italian as: *I microbi* (Editori Riuniti, 1991), p. 25. For the situation in France during the first half of the 19th century and on public policies for social regeneration see J.L. Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses* (Plon, 1958).
8. R. Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 170.

movement. When, in 1869, Francis Galton wrote the first treatise on social eugenics entitled *The Hereditary Genius*, he was clearly influenced by liberal individualism. The aim was the total, harmonious development of the individual and improvement of the living conditions of the working population. Eugenics appeared as a mixture of social protection, of benevolent coercion and of rhetoric, a strategy for institutionalising social protection, welfare in all countries. Thus biopolitics sought to maximise the health and well being of the population by offering new living and working conditions, overseeing the hygiene practises of individuals and promoting the right conditions for healthier living through town planning, control of epidemics and endemic illnesses, as well as by improving the conditions of work in industry. Furthermore this public health and hygiene programme sought to instil habits that would improve both the physical and moral health of each individual through public education, family involvement, and by state intervention in the field of the most common social areas of health disease. Many disciplines took care of public health. Social medicine was the most important of those disciplines. It was the outcome of a close union between the conquests of experimental sciences, such as medicine and of sociological disciplines. The targets of such 'beneficial and harmonic unity' were social diseases where 'medicines, hygienists, lawyers and economists should come together'.⁹

A voluntaristic view: crowds and masses as a challenge to the biopolitics

In the late 19th century a new vision of society emerged that challenged the optimistic view of theories of evolution, which envisaged slow, almost imperceptible improvements within society through state policies. Biopolitics played a crucial role in this reformist approach to controlling the balanced development of all parts of social organism, an approach that accorded with the views of both liberal democrats and moderate socialists. The conflict between 'necessarism' and voluntarism was crucial at this stage in the development of biopolitical strategies. While necessarism was based on the awareness of regularities that support economic evolution, voluntarism asserted that economic relationships depended on human will and human consensus. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the voluntaristic view of nationalism was developed by a number of writers who sought to influence public opinion and consensus by using a new rhetorical style. They encouraged intellectuals and the reading public to rebel against reason, rationality, positivism, erudition, materialism, democracy and historical method: such things must be spurned. The cult of the superman, leader, 'duce', of a small and aristocratic elite, gradually usurped the place of positivist utilitarian individualism. The new individualism was heroic and marked by virtue, in the sense that individuals had to sacrifice their interests to broader national values. Only a true genius, a leader, a dictator would be able to embody the mystic soul of the nation. Such a person would be the true manager, the mind behind the higher goals of the collective organism. Italian nationalists based their

9. A. Gemelli, 'Osservazioni sulle malattie dei lavoratori in rapporto alla legislazione sociale', *Rivista Internazionale di Scienze Sociali*, Vol. 17, fasc. 196 (1909), pp. 497–530.

thinking on 'elite theories' elaborated by Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto who inspired nationalists to argue that only aristocracies are able to decode the 'obscure (unknown) destiny' of the nation and transform it into political action. The nation is an organism that lives and develops within its own boundaries, its qualities being determined by those who have gone before.

This approach marked a shift from objectivist positivism to a new subjective elitism. It also marked the crisis of rational and liberal individualism and the development of voluntarism and collectivism. A famous Italian sociologist, Scipio Sighele, wrote a paper entitled 'Against Parliamentarianism', in which he analysed the collective psychology of Members of Parliament. He maintained that bringing individuals together reduced both their intellectual capabilities and collective responsibility. He shared the views that John Stuart Mill expressed in a pamphlet he wrote against the tyranny of public opinion. Human aggregates could express only the lowest intellectual faculties of human beings; they are emotional and easily influenced and manipulated. To avoid the dangers of such behaviour, the crowd must follow one genius, who is able to control it. Social psychologists wanted to find the 'soul of the crowd'. There are laws that rule mass behaviour. The instinct to imitate has created a social world that is a tissue of similes. Another danger is that of moral contagion, which spreads like an epidemic through crowds and the mass, generating both religious and political mental disease. This suggestion (influence) made clear the causes of moral contagion and imitation. This 'epidemic', this psychosis, laid the physical base for a variety of phenomena. In the eyes of sociologists the crowd was mainly a barbarian, dangerous and atavistic collective, however the genius and the elite would be able to direct the actions of the crowd towards acceptable goals. Nationalist leaders were able to guide the crowd along the right path and transform it into a mass of heroes. The political minority was the catalyst within each crowd: they were the *meneurs des foules*, who *pushed forward* or worked to induce people to action. The scholars of the crowd had a certain power and influence, because they could recognise the great anti-system energy contained within that crowd, energy that had to be kept under control and directed towards achieving rational and political goals. Those in power also had to calm the fears generated by these crowds and to do that they turned to scholars to explain the nature of mass behaviour.

The two faces of biopolitics

After Fascism had come to power, biopolitical practices were used in order to silence the polemic, raised by scholars of the crowd, against the state role and function. This biopolitical coercion shifted the basis of the social contract from a contract between the individual and society to surveillance and regulation of the biological, economic and political evolution of the mass—the population. It also neutralised the crowd's potential to demolish, the social structure by enmeshing, in biological determinism, the collective energy that had the potential power to break through social norms: force, energy, created by the individuals who had gathered together the crowd and had been homogenised within the mass.¹⁰

10. E. Canetti, *Masse und Macht* (Claassen, 1960).

During the inter-war period, in the nation states of Europe and North America and in many of colonies, two major biopolitical strategies frequently overlapped. Both had already rejected the pseudo-democratic view of biopolitics, which had held sway during the second half of the 19th century, and by the turn of the century were already moving towards very different biopolitical strategies. Reformist hopes and aspirations began to fade as totalitarian state collectivism evolved. From being a scientific means of freeing individuals from need and suffering the strategies were transformed into a powerful means of social control. Birth control policies, which had been introduced in the USA thanks to pressure from both feminists and socialists, suffered the same fate. In the immediate postwar years, under the direction of a white male *élite*, permeated by nativism, racism, social Darwinism and ethnocentrism, the birth control movement was forced back into eugenic practises, on the grounds of defending the family and social morals.¹¹

The first great biopolitical strategy was designed to maximise the fitness of the population and it concentrated on reproduction. Eugenics sought to improve the social body and to relieve it of the economic and social burdens of future disease and degeneracy by acting upon the reproductive capacities of individuals in the present.¹² Eugenics programmes used a combination of incentives and compulsion to stop people in certain categories from procreating: those judged to carry hereditary diseases, to be insane, feeble-minded or physically disabled, those who were deemed to behave habitually, or incorrigibly, in an immoral or anti-social manner. The eugenic selection was carried out on the basis of theories about heredity, which could be used to direct and control individuals' choices about whom they should marry. This strategy, the 'rationalisation of reproduction' was expected to have the effect of creating a new, biologically and morally, dominant class. The rest of the population, 'the mass', would be denied access to higher level activities thus creating a horizontal social division that would effectively

11. L. Gordon, 'The Politics of Population: Birth Control and the Eugenics Movement', *Radical America*, No. 4 (1974), pp. 61–98.
12. For more on the Eugenics movement in England, see R. Alan Buss, 'Galton and the Birth of Differential Psychology and Eugenics: Social Political and Economic Forces', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, No. 1 (1976), pp. 47–58; J. Macnicol, 'The Voluntary Sterilization Campaign in Britain 1918–39', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, No. 3 (1992), pp. 422–438. For the United States, see C.A. Carey, 'Gender and Compulsory Sterilization Programs in America: 1907–1950', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, No. 1 (1998), pp. 74–105; L. Gordon, 'The Politics of Population: Birth Control and the Eugenics Movement', *Radical America*, No. 4 (1974), pp. 61–98; F. Oswald, 'Eugenical Sterilization in the United States', *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (1930), pp. 65–73. For more on German Eugenics, see S. Patellani, 'Prolegomeni di eugenetica sociale', Lesson held on 14 January 1925 at the Istituto Ostetrico-Ginecologico of the University of Milan, taken from the *Annali di Ostetricia e Ginecologia* (Cogliati, 1925); M. Burleigh and W. Wippermann, *The Racial State. Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1991). On French Eugenics, see G. Vacher de Lapouge, *Race et Milieu Social. Essais d'anthroposociologie* (Librairie Marcel Rivière, 1909); A. Bejin, 'Le sang, le sens et le travail: Georges Vacher de Lapouge, darwiniste social, fondateur de l'anthroposociologie', *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, No. 73 (1982), pp. 323–343.

encourage the idea that there really was an 'elected race', one that was above all other social groups.¹³

'Degeneration became one of the key words of Eugenics. It preyed up the idea, widely held in Europe, that the superior race was in decline.'¹⁴ For Max Nordau, a German doctor, a liberal Jew and pupil of Cesare Lombroso, degenerates were those who did not absorb the values of the emerging middle class: artists who were not clear or concrete and who had no scientific spirit, the enemies of regular work, of sexual morality, of the 'suitable aspect'.¹⁵ Eugenics rejected anything that smacked of anomaly, hiding it or removing it from view, expelling all those who were unsuited to the new rational order from the society of 'normal' individuals. Individuals who were anomalous, degenerate or criminal merited only 'elimination from the social environment and from reproduction', 'deportation overseas', 'removal from civil life', the state and society should initiate 'great work of collective defence against the anomalous and the degenerate'.¹⁶ Eugenics segregated the normal in order to separate it from the anomalous and eliminated the 'pathological' in order to improve the 'physiological'. It seemed to believe it had found the area of biological and social phenomena it could act upon, over the generations, in order to selectively breed a more and more perfect human being. Eugenics did create some confusion, but undoubtedly it identified health with salvation and illness with sin. No longer original sin, but a social sin that demanded immediate expiation.

The second strategy turned to racism, introducing into the lives, that were now being managed by those in power, a separation between 'that which must live and that which must die'. In this case biopolitics encouraged the distinctions and hierarchies within different human groups, defined as 'races' (but as we know races do not exist), thus fragmenting the biological field. Racism caused the shift of biopolitical strategies of power, introducing rifts into the biological continuum of the population by identifying, recognising, hierarchically ordered sub-groups.

13. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1951), pp. 250–251.
14. The term degeneration was coined by the French psychiatrist Benedict Morel in his paper 'Traité des dégénérescences' published in 1857. In the eyes of Giuseppe Sergi, 'degeneration' was a 'phylo genetic book full of atavistic reasoning' or 'the fact that individuals and their descendents, which in the struggle for existence, have not perished, but survive in inferior conditions and are little suited to the continuing struggle of living'. Cfr. G. Sergi, 'L'antropologia moderna', *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1882; G. Sergi, 'Le degenerazioni umane', *Rivista di Discipline Carcerarie*, Vol. 17, Nos. 9-10 (1887). For a social psychiatric interpretation see S. Tonnini, 'Degenerazione e primitività', *Atti dei congressi della società freniatria italiana*, Vol. 6, Suppl. *Archivio italiano per le malattie nervose e più particolarmente per le alienazioni mentali* (1890), pp. 99–161. Cf. also G. Sergi, 'L'eugenica e la decadenza delle nazioni', in *Atti Sips*, Vol. VIII *riunione marzo* 1916 (Sips, 1916), pp. 180–200; E. Morselli, 'L'eugenica e le previsioni sulla eredità neuro-psicopatologica', *Quaderni di Psichiatria*, No. 2 (1915), pp. 321–331.
15. See the paper 'Degeneration', which appeared around 1892/1893 and was widely read throughout Europe. Cf. G.L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution. A History of European Racism*, 1978; translated into Italian as: *Il razzismo in Europa dalle origini all'olocausto* (Mondadori, 1992), pp. 94–95.
16. P. Consiglio, 'Come difenderci dagli anormali e dai degenerati nell'ambiente militare', *Difesa sociale*, Vol. 2, No. 10 (1923), pp. 153–158.

The racial strategies of biopolitics established a positive relationship between the death of one and the life of another, a biological type of relational strategy. By eliminating inferior individuals and groups, the superior race could cleanse, reinforce and reinvigorate itself. 'Eliminating' did not only mean directly killing but also, indeed above all, exposing such individuals to the risk of death, increasing the chances that they would die or, even more simply, just political death, expulsion and segregation.

After the 1938 Italian racial laws, eugenics became a powerful means for social advancement and for practical training in imperialism. In the climate created by Fascism, with renewed pride in race and with the duties that it brought with it, eugenics became a very 'fecund science' that 'today can go out among the population and contribute to the new and ever more valid expectations of imperial Italy'.¹⁷ This association between racial eugenics and scientific study of heredity, of the transmission of characteristics, were crucial for making sense of the huge metaphysical construction that 'race' was becoming. The laws that regulate the inheritance of specific characteristics had to be understood if one was to grasp the origins and the aims of racism. Consequently, the psychological as well as the somatic characteristics of a race became 'an amalgamation of characteristics inherited from both close and distant ancestors by means of biological inheritance. Achieving the aims of racism, that is, hastening improvements in the race depends directly on how efficiently the laws of biological inheritance are applied'.¹⁸

The concept of race was used as a means of explaining every biosocial event and phenomenon, thus creating a relationship, a link, between certain illnesses and the biological constitution of the race. For example, they argued that for a large number of illnesses certain races either had a strong disposition to succumbing or they were naturally immune.¹⁹ Racial biopolitics was put into practise as persecution, while more and more attention was paid to the sociobiological category: Italian race. Under the influence of Mendel's ideas, they argued that the Italian race descended directly and had remained unchanged since the times of the Roman Empire. Mendelianism and Galtonism were seen as proven, irrefutable, scientific fact,²⁰ because they had shown that genetic characteristics are inherited unchanged down the generations within a family, or other close knit social group. Race cannot change or be changed, even by the struggle for survival, it must be passed on unchanged as it always has been in the past:

17. L. Businco, 'Salute della famiglia forza della razza', *La Difesa della Razza*, Part II, No. 4 (20 December 1938), pp. 37–39; argued much the same by M. Ricci, 'Eugenica e razzismo', *La Difesa della Razza*, Part II, No. 6 (20 January 1939), pp. 22–23.

18. M. Ricci, 'Le leggi di Mendel', *La Difesa della Razza*, Part II, No. 2 (1938), pp. 16–17; see also L. Franzì, 'Concetti fondamentali sull'ereditarietà', *La Difesa della Razza*, Part II, No. 2 (1938), p. 29; M. Ricci, 'Ereditarietà ed eugenica', *La Difesa della Razza*, Part I, No. 5 (1938), pp. 29–31; M. Ricci, 'Eredità biologiche e razzismo', *La Difesa della Razza*, Part I, No. 5 (1938), p. 19; L. Franzì, *L'eredità nella patologia e nella clinica* (Cappelli, 1942).

19. B. Imbasciati, 'Razze e malattie infettive', *La Difesa della Razza*, Part II, No. 21 (5 September 1939), p. 16.

20. See a series of interventions on the theme: 'Politica demografica e crisi di natalità', *Archivio fascista di medicina politica*, Part II (1928), pp. 283–359.

The *thanatopolitics* of population purification is inherent within the very aims of biopolitics: to manage the health of the 'social body' inescapably requires the control and elimination of 'foreign bodies'.²¹ The National Socialism of the German Third Reich exemplifies this link between the administration of life and the administration of death. However, it was but a radicalisation of current policies being applied by other fascist regimes and liberal governments too. Eliminating foreign bodies requires a nationally organised and politically directed programme to improve the quality of the national stock and eliminate taints or weaknesses that might threaten it. Its tactics range from propaganda and education: from stressing the burden on the race imposed by those with defective constitutions, to preventing those who are members of defective or inferior sub-populations from reproducing through sterilisation or, in the case of Third Reich, by extermination. Once each life has a value that may be calculated, and some lives have less value than others, such a politics has the obligation to exercise this judgement in the name of the race.²²

Biopolitics and Totalitarian Policies: The Case of Italian Fascism

During the Italian fascist era, the political authorities, together with many scientists, took on the task of the management of life in the name of the well being of the population as a vital order and of each of its living subjects. Policy makers started to address the vital processes of human existence. This was supported by techniques, technologies, experts and apparatuses for the administration of every aspect of life in society, from town planning to training the labour-force, from the eugenics of population to the management of colonies. Scientific disciplines such as hygiene, medicine, biology, demography, sociology, all offered a large amount of advice, information and *vademecum*, on how to improve public health and hygiene, or to discover the relationships between the population's general health and economic condition.

Fascism gave scientists new hopes for a radical state commitment to confront social morbidities. They blamed the weakness of the social policies of former liberal governments and called on 'the new Government of the new Italy' to launch a plan to reduce 'the entity of diseases which shrink the energies of our race' and to begin an action of social recovery. Only by facing the problem of social body sufferance and disease, they said, would it be possible to realise the task of the economic recovery and social pacification that the country was demanding.²³

In this new political climate, scholars of social pathologies wanted to go beyond the traditional concepts of hygiene, social security, and assistance. The aim was not only struggling against infective agents, restoring living and working environment, curing injuries inflicted by terrible and insidious internal enemies, which were concealed within urban decay. On top of this, social medicine and

21. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Polity, 1989).

22. Rose, 'The Politics of Life Itself'.

23. E. Levi, 'Alle radici dei mali sociali: il fascismo alla prova', *Difesa Sociale*, Part II, No. 1 (1923), pp. 1–4.

other disciplines should be concerned with 'human capital' with improving 'human selection', education and professional skills.²⁴ According to an anonymous reviewer, 'State, ruling class and representatives of capital and labour have the following responsibilities:

1. to restrain, on the base of scientific researches and a cautious legislative address, the actual indiscriminate production of dysgenic elements who are in charge of the Nation, encouraging the production of good race elements;
2. to teach to the masses of kids who will become the workers of tomorrow, and the workers of today, the importance of defending their physical and psychical energies from illnesses and accidents;
3. to select men better fit to the machine means saving housing cures and hospitalisations, workers' compensations, strikes, vagrancies and crimes, it means to appreciate the irreplaceable human machine, the sole source of social wealth.²⁵

By taking care of, and improving, the biological and psychical efficiency of 'human capital', Fascism could simultaneously resolve a variety of problems: economic, political, managerial and crime. Fascism was fascinated by the seeming efficacy of the policies of social prophylaxis advocated by medical and biosocial scientists, making it the pivot of its strategies for the totalitarian control of the social body. Fascist biopolitics did not seek the individuals' moral regeneration. Rather it sought state control over biological life, by propagating, and enforcing regulatory practices throughout the population.

Many other Western countries promoted not only Fascism, but also eugenics, the new science that, as Francis Galton declared, had to 'study the agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally'.²⁶ Eugenicists believed that, through science society could discover the factors that promoted positive and negative characteristics within the human race, and, with that knowledge, design policies to improve the quality of the population. Eugenicists believed that society was plagued by racial deterioration. They argued that unfit and defective persons—those characterised as mentally inferior, criminal, immoral and sexually deviant—were bringing about the downfall of society and needed to be controlled. They believed, moreover, that qualities such as deviance and degeneracy were genetic in nature. The unfit not only offended society by their own conduct, but also passed these traits down through the generations. Eugenicists held that the unfit were more fertile than proper society, and consequently the nation was running towards 'racial suicide' because of the uncontrolled reproduction of the unfit.

Under Fascism, biosocial skills were applied in order to achieve the following aims: biological improvement of the population and the family, scientific

24. E. Levi, 'Per l'avvenire della razza', *Difesa Sociale*, Part I, No. 1 (1922), p. 7.

25. Anon., 'Problemi di eugenica', *Difesa Sociale*, Part IV, Nos. 5–6 (1925), p. 137.

26. P.R. Reilly, *Surgical Solution: History of Involuntary Sterilization in the United States* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 4.

Biopolitics and Social Control

TABLE 1 Admissions to psychiatric hospitals

	Present on 1 January	Admitted	Discharged	Transferred to other institute	Deaths	Present on 31 December	Total patients
1926	60,306	26,057	15,399	2575	6282	62,127	
1927	62,127	27,467	15,013	4334	5979	64,268	
1928	64,268	27,785	15,585	3703	6473	66,292	
1929	66,390	28,607	16,468	3441	6466	68,671	
1930	68,777	30,424	16,899	4641	5643	72,018	
1931	72,269	29,460	17,065	4047	5837	74,780	
1932	74,780	30,866	17,294	4439	6189	77,724	101,207
1933	77,724	32,481	17,505	5490	6201	81,009	104,715
1934	81,009	31,447	18,786	4359	5917	83,394	108,097
1935	83,541	31,413	19,321	3981	6243	85,409	110,973
1936	86,449	33,680	19,687	4368	6683	89,391	115,761
1937	89,393	34,715	20,707	4628	7093	91,760	119,560
1938	93,019	35,209	20,968	5152	7292	94,816	123,076
1939	94,946	37,813	22,251	7352	7177	95,979	125,407
1940	95,984	37,440	21,675	7690	7636	96,423	125,735
1944	73,222	26,900	16,883	4708	13,517	65,014	95,414
1945	65,014	29,760	20,598	3799	8680	61,697	90,975
1946	61,886	33,262	21,266	5861	4489	63352	93,407

Fonte: *Istat, Annali statistici italiani*.

management of the industrial labour force, implementation of rural/urban policies, control of internal migration and colonial populations. Eugenetic control over biological reproduction within the family was enforced through laws and a sharp increase in the number of people committed to psychiatric hospitals. ‘Degenerate’ individuals were controlled by means of internment and treatment. Table 1 shows admissions to psychiatric hospitals in Italy in the years between 1926 and 1946.

As the table shows, the number of patients admitted and treated rose steadily by 50% over a 15-year period. However, both doctors and psychiatrists were sure that the number of ‘degenerates’ admitted to psychiatric care was far greater than that revealed by the statistics, thus the real numbers of those treated was much higher.²⁷ Control over an individual’s ability to reproduce, an individual without rights and unable to react, had to be both exhaustive and extensive. The Race Laws had removed any qualms, doubts, regarding two main aims: differentiation and purification of the race. The genetically defective and mentally ill, by procreating would grow in numbers and threaten the biology of the collectivity thus causing the superior white Italian race to deteriorate. Because of this they had to be neutralised.

Eugenetic policies sought to improve the quality of the race, demographic policies sought to encourage it to proliferate. The quality and quantity of social phenomena worked together in population policies. Population growth only made sense if the average quality of the individuals was good.

27. L. Cesari, ‘Una questione di bonifica della razza: per i figli dei tarati neuropsichici’, *Razza e civiltà*, Part I, No. 1 (1940), pp. 75–82, cited at p. 79.

Policies designed to increase the birth rate leaned heavily on female stereotypes of mothers and procreators when seeking those best suited to the Fascist aim of improving the race.²⁸ The struggle to control any type of transgressive behaviour on the part of women was both constant and ferocious. One method used by the government to try keep women's growing hostility to the regime under control was to enact policies that sought to defend rural life: women's hostility boiled over quite often during general demonstrations and protests but especially in rural areas, which were the hardest hit by unemployment and the rising cost of living, and which bore the brunt of the situation.

People, population and multitude

The sociological culture underlying fascism distinguished between the concepts of 'people' and of 'population', removing connections and analogies between the two. Thus Fascism discarded the cultural and humanistic interpretation of society, to create a biosociological picture of the 'social'. The concept of people denotes something of intentional, subjective, an entity endowed with a political will and inalienable rights, a 'political unity made up of intelligence and aspirations which obeys a legal system'.²⁹ The population is, instead, an object, a body without a head, an organism ruled by biological and social predictable rules. Population had to be seen as 'one of the factors of production, and its consumption the goal of production itself. Whoever dies before having a productive life leaves no savings, and for the collective it is a deficit as the costs of raising the individual are not repaid.'³⁰

The concept of population denoted the multitude, a sociological and biological organic mass, a whole group of individuals with no particular qualification or specific feature, whose priority is renewability and function as an economic resource. It functionally bounded demographical phenomena and economic development: when a population decreased, governments had to face declining consumption and employment. This new notion of population, of this bodily (corporate), biological and unintentional entity, shifted the focus of the foundations of the social order from the contract between individuals to surveillance of the regularity of evolution of mass social phenomena. Controlling the physical, psychological and moral qualities of the social body, whose normal development was inferred on the basis of statistical estimates and global measurements, meant reinforcing the homeostatic equilibrium of society.

28. E.L. Krause, 'Forward vs. Reverse Gear: Politics of Proliferation and Resistance in the Italian Fascist State', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1994), pp. 261–288. P. Corner, 'Women in Fascist Italy. Changing Family Roles in the Transition from an Agricultural to an Industrial Society', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1993), pp. 51–68.

29. G. Bortolotto, *Governanti e governati del nostro tempo. Sociologia e politica fascista* (Hoepli, 1933), p. 43.

30. M. Vergottini, 'I fenomeni demografici come base di quelli economici', *Bollettino dell'Istituto Statistico-Economico*, Vol. 6, Nos. 10–12 (1930), pp. 171–173.

Combining atavism and utilitarianism, demography, the science of demos, could therefore acquire some crucial sociological features, evolving as a ‘science of the social order of biological facts about the population, understanding the social order as those links made by the forces which are found with individuals, utilitarian spirits as well as conservative forces’.³¹

Anticipating many current functional and systemic theories, several social and biological scientists in the Fascist era planned to reunite the social and productive forces, the mass of the people ruled, into a new order, ‘developing a biological process in which all elements, even though unconnected, individualised and identified, had to cooperate if there were to be a balance when forming the whole—a whole which one must simultaneously manifest, incorporate and go beyond the characteristics of single elements’.³²

Recently, the concept of ‘multitude’ has taken on new meanings. Biopolitics produces the multitude. In the past, nation-states were so successful as a form of political domination simply because they made people believe, by means of a variety of ideologies, that they too had a stake in the state, that they were ‘the People’, the central actors who, by sheer force of will, animated the machinery of ‘democratic’ government, but in the brave new world of Empire, there is no longer a nation-state that can hoodwink ‘the People’ into believing they are still in control. Political and cultural identities become pluralised. The multitude is now seen as the plurality of the productive and creative subjects of globalisation. According to Negri and Hardt these subjectivities are in perpetual motion and they form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual global reconfiguration on the system. This perpetual motion can be geographical, but it can refer also to modulations of form and processes of mixture and hybridisation. The relationship between ‘system’ and ‘anti-systemic movements’ cannot be homogenised, compressed, into any logic of correspondence in this perpetually evolving, modulating ‘atopia’. Even the a-systemic elements produced by the new multitude are in fact global forces that cannot have a commensurate relationship, even an inverted one, with the system. Every insurrectional event that erupts within the order of the imperial system is a shock to the system in its entirety.

According to these scholars, new figureheads of struggle and new subjectivities are produced through the concatenation of events, in this universal nomadism, in the general mixing and miscegenation of individuals and populations, and in the technological metamorphoses of the imperial biopolitical machine. These new figures and subjectivities are produced because, although the struggles are indeed antisystemic, they are not posited as merely being against the imperial order, they are not only, or merely, just negative forces. They also express, nourish, and develop their own constituent projects; working towards the liberation of living labour, creating constellations of powerful singularities. This constituent aspect of

31. F. Coletti, “Il carattere sociologico della demografia”, paper presented on 7 May 1928 at the University of Trieste, *Bollettino dell’Istituto Statistico-Economico*, Vol. 4, Nos. 5–6 (1928), p. 156.

32. G. Bortolotto, *Lo stato e la dottrina corporativa* (Cappelli, 1931), p. 383.

the movement of the multitude, in its innumerable faces, offers a positive terrain for the historical construction of Empire. The de-territorialising power of the multitude is the productive force that sustains Empire and, at the same time, the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction.³³

This new category of multitude seems very artificial and with few connections with the social realm of subjects. It seems rather close to the 'crowd' concept formulated by social psychologists in the period between the two world wars. However, it is very difficult to find, identify, some subjective meanings within the multitude, also because, if it is manipulated by biopolitical mechanisms, it becomes an object, a biological body without a head. This concept of multitude does not endow the multitude either with consciousness of itself, or with a will. The category 'multitude', a product of biopolitics, is now also the new condition of the 'naked life' of people; it is the product, the result, of the great strength of capitalism today, which tries to manage not only minds but bodies too. Biopolitics does not, in our view, favour social struggles and antagonist behaviours, but rather encourages complex people's control at both the individual and the collective levels, reaching into the furthest corners of society. The use of the category of multitude seems a way to entry into postmodernity, offering a contradictory hybridisation of certain Marxism, with its belief in the idea of progress, and certain postmodernism, which mixes up the ideas of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity',³⁴ as well as those of 'voluntarism' and 'necessarism'.

Biopolitics as risk politics

During the second half of the 20th century, biopolitics sought to minimise social risks: risks to health (environmental pollution, accidents, etc.), risks to personal safety (crime and anti-social behaviour) and threats to racial homogeneity and to shared morality and norms posed by poor and undeserving people. The demand for collective measures for biopolitical risk management, far from decreasing, is proliferating and globalising. Strategies aimed at reducing the likelihood of untoward events within a population are spreading and beginning to control many other kinds of unwanted events.

A wide range of strategies is now operating as a type of risk thinking. These strategies try to identify factors that make it possible to identify high-risk groups, thus allowing the authorities to intervene on the real or potential members of such groups either through prevention or appeasement. Risk profiling acts 'actuarially' or 'insurantiably' upon the population at large and uses probabilistic and epidemiological knowledge to identify factors associated with higher risks of

33. M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 60–61. See also A. De Giorgi, *Il governo dell' eccedenza* (Ombre Corte, 2002).

34. T. Fotopoulos and A. Gezerlis, 'Hardt and Negri's Empire: A New Communist Manifesto or a Reformist Welcome to Neoliberal Globalization?', *Democracy and Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2002), pp. 319–330.

particular forms of ill health, reproductive problems or other forms of pathology.³⁵ Biopolitics, by mean of different techniques, calculates the risk profiles through which individuals are allocated to risk groups, their generalisability to others given national and cultural variations, and then it applies probabilistic reasoning to determine the treatment of individuals. Once an individual is considered to be within a risk group, then he/she may be treated as if they were, now or in the future, certain to be affected in the most extreme way.

Perhaps the most important of these biopolitical strategies is that of penal repression, criminalisation, of the poor and of deviants. Loic Wacquant called such preventative policy, e.g. one like that used in the United States, as the passage from the social state to the penal state, a strategy of the 'criminalisation of poverty, which functions to capital to hire and fire at will, to keep pay low'.³⁶ The innovative concept within this radical rationale for control is that of risk. The new penal strategies are designed to implement preventative repression of all 'populations' that are considered to be a risk. This does not mean merely neutralising those individuals who are considered to be potential dangerous criminals, i.e. neutralising individual risk factors, rather it means managing, controlling, whole populations at the mass level, on the basis of an 'actuarial' type rationale. The prison population is 'recruited' on the basis of an 'invented' class of subjects at risk composed of individuals who are considered carriers of the risk factor, hence, who are dangerous for the social order. The target of control strategies is not so much the individual actions of subjects, rather it is the actions of whole social groups that are considered, on the basis of mathematically calculated risk probabilities, to be a risk, representing a danger, for the social order.³⁷ Simply belonging to one of these 'high risk' categories is enough to justify neutralising, repressing individuals, on the grounds that as it is 'very probable' that they will carry out deviant acts it is better to act preventatively and put any such individuals into a situation where it will be impossible for them to act in the first place. Used like this, strategies for prevention take on a whole new 'aberrant' meaning and the level of discretion that the organs of control are allowed to exercise increases beyond all acceptable levels.

Today's biopolitical approach to risk groups offers many analogies to the racial strategies, policies, adopted in the interwar period. As the anthropologist Franz Boas argued: if the belief that all the individuals of a certain group have an undesirable character should prevail, they would at once be segregated and none of these individuals could escape from his class no matter what his personal characteristic might be. People stigmatised who may at once be recognised by their bodily build or cultural traits are automatically placed in their class and not one of them can escape from their biological and cultural fate.³⁸ According to

35. Rose, 'The Politics of Life Itself'.

36. Wacquant Loïc, 'Deadly Symbiosis. When Ghetto and Prisons Meet and Mesh', in David Garland (Ed.), *Mass Imprisonment Social Causes and Consequences* (Sage, 2001).

37. A. De Giorgi, *Il governo dell'eccedenza* (Ombre Corte, 2002).

38. F. Boas, 'Race and Progress', *Science*, Vol. 74 (1931), pp. 1–8; now in *Race, Language and Culture* (The Free Press, 1968), pp. 3–17.

Tzvetan Todorov, racism presupposes that there is a strong link between biological aspects and moral aspects, that is, he argues that physical, somatic, biological and genetic differences will determine cultural differences. This theory implies that both the 'mental' and the 'cultural' can be inherited and that they cannot be modified, altered, through education.³⁹ Basically this means that high-risk groups are 'marked' by somatic, genetic and cultural traits that biopolitical strategies for control tend to confirm and establish once and for all. This deterministic principle also works the other way to ensure that individual behaviour will be consonant with that expected of the racial-cultural group to which he/she belongs. When looked at from the perspective of the biopolitics of risk, the individual loses all autonomy and moral freedom of choice, because his/her feelings, actions and attitudes can all be predicted simply on the basis of the accepted stereotype for the group he/she falls into.

This means that the biopolitical identification of the risk groups has infinite possibilities today. The concept of 'population' is still crucial for the mechanisms of biopolitical control. As in the past, the perceived risk among populations 'at risk' concerns the risk posed by the reproduction of specific groups or sub-populations. Within these groups, the individual who is considered to be a biological or genetic risk is identified on the basis of the characteristics attributed to the group to which he/she is believed to be part. As we will see below, biopolitics still focuses on defining standards of morality and biological suitability in order to assess both individuals and groups to determine whether they are 'consonant with' the dominant social order.

The underclass, IQ and social policies

Labels such as 'unfit', 'defective', 'feebleminded', 'degenerate', continued to be used by biopolitical scientific knowledge and discourse until the end of the Second World War, when their claims were rejected by systematic research and new ideas emerged by the general revulsion against Nazi race ideology and policy, even though sterilisation of poor people did continue in some US states and European countries until the 1970s. Indeed, several class-biased intelligence tests have survived until today, and semblances of old racist thought are returning in the attempt, by some psychologists and other researchers, to find genetic evidence attesting to inherited differences in intelligence between black and white individuals. The development of sociobiology, and subsequently of basic and applied genetic research, has resulted in a variety of claims being made about the genetic causes of poverty-related behaviour patterns. In the USA, the publication of several books, which correlate poverty, crime and a variety of poverty-related behaviour patterns with intelligence, heredity, and even genes, and then treat these correlations as causes, show how biopolitical strategies are able to invent new hereditary or genetic attributes for the lowest classes of the population.⁴⁰

The 'underclass' category serves to identify those subjects who should either be in the charge of or discharged from biopolitics. According to some scholars,

39. T. Todorov, *Nous et les autres* (Éditions du Seuil, 1989), pp. 109–110.

40. Herbert J. Gans, *The War Against the Poor* (Basic Books, 1995).

the 'underclass' consists of four populations: 'high school dropouts', 'prime-age males not regularly attached to the labour force', 'welfare recipients' and 'female heads of households'. Scholars argue that these populations manifest 'underclass' or 'dysfunctional behaviour' that they believe to be 'at variance with those of mainstream populations'.⁴¹ They define patterns for evaluation of morals, because they define the underclass as 'people whose behaviour departs from (mainstream) norms'. In doing so, they say nothing about causality, taking for granted that all behaviour is the result of violating these norms. Furthermore, by not giving any social explanation of the immoral behaviour of underclass, they implicitly suggest biological (feeble minded people) or environmental (slum dwelling) reasons influencing antisocial attitudes. Thus biopolitics serves mainly as a way of denying underclass people welfare security because they are 'undeserved' to be entitled to social rights such as social security benefits.

The notion of 'underclass' has also been extended and it has been converted into 'bio-underclass'. This term refers to black children who are considered incapable of contributing anything positive to society. Many people in the USA believe not only that black mothers are likely to corrupt their children, but that black children are predisposed to corruption. This trend is epitomised by the panic over 'crack babies', i.e. black infants irreparably damaged by their mothers' use of crack during pregnancy. It was erroneously reported that these children sustained neurological injuries that warped their emotional development, making them unresponsive as babies and uncontrollable as toddlers. Lacking an innate social conscience, crack babies are destined to grow up to be criminals. Beliefs about hopelessly defective crack babies represent a new kind of biodeterminism. These negative predictions easily become self-fulfilling prophecies when, for instance, teachers expect the children to be unable to learn, or legislators believe it is pointless to waste money on programmes for children who cannot possibly achieve. Biopolitical strategies act here as in the case of the Bell Curve discussed below: since these children are unalterably defective, any attempt to improve their lives through social spending will be futile. The new biodeterminism presents drugs, poverty and race as interchangeable marks that inevitably consign black people, poor people or unlucky others, to a worthless future.⁴²

The debate about the Bell Curve is very instructive for an understanding of how biopolitics works. This well-known study, carried out by Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray was subtitled 'Intelligence and class structure in American life'. In it, the authors claim that race and class differences are largely caused by genetic factors and are therefore essentially immutable. This anachronistic social Darwinism asserts that intelligence can be expressed as a single number and people can be ranked on the basis of genetic, effectively immutable factors. If the IQ quotient is really immutable, consequently so too is the social structure of opportunities, thus all public

41. E.R. Ricketts and I.V. Sawhill, 'Defining and Measuring the Underclass', *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, Vol. 7, No 2 (1988), pp. 316–322; cited in Gans, *The War Against the Poor*, p. 62.

42. D. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body* (Vintage Books, 1997), pp. 19–20.

programmes that aim to improve education among less fortunate people are useless and too expensive for taxpayers given the fact that they can change nothing. The biopolitical concepts advanced by the Bell Curve' authors are not only centred on race and the political consequences of ethnicity, but are also able to support a theory of the cognitive elite. However, class, race and gender differences are the result of structural economic and social factors such as income, education, power and race, rather than of IQ. Therefore, the idea that the sphere of intelligence will eventually dominate all others, creating a new social hierarchy ruled by an 'elite of intelligence', a new distribution of power based on IQ, only serves to exacerbate the differences between social groups.⁴³ The theory of cognitive elite makes the discussion of genetics and racial differences plausible, offering new labels for biopolitics to apply to undeserving and unworthy people—just because their IQ is low—but what is most striking is that the Bell Curve' theory predicts the emergence of an 'elite of intelligence', one that can exercise power upon people, masses and crowds.

Biopolitical strategies are closely connected to the way in which welfare social policies have been implemented since the Second World War. Here we are using a broad definition of welfare that ranges from archetypical social security, through education, health, to agencies operating within the criminal justice system. The focus here is on the ways in which the 'body' is an object for welfare social policies. Social policy has tended to treat 'the body' as a solid, pre-social and fixed surface. What is crucial here is to maintain the social order by means of the regulation of the masses of the bodies. The body is often seen as a metaphor of societal risks, pure and impure classifications and a symbol of ordered/disordered society.⁴⁴ Societies as functional systems have to face the central problem of what to do about bodies, because body is the most potent symbol of social order and, in turn, 'disease is the most salient metaphor of structural crisis'.⁴⁵ However, there is an extensive interpretation of this approach, which stems from the idea that the body is a site of power and control constituted through discourses and practices. The institutions and knowledges that should govern and regulate populations promote social policies, which have to be consonant with the relative abilities, constraints and needs that different bodies are assumed to produce. Here, the focus is on the intersection of biology and culture and on the performance of each collective body, which is influenced by genetic and biological factors. In short, particular behaviours are associated with particular types of people: people may be considered as having a potential genetic predisposition to certain kinds of behaviour (the 'criminal' gene idea is an example), and social policies are required to take this into account.

43. Alan Wolfe, 'Has There Been a Cognitive Revolution in America?', in Steven Fraser (Ed.), *The Bell Curve Wars* (Basic Books, 1995), pp. 109–123.

44. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Penguin Books, 1970).

45. G. Lewis, G. Hughes and E. Saraga, 'The Body of Social Policy: Social Policy and the Body', in L. McKie and N. Watson (Eds), *Organizing Bodies* (MacMillan Press, 2000), pp. 3–25.

New genetic and new reproductive technologies

After the end of the Second World War, a large number of heredity clinics were set up in many countries, they mainly aimed to prevent birth defects and to help couples make 'eugenic' rather than 'dysgenic' decisions. During the final decades of the 20th century, antenatal screening, for example, began to be widely used, coupled with the option of termination, for pregnant women whose age or family history placed them in high-risk groups. These strategies meant that parents were not only entitled but also forced to decide whether they wanted to allow the child to be born if, from the point of view of genetic perspective, it is 'flawed' in this or that respect. Children were thus no longer simply conceived and born, but could be assessed on the basis of their qualities before birth, and perhaps eliminated.

Recent progress in genetic research is undoubtedly putting the 'essence' of humans, their very humanity, within the scope of social purposes and structural principles. As Hans Jonas says, 'It would be a metaphysical break with the normative essence of humankind, and, considering the complete unpredictability of the consequences, the most foolhardy game of change—a blind and presumptuous demiurge hacking about the heart of creation'.⁴⁶

Arguments in favour of genetic engineering go as follows: first, genetic engineering will solve the central problems of humankind (famine, destruction of the environment, scarcity of resources, inherited diseases, AIDS); second, these are traditional methods, no different in principle from those of cheese manufacture; third, nothing can go wrong anyway because we all have the very best intentions and all talk of monsters or eugenics is ludicrous and only stirs up the irrational fears of the populace. For at least three decades, professionals involved in this work have explicitly rejected the view that they are (or should be) seeking to limit the reproductive capacities of those at risk of passing an inherited condition or disability to their offspring, let alone the suggestion that they are (or should be) concerned with the contribution of individual biological characteristics to future population quality, or even with the future cost to the nation of caring for children with disabilities.

Nonetheless, the spectre of eugenics casts a shadow over the new genetics. The eugenic misuses and abuses of the 20th century have already been documented and recounted by historians. Although the new genetics is more scientific/medical, involves committed individual choices and has not led to blatantly discriminatory state policies, the dark cloud of eugenics hangs over, and is reflected in anxieties about genetics. Some focus on the social implications of screening for inherited genetic disorders, especially those that are thought to be distributed differently among races and ethnicities. Although there has yet been no return to eugenics in its earlier malevolent and racial form, we may already have reached the 'backdoor to eugenics' in the form of health through screening, treatment and therapies. While most genetics professionals distance themselves from the abuses and 'bad science' of the old eugenics, several sociologists have expressed concern about the potential eugenic results of prenatal screening for

46. H. Jonas, *Technik, Medizin und Ethik. Zur Praxis des Prinzips Verantwortung* (Insel, 1985).

devalued traits (e.g. disabilities) or for the improvement of humans through genetic manipulation of embryos.⁴⁷

The decisive potential of reproductive medicine and human genetics for social theory consists of replacing social 'solutions' with genetic techniques. If this becomes possible, the field of operations of genetic tests quietly promises to provide value for money, encompassing preventive 'solutions' to social problems and conflicts that cannot be cured, but only 'massaged' locally, by established political means. The dream of being able to 'plan' and 'realise' a life 'without problems' is nourished by technological possibilities. It means genetic policies instead of social, educational, family and environmental policies, a real *deus ex machina*.⁴⁸ New genetics has opened up a new area of social policy, which will make possible to change the constitution of life through genetic technologies that are not subject to law or to problems of enactment, interpretation and implementation as often happens, as should happen in democratic societies. In short, this biopolitical strategy has the power to pursue the goal of human perfectibility, perfection, a dream that has been around since the 19th century.

The new reproductive technologies may also reflect an already established racial caste system. High-tech means of procreation may magnify racial inequalities by enhancing the power of privileged whites and contributing to the devaluation of black Americans as well as of other races. The racial disparity in the use of new reproductive technologies might well alter the demographic composition of several countries if the potential of the new genetics meets expectations. The ability to select or improve the genetic features of one's offspring carries material as well as symbolic advantages. Modern genetic technologies allow parents, those who can meet the costs involved, to ensure the health and physical abilities of their children. Without government subsidies, this could produce a society where only the poor bear children with genetic disorders.⁴⁹ Concentrating the power of genetic enhancement in the hands of already privileged class would exacerbate differences in the status and welfare of social groups.

Measuring the illegal bodies

Biopolitical strategies have generated new technologies that are useful for measuring and identifying individuals, such as biometrics. Far from being a new field of application within biopolitics, biometrics has been developing its technical capabilities and range by using diverse information processing systems. So what is this new biometrics? Judging from the uses to which biometrics are being put today, and the forces which lie behind its rapid development and implementation, biometrics now seems to be about maintaining social order by regulating access and exclusion from socio-economic goods, geographic spaces and liberties. The groups targeted for obligatory biometric identification include disproportionate numbers of

47. P. Conrad and J. Gabe, *Sociological Perspectives on the New Genetics* (Blackwell, 1999).

48. U. Beck, *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* (Polity Press, 2002), p. 25 (1st edn, 1988).

49. D. Roberts, *Killing the Black Body* (Vintage Books, 1997).

criminals, recipients of welfare, workers, asylum seekers and immigrants.⁵⁰ A European Union biometrics project, called 'Eurodac', has been designed to increase control over illegal immigration and the flow of refugees and asylum seekers into the EU. Whether it be the iris, the retina, the fingertip, the voice, face or hand, digital representations that will be stored and read by machines, the citizen's body becomes implicated in the distribution of benefits, services and rights, in a word—the social status of the individual.

Since the end of 19th century biometrics has been used to measure differences between people. The differences between individuals—physical and moral, of the body and of the spirit, how they are and how they act—have always been central to life in society and to the distribution of social roles, thus they have had to be interpreted accurately. The congenital and natural, physical and psychological qualities that each individual exercises, both on and within the social structure of inequality, determine the quality itself.⁵¹ To possess the list and measurements of the constant factors in society, which are found in life, means possessing the secret of prediction, of being able to see into the future. The birth of the Social Sciences made it more and more necessary to be able to assess and classify the different tools that were, increasingly, required to control social phenomena. Anthropology and experimental psychology have reduced the human personality to measurements, numbers and diagrams. Physical and psychological characteristics, the ability to live, the colour of eyes, the way in which one gets tired, how one moves, one's voice and handwriting, the sense of touch have all been subjected to closer and closer scrutiny and to more and more precise measurement.

The study of individual somatic, anatomical, physiological, pathological and psychic characteristics requires specific, specialised methodologies. *Biometry* and *biometrics* were developed to meet this need. *Biometry* used to mean a set of research techniques and interpretative models that can be applied to a wide variety of research areas that deal with quantitative phenomena of life: medical, botanic, genetic, etc. *Biometrics* was considered a fairly circumscribed discipline that was dedicated to the statistical study of questions of heredity—the genetic transmission of characteristics, of the transformation of the species through both individual and collective evolution.⁵²

Eugenics, in all its forms, seeks to discover the laws that govern the way in which inequality is distributed. The idea is that these laws can be discerned through analysis of where each individual is placed along a binomial curve called the 'Gaussian error curve'—an advanced statistical biometric measure developed by Quételet. Very few individuals fall at either extreme of the curve, i.e. stand out for their exceptionally superior or inferior characteristics. The rest, the crowd, are clustered in the middle, about equally distant from both extremes. Niceforo expressed this sociological law in

50. Irma van der Ploeg, 'The Illegal Body: 'Eurodac' and the Politics of Biometric Identification', *Ethics and Information Technology*, Vol. 1 (1999), pp. 295–302.

51. A. Niceforo, 'Frammenti di una introduzione allo studio della sociologia. I fatti costanti della vita sociale', *Rivista di psicologia*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (1935), p. 93. See also A. Niceforo, *Lezioni di Demografia* (Rondinella, 1924), pp. 245–308.

52. Cf. M. Boldrini, *Biometrica. Problemi della vita delle specie e degli individui* (Cedam, 1927), pp. 8–9.

the following terms: 'Physical and psychological differences between human beings, a minority of whom have the qualities required, are finely tuned; not everyone can win, it can be either a disaster or a triumph if the few win'.⁵³ From the constant of inequality the constants that form 'the strong threads of History and human affairs' can be drawn. In Niceforo's view, the law according to which 'the permanence of the inferior and the permanence of evil is an inevitable requirement of the natural law of biophysical differentiation between humans' is based on this presupposition. It is a rule that is conveyed from individuals both to society and to race, which, as has already been discussed, are rightly perceived as an 'interweaving', a fabric, of individuals. Once the principle of social differentiation has been accepted it is easy to hypothesise 'aggregation' among like individuals and 'segregation' of those who are unlike'.⁵⁴ Biometric measurements are then asked to define, to identify, what can be integrated and what must be segregated, a function they still fulfil, today, when the bodies of migrants and foreigners are measured biometrically and, subsequently, evaluated in terms of individuals with rights or without rights.

Conclusions

These notes highlight one of the routes through which biopolitics and State racism evolved under Fascism. The racist aspects of fascism's version of biopolitics were unique to fascist systems and did not appear in the other biopolitics of the period simply because they represented the 'totalitarian' response to the political and knowledge needs that afflicted both fascist and liberal states at that time. Fascism's biopolitics was the end result of the combined actions of two groups of social actors: on the one hand, the scientists and the educators in every discipline who laboured—seemingly convinced—to introduce social prophylaxis practises, and on the other, the policy makers, i.e. the State, who, responding to the activities and practises already underway in both cultural and economic spheres, drew up and launched 'social' planning policies. Scientific theories function in a Paretian manner as agents of the social order as they offer arguments, in both biological and racial terms, in favour of hegemony within the public space of the era. This leads to a unique, unrepeatable, convergence between State policy, Social Science and political ideology, a convergence that makes it possible to formulate a whole system of strategic knowledge about society. In liberal societies, strategic thinking combines control over the market with economic redistribution; in totalitarian societies, it integrates science with state power in order to create a 'total' system of biopsychosocial control. As Walter Lippmann so accurately observed when talking about social planning policies: 'In science there was knowledge, in government there was power. By bringing these two together it became possible to create an indispensable "Providence", as it was made possible to discover, to predict the future of human society, and to dominate it'.⁵⁵

53. A. Niceforo, 'Attrazione, repulsione e circolazione nella vita sociale. Psicologia e sociologia (Continuazione e fine)', *Rivista di Psicologia*, Vol. 31, No. 5 (1935), p. 225.

54. A. Niceforo, 'Attrazione, repulsione e circolazione nella vita sociale. Psicologia e sociologia', *Rivista di Psicologia*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (1935), pp. 190–192.

55. W. Lippmann, *The Good Society* (Boston, Brown & Company, 1936); translated into Italian as: *La giusta società* (Einaudi, 1945), p. 42.

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