

Michel Foucault

Key Concepts

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Biopower

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French philosopher Michel Foucault is perhaps best known as a theorist of power. Foucault analysed several different types of power, including sovereign power, disciplinary power and the subject of the current chapter: biopower. In what follows, I will first provide an overview of biopower as Foucault conceives of it. This overview will distinguish biopower from sovereign and disciplinary power, identify and discuss distinctive characteristics of biopower and provide examples which illustrate these characteristics. The final section of the chapter undertakes an extended example of a particular occurrence of biopower within modern and contemporary Western societies.

Powers of life and death: from sovereign power to biopower

In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1990a) and in his 1975–76 Collège de France course, *Society Must Be Defended* (2003) Foucault describes biopower as a power which takes hold of human life. In both these works Foucault traces the shift from classical, juridico-legal or sovereign power to two typically modern forms of power, discipline and biopower, as a shift from a right of death to a power over life: “in the classical theory of sovereignty, the right of life and death was one of sovereignty’s basic attributes ... The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die” (2003: 240–41). Sovereign power is a power which deduces. It is the right to take away not only life but wealth, services, labour and products. Its only power over life is to

seize that life, to end, impoverish or enslave it; what it does not seize it leaves alone. Sovereign power's right over life is merely the right of subtraction, not of regulation or control. As Foucault writes:

The sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill, or by refraining from killing; he evidenced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring. The right which was formulated as the "power of life and death" was in reality the right to *take* life or *let* live. Its symbol, after all, was the sword. (1990a: 136, emphasis added)

The seventeenth-century theorist of sovereign power Thomas Hobbes illustrates Foucault's points, writing:

For seeing there is no Common-wealth in the world, wherein there be Rules enough set down, for the regulating of all the actions, and words of men, (as being a thing impossible:) it followeth necessarily, that in all kinds of actions, by the laws praetermitted, men have the Liberty, of doing what their own reasons shall suggest, for the most profitable to themselves. (1986: 264)

Hobbes notes in particular that it would be ludicrous for a sovereign to attempt to regulate the corporeal dimensions of a subject's existence, and hence no covenant with the sovereign could be concerned with these aspects of a subject's life. Hobbes argues that so far as "corporall Liberty" is concerned, subjects of any commonwealth are free: "For if wee take Liberty in the proper sense, for corporall Liberty; that is to say, freedome from chains, and prison, it were very absurd for men to clamor as they doe, for the Liberty they so manifestly enjoy" (*ibid.*). The freedom of subjects, for Hobbes, consists of those aspects of life with respect to which there are no covenants with the sovereign. For Hobbes, it would be *absurd* to imagine certain mundane aspects of life, such as liberty over one's body and private life, being the subject of such covenants. Hobbes simply cannot imagine these being of interest to the king or to the commonwealth, or mechanisms of power which might function at this level. He elaborates:

The Liberty of a Subject, lyeth therefore only in those things, which in regulating their actions, the Sovereign hath praetermitted: such as is the Liberty to buy, and sell, and otherwise contract with one another; to choose their own aboad, their own diet, their own trade of life, and institute their children as they themselves

think fit: & the like.” Hobbes adds that “Lawes are of no power ... Without a Sword in the hands of a man, or men, to cause those laws to be put in execution. (*Ibid.*)

And he assumes that concerns such as dwelling, diet and childcare could never warrant the wielding of a sword or the exercise of law. Sovereign power is, then, for Hobbes as for Foucault, a juridico-legal power to kill which leaves the daily life of the body alone, and its symbol is the sword or the threat of death. In those realms where one would not wield a sword or the force of law, one is free or escapes from power. In particular, Hobbes thinks that our bodies are free, or that we have “corporall Liberty” unless the sovereign has us literally in chains.

In contrast to sovereign power which could “*take life or let live*”, biopower is the power “*to foster life or disallow it to the point of death*” (Foucault 1990a: 138, emphasis added). Foucault writes,

Power would no longer be dealing simply with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself: it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body. (*Ibid.*: 142–3)

Hobbes deems corporeal aspects of life such as dwelling (abode), desires (what we want to purchase and consume), the care of the body (diet), and childcare and education to be outside of the interests of the sovereign and hence free. Yet for Foucault these aspects become some of the privileged loci of the mechanisms of biopower, indicating a transformation of power which Hobbes would have deemed “a thing impossible”.¹ Biopower is able to access the body because it functions through norms rather than laws, because it is internalized by subjects rather than exercised from above through acts or threats of violence, and because it is dispersed throughout society rather than located in a single individual or government body. While the sovereign power which Hobbes describes could only seize life or kill, Foucault writes of “a very profound transformation of these mechanisms of power”, in which “deduction” would be replaced by a power “working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them” (*ibid.*: 136).

Two levels of biopower: discipline and regulation

In his 1977–78 Collège de France course, *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault takes the example of a prohibition such as “do not steal” or “do not murder” in order to illustrate the differences between sovereign power, discipline and biopower in a simple way (Foucault 2007). Under sovereign power, which predominated up until the end of the seventeenth century when Hobbes was writing, an individual who transgressed these prohibitions against theft and murder would be subjected to the law and punished solely on the basis of his crime; he might, for instance, be executed, exiled or fined. Under disciplinary power, which emerged in the eighteenth century, the criminal will still be subjected to the law or punished, however it will no longer be a mere matter of his crime. Rather, power will now be at least as interested in the thief’s or murderer’s character. It will want to know the conditions, both material and psychological, under which the individual committed his crime. This information will be deemed important in order to anticipate and intervene in the likelihood that the criminal will reoffend. In order to predict and control the individual’s chance of recidivating, the criminal needs to be subjected to psychological examinations, surveillance and rehabilitative practices unknown under sovereign power. For this reason, the punishment is less likely to put an end to the criminal’s life, and more likely to control his life through tactics such as prison, psychiatric treatment, parole and probation. Finally, under biopower, which emerged later in the eighteenth century, the focus and target of power becomes the numbers of thefts and murders occurring in the population. Power now takes an interest in whether crime rates are rising or falling, in which demographic groups particular crimes are predominant, and how crime rates can be optimally controlled or regulated. While many of the same tactics will be employed under biopower as under disciplinary power, the focus will now be on the population rather than the individual.

If at times Foucault describes discipline and biopower as two distinct (although intersecting and overlapping) forms of power,² at other times he includes discipline within biopower, or describes discipline as one of the two levels at which biopower works. Biopower is a power over *bios* or life, and lives may be managed on both an individual and a group basis. While at one level disciplinary institutions such as schools, workshops, prisons and psychiatric hospitals target individual bodies as they deviate from norms, at another level the state is concerned with knowing and administrating the norms of the population as a whole and thus with understanding and regulating “the problems of

birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration” (Foucault 1990a: 140). Disciplinary power works primarily through institutions, while biopower works primarily through the state, however the state is also involved in many institutions, such as the prison. In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Foucault writes of biopower:

this power over life evolved in two basic forms; these two forms were not antithetical, however; they constituted rather two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations. One of these poles – the first to be formed, it seems – centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body*. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population*. (Ibid.: 139, emphasis added)

Discipline may be seen as biopower as it targets the individual body, therefore, while another level of biopower targets the species-body. Foucault will describe these two levels as “the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed” (*ibid.*). These two levels of power are necessarily intertwined, since bodies make up populations and populations are made up of individual bodies. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault insists that a biopolitics of the population:

does not exclude disciplinary technology, but it does dovetail into it, integrate it, modify it to some extent, and above all, use it by sort of infiltrating it, embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques. This new technique does not simply do away with the disciplinary technique, because it exists at a different level, on a different scale, and because it has a different bearing area, and makes use of very different instruments. (2003: 242)

One way of conceptualizing the point of this passage is to say that discipline is the micro-technology and biopolitics is the macro-technology

Table 3.1 Two levels of biopower

Type	Target	Aim	Institutions	Tactics
Regulatory power (biopolitics)	Populations, species, race	Knowledge/power and control of the population	The state	Studies and practices of demographers, sociologists, economists; interventions in the birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, migration
Disciplinary power (anatomopolitics)	Individuals, bodies	Knowledge/power and subjugation of bodies	Schools, armies, prisons, asylums, hospitals, workshops	Studies and practices of criminologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, educators; apprenticeship, tests, education, training

of the same power over life. Table 3.1 schematizes the distinctions between these two levels of biopower.

Administering life: from the census to sexuality

Biopower administers life rather than threatening to take it away. In order to administer life, it is important for the state to obtain forecasts and statistical estimates concerning such demographic factors as fertility, natality, immigration, dwelling and mortality rates (Foucault 1990a: 25). For this reason, an important moment in the history of biopower is the development of the modern census. While inventories of heads of households, property and men who could serve in the military were taken in ancient Rome, China, Palestine, Babylonia, Persia and Egypt, they were almost unknown throughout the Middle Ages (an exception being the Domesday Book of William the Conqueror), and differed from the modern census in that they did not attempt to gather information about the entirety of the population, but only about specific types of individuals: those who could be taxed, drafted or forced to work. The idea of enumerating the entirety of a population was only introduced in Western countries at the end of the seventeenth century and became increasingly detailed in the centuries that followed. Soon, the census secured data on dates and places of birth, marital status and occupations. Modern states recognized the necessity of understanding the characteristics, structures and trends of their populations in order to manage them or to compensate for what they could not control.

One subject of biopolitical concern is the age of a population, “together with a whole series of related economic and political problems” (Foucault 2003: 243). The state is concerned with demographic forecasts which foresee a “sapp[ing of] the population’s strength, [a] shorten[ing of] the working week, wasted energy, and cost money [...]” (*ibid.*: 244). We often hear of the ageing of the “baby boomer” generation, for example, when unprecedented segments of the population will retire from the work force and require expensive geriatric care. Both a “sapping” of the labour force and of medical resources are predicted as a result and need to be compensated for, while retirement and geriatric care facilities need to be established and staffed in anticipation of this event.

Another area of biopolitical study and intervention is the health and survival of neo-nates, managed, for instance, through government-sponsored breastfeeding advocacy campaigns (see Kukla 2005: chs 2, 5). States may also be concerned with what sorts of babies are born, or which demographic groups they are born into. The French Canadian province of Québec has a profound interest in keeping the French language alive in its territory, for instance, and is thus concerned with increasing its francophone population in particular. Since the census reveals that French Canadians have fewer children than English Canadians, “allophones” and immigrants, the province compensates with pro-natal policies, by promoting immigration from francophone countries (through financial incentives), and by promoting immigration in general (through attractions such as inexpensive day-care) while obliging children of non-francophone families to attend French-language schools.

As Foucault writes in *The History of Sexuality*:

At the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex ... It was essential that the state know what was happening with its citizens’ sex, and the use they made of it ... Between the state and the individual, sex became an issue, and a public issue no less. (1990a: 26)

While non-reproductive sexual acts had long been considered sinful, since the eighteenth century they have come to be seen as a threat to society. At the disciplinary level, individuals engaging in non-reproductive sexual acts and women uninterested in procreative sex have been medically treated for perversion, frigidity and sexual dysfunction. At the biopolitical level, non-reproductive sexual acts and the rejection of reproductive sexuality are issues which need to be managed. It is necessary to know what proportion of the population is engaging in specific

sexual acts, or is using contraceptives, in order to intervene in this behaviour or to compensate for it. While in some segments of society the state is concerned with promoting procreation and thus with providing incentives to parenthood, in other segments of the population the state is concerned with containing and preventing procreation. In particular, certain groups, such as unwed women, the poor, criminals and the mentally or physically ill or disabled have been deemed (and in some instances continue to be deemed) unfit to procreate or to raise children.³

As these cases show, sex is important at both levels of biopower, concerning as it does both the individual's use of his or her body and the growth and health of the population. As Foucault notes, "Sexuality exists at the point where body and population meet. And so it is a matter for discipline, but also a matter for regularization" (2003: 251–2).

Sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species. It was employed as a standard for the disciplines and as a basis for regulations. This is why in the nineteenth century sexuality was sought out in the smallest details of individual existences But one also sees it becoming the theme of political operations, economic interventions (through incitements to or curbs on procreation), and ideological campaigns for raising standards of morality and responsibility: it was put forward as an index of a society's strength, revealing of both its political energy and its biological vigor. Spread out from one pole to the other of this technology of sex was a whole series of different tactics that combined in varying proportions the object of disciplining the body and that of regulating populations. (1990a: 146)

Far from being something which we have recently liberated (or still struggle to liberate) from an archaic and repressive power, Foucault therefore argues that sex is in fact a privileged site and indeed *a product* of the workings of modern forms of power.

Death in the age of biopolitics

In contrast to sex, Foucault argues that death has now receded from view, becoming private and hidden. While sovereign power entailed the right to impose death, the aims of biopower are to foster and manage life, and so death becomes a "scandal". Under sovereign power death was ritualized as the moment of passing from one sovereign authority to the next. Death was the ultimate expression of the sovereign's power

and was made into a public spectacle whenever this power needed to be affirmed. In contrast, under biopower, death is the moment in which we escape power (Foucault 2003: 248). Foucault writes of the “disqualification of death” in the biopolitical age, and observes that the “great public ritualization of death gradually began to disappear” (*ibid.*: 247). For this reason suicide was illegal under sovereign power, perceived as a seizure of the king’s power to take life, whereas today it is a medical problem, a shameful secret and a bewildering threat. As an escape from bio-disciplinary power, suicide is described by Foucault as a subversive act of resistance in works such as “*I, Pierre Rivière ...*” (1982b) and *Herculine Barbin* (1980a).

One manifestation of the shift from the sovereign power to kill to the biopolitical interest in fostering life is that capital punishment came to be contested in the modern period and new forms of punishment were invented to replace it, most notably the prison. While the death penalty was abolished in most Western democracies by the 1970s, its practice had long since become rare. In those places where it is still legal and regularly practised today, such as the United States, it is widely criticized as backward and anachronistic.⁴ In earlier eras, execution for murder or theft was understood as punishment for having broken the sovereign’s law and for undermining his power. Crime was conceived as a personal attack on the sovereign rather than on the individual victims of the crime or on the security of the population as a whole. Punishment was the sovereign’s counter-attack, his reaffirmation of power. In contrast, the current view of punishment is a “paying of one’s debt to society”, while executions, where they are permitted at all, are justified in the name of security. A criminal condemned to death must be perceived as a threat to the population rather than to the ruler’s power. For this reason serial killers are executed in the United States today but the president’s political opponents are not.

Capital punishment aside, there is little direct control over death under biopower. As Foucault notes, we now have the power to keep people alive when they should be dead and to decide when to “let them die”, or to regulate their lives even after, biologically speaking, they should be dead (2003: 248–9). We may thus choose to cease managing an individual’s life by letting her die, or to not foster certain lives to begin with, but this is not the same thing as the sovereign right to kill. While a person might be allowed to die or her life may be disallowed to the point of death, and while the state monitors the morbidity rate, you can be fairly sure that your death will not be claimed by the state, and that your life will be managed but not seized. This is why death is now privatized – it is, according to Foucault, “outside the

power relationship” (*ibid.*: 248). While we claim that sex is silenced and repressed, Foucault compellingly argues throughout *The History of Sexuality* that this is not the case and that we in fact talk about sex more than anything else; on the other hand, death today truly is taboo.

Foucault thinks that the irony of this “disqualification of death” is that wars are bloodier than ever but are justified in the name of life. He writes:

Yet wars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century, and all things being equal, never before did regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations. But this formidable power of death ... now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it ... Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. (1990a: 137)

The Holocaust of the Jews, along with the extermination of gypsies and the “euthanasia” of the mentally ill and persons with developmental disabilities, were justified under the Nazi regime as “racial hygiene”, necessary or beneficial to German flourishing. Nazi propaganda depicted Jews as a plague of rats that posed a threat to German well-being, and presented medical care for the mentally ill and disabled as a drain on German resources better used for those fit to survive. Indeed, despite the “disqualification of death” in the modern era, Foucault argues that there will be more genocides under biopower than under sovereign power, because biopower wants to manage the health of populations. When combined with racism, this management becomes cast as a concern for the racial purity of a people. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault argues that biopower is almost *necessarily* racist, since racism, broadly construed, is an “indispensable precondition” that grants the state the power to kill (2003: 256).⁵ Under such conditions, eradicating sub-groups of that population is perceived as a justifiable form of managing and protecting a people. Foucault writes: “If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill, it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population” (1990a: 137).

We can take the example of the recent US-led invasion of Iraq to illustrate the manner in which the modern biopolitical state justifies

mass killings in the name of life, and both produces and exploits racism in order to do so. The original justifications for the invasion of Iraq involved claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and was affiliated with Al-Qaeda. The Bush and Blair administrations suggested that Iraq would use its weapons of mass destruction to attack the United States and its allies, affiliated as it was with the attacks of 9/11. Anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism abounded in this period in the US and was exploited in the arguments for invading Iraq. In this way Iraq was presented as a racialized threat to American existence or to the Western way of life, and invasion of this country was deemed necessary to protect life in Western democracies. When no weapons of mass destruction and no link to Al-Qaeda were found, the Bush and Blair administrations shifted tactics, emphasizing the slaughters and massacres that Saddam Hussein had committed against his own people, much like the oppression of women and girls in Afghanistan is exploited to justify the military incursions into this country. Over time these wars are recast as charity missions, undertaken not so much to protect lives in the West as to save innocent lives in the East. While critics point out that the alleged desires to save Iraqi lives and to liberate oppressed women are pretences, the important point is that we now *need* pretences such as these in order to justify war. We no longer pursue military invasions for the overt sake of glory, gain or conquest, or to defend the honour of the sovereign. While the ancient Romans could invade a foreign country for the undisguised purposes of occupying a land, enslaving a people and gaining access to resources, today we must mask our massacres as humanitarian efforts even while bringing about the deaths of thousands of civilians, turning millions more into refugees, and immediately securing the oil fields.

Social Darwinism and eugenics

In the nineteenth century, Europeans and North Americans grappled with the effects of increased urbanization, including the steady growth of slums inhabited by an underclass of paupers, prostitutes and thieves, many of whom were sickly and, the middle class thought, lazy and immoral. Rates of crime, disease, mental illness, alcoholism, promiscuity and prostitution were rampant in this segment of the population, which was, moreover, reproducing itself more quickly than the middle classes. The result was a growing fear among the bourgeoisie that the “dregs” of society would eventually overtake them. The middle classes in Western countries began to suspect that their race was degenerating, both because they were not reproducing quickly enough and because

the lower class was reproducing too quickly. These fears were exacerbated in Britain when studies of the records of the height, weight and health of soldiers throughout the nineteenth century suggested “a progressive physical degeneracy of race” (Childs 2001: 1). European exploration of non-Western countries also confronted Europeans with races they deemed inferior, but which, because they must have a common ancestry with Europeans in Adam and Eve, were believed to have degenerated over time, falling from their original nobility (*ibid.*). The possibility of nationwide racial degeneration was thus posed, and anxiety mounted that Europeans could descend to the level of these “inferior races” if procreation patterns were not controlled.

In response to these fears, the science of eugenics was born in the late nineteenth century in Britain with the works of the statistician Francis Galton, and reached its height in the first half of the twentieth century throughout the Western world. Galton drew on his cousin Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection and argued that human societies were preventing natural selection or the “survival of the fittest” by protecting the sick, the poor and the weak through welfare programmes, charity and medicine. He coined the term “eugenics” from the Greek roots *eu* (good or well) and *genēs* (born), and described the science as “the study of all agencies under human control which can improve or impair the racial quality of future generations” (Black 2004: 18). Social Darwinists argued that the “survival of the fittest” human beings would come about naturally if welfare systems were simply withdrawn: although the poor would continue to have more children than the middle classes, this would be compensated for by higher mortality rates resulting from poverty and lack of medical care. As one Social Darwinist, Herbert Spencer, explains:

It seems hard that an unskilfulness ... should entail hunger upon the artisan. It seems hard that a laborer incapacitated by sickness ... should have to bear the resulting privations. It seems hard that widows and orphans should be left to struggle for life or death. Nevertheless, when regarded not separately but in connexion with the interests of universal humanity, these harsh fatalities are seen to be full of beneficence. (Childs 2001: 2–3)

Spencer thus suggests that nature be allowed to run its course, eliminating the weak from society. Individuals such as Spencer rejected the argument that improving the environment of the poor might reduce their rates of mental illness, infection, alcoholism, promiscuity and crime. While those advocating environmental reform suggested improvements

in education and health care for the urban poor, and thus argued for biopolitical interventions of a different order (carried out at the level of *disciplinary* incursions into the lives of disorderly and abnormal members of society), Social Darwinists opposed such methods, arguing that they would only exacerbate the problem by helping to sustain those segments of society better left to die.

While Spencer's approach is to let the poor and the weak die out through non-intervention, other eugenicists advocated more active tactics. These tactics were divided into what were called "negative" and "positive" eugenics. "Negative eugenics", as the philosopher and eugenicist F. C. S. Schiller puts it, "aims at checking the deterioration to which the human stock is exposed, owing to the rapid proliferation of what may be called human weeds" (*ibid.*: 3). This strategy entails preventing individuals and groups deemed "degenerate" from procreating through abortions, forced sterilization, incapacitation (such as locking up the mentally ill), "euthanasia" or, as in the case of Nazi Germany, genocide. Such "negative" tactics, however, can only prevent further deterioration; they cannot improve the species and so strategies of "positive eugenics" were simultaneously promoted. "Positive eugenics" involved encouraging or compelling "human flowers" to produce large families, for instance through economic stimuli. Abortion by "fit" women was illegal in Nazi Germany, and middle-class women who attempted to enter the work force were discouraged on the grounds that jobs outside the home were "race-destroying occupations" (*ibid.*: 7).

Eugenics thus attempts to improve the gene pool; however, what is meant by "improve" is inevitably socioculturally defined and has always been tainted by classism, racism and abilism. Early eugenicists were concerned with increasing the intelligence of the population, for instance, but this concern tended to promote births in the middle class while preventing them among the working classes. Racist eugenicists are opposed to miscegenation. With the Immigration Act of 1924, eugenicists successfully argued against allowing "inferior stock" from southern and eastern Europe into the United States. Laws were written in the late 1800s and early 1900s to prohibit the mentally ill from marrying and to allow them to be sterilized in psychiatric institutions. These laws were upheld by the Supreme Court in 1927 and were only abolished in the mid-twentieth century. As a result, 60,000 mentally ill Americans were sterilized in order to prevent them from passing on their genes. This is particularly problematic since what qualifies as "mental illness" is notoriously unstable and, as Foucault argues in works such as *The History of Madness* (2006b) and *Psychiatric Power* (2006a), has tended to describe social mores and norms rather than genuine medical conditions.⁶

Social Darwinism and eugenics may be described as biopolitical movements since they involve strategies for managing the health and productivity of populations through interventions in natality and mortality rates, mental and physical health, and immigration, even if what is taken to be “healthy” is highly problematic, entailing as it does prejudices ranging from abilism and classism to sexism, nationalism and racism. Following the Second World War, there has been a tendency to repress the fact that other countries besides Germany have histories of eugenics, histories which quietly continued long after the defeat of the Nazis (Childs 2001: 15). Ladelle McWhorter not only traces the extensive history of eugenics in the United States, however, but argues that the contemporary and mostly unquestioned pro-family movement in this country is a mere recasting and extension of the eugenics movement (McWhorter 2009). Eugenic uses of science also arguably continue in the cases of pro-family financial, social and political incentives, designer babies, genetic counselling, preemptive abortions, and the creation of “genius sperm banks”. Many of these examples entail the use of new scientific technology to improve the genes of individual babies and of the population as a whole while preventing babies deemed “unfit” from ever being born. These biopolitical practices thus further entrench the prejudices of an abilist society while continuing the goals of eugenics in manners which have become increasingly unbounded by the state.

Notes

1. For a Foucauldian study of how biopower and discipline control the care of one’s body, see Bartky 1988; for how disciplinary power controls diet, see Bordo (2003) and Heyes (2006); for a Foucauldian study of how biopower controls housing choices and opportunities and the raising and education of children, see Feder (1996, 2007).
2. In the second and third lectures of *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault contrasts disciplinary mechanisms and security measures aimed at the level of population which, at the beginning of the first lecture, he calls “somewhat vaguely, bio-power” (2007: 1).
3. See Kukla (2005: chs 2, 5).
3. For an extended discussion of biopolitical interventions in the birthrate among these demographic groups in the United States, see McWhorter (2009).
4. Bedau, “The Case Against the Death Penalty”: www.skepticfiles.org/aclu/case_aga.htm (accessed August 2010).
5. Foucault writes of “racism against the abnormal” in this lecture, and hence is not limiting himself to racism based on skin colour in making these claims.
6. To take but one example, homosexuality was included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* until 1973.