

INTRODUCTION: EUGENICS OLD AND NEW

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In many parts of the world, especially the wealthier parts, advances in biotechnology are transforming the processes of human reproduction. Prenatal testing and screening procedures, genetic counselling, birth control, and in vitro fertilisation are commonplace in most advanced economies. DNA profiling and databanks, egg donations, frozen egg cells, sperm banks, extra-uterine experimentation, preimplantation genetic diagnosis, gene-modification, genetic therapeutics, stem-cell research, organ-breeding, the ability to harvest large numbers of embryos, germ-line engineering, reprogenetics, 'designer babies', human cloning - these existing and potential manifestations of the extraordinary biotechnological advances made over the last half-century have already made significant inroads upon the expectation of an unmanipulated genetic heritage. The prospect of eradicating debilitating genetic disease is presented by some sections of the biomedical community as a near-future likelihood but, alongside the optimism for transformed healthcare, there are rumbles of alarm both about the efficacy of current regulatory systems for overseeing such biotechnological transformations and also about the possibility of assessing their profound ethical implications.

This special issue of *new formations* explores the ways in which a posthuman future - seemingly so nearly (or already) upon us - is potentially also a eugenic future. The modern notion of eugenics first began to emerge around the 1860s, when the meaning of heredity made a decisive shift to include, along with the familiar forms of succession to status, land, wealth and office, the properties of organic beings. The word eugenics was coined in 1883 when Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, gave precise formulation to the ambitions of a newly professionalised, moralised, and middle-class notion of inheritance and what it means to be 'well born'.¹ Bodily health, mental aptitude, and moral quality are inherited, Galton argued, and therefore managing the random and unruly chances of reproduction was a responsibility that needed to be understood and accepted by all, from the individual to the state. In civilised society, natural selection must be superseded by rational selection if evolutionary progress was to be maintained. If an individual's reproductive inclinations and behaviour ran counter to the collective good, then the state must intervene in order to stay and reverse the forces of human biological and social degeneration.

By the early decades of the twentieth century eugenics was associated with state policies. These ranged from educational measures aimed at fostering a 'eugenic conscience', to forms of taxation and family policy, the segregation of those deemed mentally 'unfit', and all the way through to forced compulsory sterilisation. Eugenics proved an immensely flexible idea, taking different

1. *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development*, London, Macmillan, 1883.

ideological and practical forms in different parts of Europe and the United States. In Britain it originated primarily as a means to curb, control and reform an urbanised working class, the social 'residuum' associated with city slums, squalid living conditions, and a relatively high birth rate; elsewhere, it found other expressions, centring on mental health in Germany, for example, and closely associated with discourses of race in the United States. This adaptability was no doubt in part a consequence of the way in which eugenics attracted support from across the political spectrum. Its legitimacy and its popularity were only definitively challenged in the wake of the Second World War when the eugenic ideal was generally seen to have come to grief amidst revelations of Nazi atrocities.

In his influential 1990 book, *Backdoor to Eugenics*, the US-based sociologist, Troy Duster, argued that the seeming triumph of social over hereditarian theories in the 1950s, which for some seemed to consolidate the shift away from a bad moment in European history, was in fact transitory. The latter part of the twentieth century had instead witnessed a marked shift in favour of the genetic paradigm. The increasing deployment of molecular biology and bioengineering in relation to human groups support arguments that seek to assert definitive genetic correlations between race and class and categories such as mental illness, intelligence and mortality. What is remarkable for Duster is how invidious this process has been: it is a shift which includes a tacit, rarely overt, return to eugenics.² In truth, and as many of the essays in this collection testify, eugenic thinking never really went away. Eugenic enthusiasm was certainly muted following the war but eugenic policies were still pursued, especially in European welfare democracies, where they continued until the 1970s. The importance of eugenics to the story of European welfare collectivism across the mid-twentieth century is explored here, with special attention to Sweden, in the informative contribution by Véronique Mottier and Natalia Gerodetti. Eugenics also retained ideological force in the mid-century in relation to the development of the social sciences. Gillian Swanson draws attention to the under-explored and contradictory figure of C.P. Blacker in relation to the development of social psychiatry and, in particular, the role of the family in the making of individual character. In bringing to light a forgotten network of affiliations between medical professionals, social planners and politicians in the mid-century, Swanson shows how important eugenic thinking remained. In relation to the interwar period, Lucy Bland examines a fascinating interwar investigation about race and 'race-crossing', illuminating how diverse groups of social researchers shared and consolidated ideas about racial types in the name of eugenic improvement.

What is nevertheless clear, however, is that in the later decades of the twentieth century the relationship between individual and state in connection to eugenics shifted definitively in the wake of the rise of genetics and the discovery of the structure of DNA. No longer the provenance of state policy, the 'new eugenics' is characterised above all by individualism and consumer choice. For some, this 'liberal eugenics' rehabilitates a discredited concept

2. Troy Duster, *Backdoor to Eugenics*, New York, Routledge, 1990.

by sweeping away the spectre of coercion and installing instead the idea of individuals who freely choose to use technological innovation in order to improve the life-chances of themselves and their children. As John Dupré remarks in his review of Nicholas Agar's *Liberal Eugenics: in Defence of Human Enhancement*: 'Making better people, despite some obvious problems of interpretation and execution, is not a self-evidently vicious objective' (this volume p150).

As Dupré intimates, however, the issues are complex. In his 1998 *Remaking Eden*, the molecular biologist Lee M. Silver begins with a Prologue which imagines a future American society divided between the 'Naturals' and the 'Gene-Enriched' or 'GenRich'. The use of genetic technology is inevitable, Silver argues, and that fact must be recognised and accepted. What remains are matters of access, and the way in which biotechnologies are already being shaped by the power of the individual consumer.³ In her contribution to this volume, Elizabeth Watkins looks at the growing phenomenon of postmenopausal pregnancy as exemplary of this process. The combination of a privileging of genes over environment, an accompanying pronatalism which predominantly targets women, and a market environment which functions in response to privilege and wealth - the privileging of the genes of the privileged, as Watkins has it - results, she argues, in a new form of *personalised* market eugenics.

Both Alan Petersen and Hilary Rose focus on the extent to which the 'rise of the genioist' society⁴ demonstrates continuities and discontinuities with an older eugenic tradition. While Petersen emphasises the complexities and uncertainties which characterise current genetic developments, and which should warn against any over-quick collapsing together of genetics and eugenics, Rose is worried that modern genetics 'at last creates the possibility of realising Francis Galton's nineteenth-century bio-political project of eugenics - namely distinguishing the innately wellborn from the innately unfit'. Both, however, are keen to note the diverse and sometimes unpredictable ways in which the public, including individuals and user groups, respond to technological developments. In this, Petersen and Rose see a space for a different, and potentially resistant, human agency. The 2003 Genetics White Paper, *Our Inheritance, Our Future - realising the power of genetics in the NHS*, sees the British government looking forward to a new era of genetically-informed healthcare, with 'new ways of predicting and preventing ill health, more targeted and effective use of existing drugs and the development of new gene-based drugs and therapies'. Above all, the White Paper insists, 'genetics holds out the promise of more personalised healthcare with prevention and treatment tailored to a person's individual genetic profile'.⁵

Such developments will necessarily have their counterpart in new forms of organisation, the making of individual and group identities, and the forging of new modes of political intervention. Thus Rose, for example, while profoundly unsettled by the prospect of a 'a new consumer culture without limits' in which children's attributes, from eye colour to IQ, can be chosen,

3. Lee M. Silver, *Remaking Eden: Cloning, Genetic Engineering and the Future of Humankind*, London, Phoenix, 1998.

4. The phrase is Dorothy Porter's, cited by Elizabeth Watkins in this volume.

5. John Reid, Secretary of State for Health, 'Foreword', *Our Inheritance, Our Future: Realising the Potential of Genetics in the NHS*, White Paper presented to Parliament, June 2003, Department of Health & NHS, London, 2003, p9. The Paper, and related materials, can be accessed online from the Department of Health web-page at: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/Genetics/fs/en>

is nevertheless convinced that we are also entering 'new moral territory' where outcomes are not entirely foreseeable. Nowhere is this more strongly exemplified than in the disability movement which has worked to challenge assumptions about the scope and definition of a valuable lived life. For Rose, such 'citizen involvement' gives some cause at least for optimism. Bill Armer's contribution also underscores the centrality of issues of disability in relation to the genetic revolution, but polemically highlights the multiple ways in which the concept of the 'genetically unfit' is being fashioned and an underclass thus being created which is made to bear the mark of 'genetic disablement'. The implications of this process are far-reaching, not least in terms of new forms of predictive technology which may affect an individual's ability to secure medical insurance, employment, pensions or nursing care, thus having profound consequences for his or her life even in the absence of any actually manifested health problem.

Disablement and enhancement have become pivotal terms for biotechnological intervention. Barbara Stafford's contribution focuses on the latter, as she explores the ways in which the human organism is increasingly constructed as a synthetic medium. Information technologies, she argues, are 'transforming us into a culture of self-perfection from the cellular to the gross anatomical level.' We are entering an age of 'self-eugenics', Stafford argues, which is taking the form of information relay, part of a culture of 'infobesity' in which DNA sequences are treated like information. She cites recent law cases in which human genes have begun to be described as if they are patentable matter, like software. Her essay concludes with a discussion of Gunther von Hagens' *Bodyworlds* exhibition, where bodies appear 'hygienically' as if they were computer-assisted images. Bodies in science and art, she argues, are increasingly prone to being seen as enhanceable information, in the manner of imaging technologies.

Chris Ganchoff's examination of the philosophical implications of human embryonic stem cell research also concentrates on the challenge to the category of the human issued by biotechnological innovation. Ganchoff's focus is regenerative medicine, the replacement of cells, tissues and organs created from human and non-human biological precursors, or amalgams of biological and mechanical parts. But Ganchoff repudiates the idea that this presages the loss of the category of the human. Instead he sees the 'triumphalist' narrative of biotechnology as always necessarily prone to the transformative and unpredictable effects of what he calls, following Dipesh Chakrabarty (from the latter's analysis of Marxian historiography), the ever-immanent potentialities of 'History 2' which escape the dominant discourse but which nevertheless exert effects. In relation to liberal eugenics, with its new emphasis on individual decision-making and consumer power, these 'History 2' immanences are what Ganchoff calls 'offshore worlds of entrepreneurial science' which will exert uncertain but transformative effects in their unofficial or semi-official relations with states, legislative domains and scientific institutions at global, national and local levels.

The wider philosophical and ethical issues provoked by biotechnology and genetic research are considered in essays by John Marks and Lenny Moss. Marks' focus is France, the first country to create a national bioethics committee and, in particular, the career of Jacques Testart, the geneticist and biologist who was part of the team which facilitated the birth of France's first test-tube baby. Testart's increasingly critical stance towards a scientific community seemingly complicit with the instrumentalisation and commodification of life is central to Marks' exploration of the competing conceptualisations of humanism which characterise both philosophical and bioethical debate in France. The question of whether humans are born or made, Marks suggests, has been given new and urgent meaning in the 'rapidly emerging genetic era'.

Lenny Moss turns his attention to one of the most influential philosophical interventions on the topic of liberal eugenics and bioethics of recent years, namely Jurgen Habermas' *The Future of Human Nature*. In this book, Habermas examines the ways in which techniques such as preimplantation genetic diagnosis are allowing the hitherto contingent facts of genetic inheritance to be controlled and manipulated. Such developments ultimately challenge our self-understanding as a species, and the need for philosophically-informed regulation of genetic and biotechnological research is, as a consequence, increasingly urgent. Moss' substantial critique of *The Future of Human Nature* argues, however, that it represents a wrong-turn in Habermas' engagement with the Critical Theory tradition. Going back to the roots of the debate about the category of the human amongst eighteenth-century moral and natural philosophers, Moss sets out a powerful case against the temptation to constitute genetics as distinct from a social and interpretative field. If Critical Theory is worth anything, Moss insists, it must be able to maintain clarity in recognising that what it means to be human is a 'normatively structured and normatively constitutive enterprise', and Moss concludes by suggesting how that process might be better conceived.

In an article entitled 'Biotechnology and the Threat of a Posthuman Future', in *Genetics: Science, Ethics and Public Policy: A Reader*, edited by Thomas Shannon, Francis Fukuyama asks: 'why don't we simply accept our destiny as creatures who modify themselves?' Is the biotechnological revolution, in other words, merely one more instance of the imperative to adapt which has shaped all evolution? Fukuyama's answer is that the concept of human nature provides us with too important a source of value to abandon it, and that any such abandonment thus represents too great a rift in the stability of our experience as a species. Technology, in Fukuyama's view, will have to be regulated and the state, once again, made central:

What should we do in response to biotechnology that, in the future will mix great potential benefits with threats that are either physical and obvious or spiritual and subtle? The answer is obvious: We should use the power of the state to regulate it. And if that proves to be beyond the power of

any individual nation-state, biotechnology needs to be regulated on an international basis. We need to start thinking concretely - now - about how to build institutions that can discriminate between good and bad uses of biotechnology and that can effectively enforce those rules both nationally and internationally.⁶

6. Francis Fukuyama, 'Biotechnology and the Threat of a Posthuman Future', in Thomas A. Shannon (ed), *Genetics: Science, Ethics, and Public Policy: A Reader*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, pp3, 5.

Fukuyama may well be right to reject the 'false banner of liberty' which is unfurled over biotechnological research itself, as well as the issue of free-market access to its forms of intervention. Nevertheless, the history of eugenics does not readily inspire confidence in the capacity of the national state to manage the necessary tasks of discrimination and enforcement which Fukuyama sees as crucial. The essays included in this special issue of *new formations* illustrate why this may well prove to be one of the most important issues facing a twenty-first-century world. They also remind us that eugenics is still a deadly serious issue.