

Biopolitics, Sexuality, and Women

*Angela Franks**

ABSTRACT: In this paper I examine the degree to which “biopower” and “biopolitics” can be helpful categories for investigations into the culture of death. After introducing the topics, I apply them to the twentieth-century manipulations of female fertility in the name of demography. I will show that biopower had a preoccupation with female fertility and, therefore, a disproportionate negative impact on women.

1. Introduction to Biopower and Biopolitics

IN 1976 CULTURAL THEORIST MICHEL FOUCAULT argued that a fundamental shift in power happened around the end of the eighteenth century.¹ For most of modernity, power was located in a sovereign, who had control over death and allowed everyone else to live. But by the end of the nineteenth century “biopower” replaced this “sovereign power.” Biopower fostered life and allowed some people to die. Biopower functioned at the level of populations, as with demography, while a

* Angela Franks, Ph.D., is a theologian, speaker, writer, and mother of six. She serves as Professor of Theology at St. John's Seminary in Boston and as a Senior Fellow at the Abigail Adams Institute in Cambridge. She is a Life and Dignity Writing Fellow for *Church Life Journal* (University of Notre Dame). Her areas of specialty include the theology of the body, the New Evangelization, the Trinity, Christology, and the thought of John Paul II and Hans Urs von Balthasar. She is currently focused on bringing key ideas in contemporary Continental philosophy into conversation with the Catholic intellectual tradition.

¹ Translated by Robert Hurley as *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: Translated by Robert Hurley as *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990). Tellingly, the French subtitle was *Will to Knowledge*, which combines the Nietzschean power-physics that Foucault employs with the critique of systems of knowledge. Future references to this volume will be abbreviated HS1..

complementary “anatomy-politics” functioned at the level of the individual.²

Despite its benign façade, Foucault recognized that this new form of power, also called “biopolitics,” was significantly more efficient in dealing out death than sovereign power of old:

Wars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century, and ... never before did the regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations.... Entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed.³

The purpose of promoting the life of some could provide an excuse for the death of many others, as seen in the Nazi and Stalinist regimes.⁴

In this essay I will take Foucault’s idea and utilize it as a means of examining the anti-woman and anti-fertility campaigns of the last hundred

² HS1, pp. 135-40; Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. David Macey, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003), especially the 17 March 1976 lecture, pp. 239-63. Future references will be abbreviated SMBD. Anatomy-politics uses disciplinary power on individual bodies, while biopower is concerned with “man-as-species” (SMBD, p. 242). “Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power’s problem” (p. 245).

³ HS1, pp. 136-37.

⁴ Foucault calls this “racism,” but this term seems to include not only the elevation of one race over others but also the promotion of the betterment of the human race in general: “In the biopower system, in other words, killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race” (SMBD, p. 256; cf. pp. 80-81 and Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* [Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1995]). Foucault considered Nazism to be the quintessential example of biopower (SMBD, pp. 258-60), although he believed one finds biopolitical and racist power and reasoning in socialism as well (pp. 261-63).

years or so.⁵ I want to state from the outset that Foucault's philosophy has fundamental and fatal flaws, and I detail these elsewhere.⁶ A strictly Foucauldian analysis of biopower cannot make good sense of either the "bio-" or the "power" of "biopower." Nevertheless, utilized as an insight into the mechanisms of fallen man's *libido dominandi*, it can shed light on what John Paul II calls "the culture of death." With Foucault's help, we can see more clearly how modern systems of power utilize the sterilization and death of some as a means to the end of promoting the lives of others.⁷

Foucault believed that modern power operated especially through discourses of truth, such as science. He utilized the Greek term episteme to describe the presuppositions and power-relations that structure what is accepted as "truth." "Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced," he argued. "Each society has its own regime of truth."⁸ Foucault "lays bare a modern system of power, which is both more all-penetrating and much more insidious than previous forms," writes philosopher Charles Taylor.

⁵ A similar project on the topics of medicine and death is pursued by Jeffrey P. Bishop, *The Anticipatory Corpse: Medicine, Power, and the Care of the Dying* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2011). Another related question, which I will not pursue here, is a biopolitical analysis of the world's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, a response that has had features similar to those of biopolitical population control; see Caroline C. Hodge, "Density and Danger: Social Distancing as Racialised Population Management," *Medicine Anthropology Theory* 8/1 (2021): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.17157/mat.8.1.5258>.

⁶ See Angela Franks, "Foucault's Powers and Principalities," *First Things*, March 2021, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/03/foucaults-principalities-powers#>.

⁷ In this essay, I am sticking to Foucault, who popularized but did not invent the term *biopolitics*. For the variety of biopolitical analyses in the intellectual marketplace, see Thomas Lemke, *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction*, trans. Eric Frederick Trump (New York: New York Univ. Press, 2011), and *Biopower: Foucault and Beyond*, ed. Vernon W. Cisney and Nicolae Morar (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2016).

⁸ Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," trans. and ed. Colin Gordon, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 109-33 at p. 131.

“Its strength lies partly in the fact that it is not seen as power, but as science, or fulfilment, even ‘liberation.’”⁹

Foucault argued that biopower came about with late-modern liberalism, which he conceives of “not as an economic theory or a political ideology but as a specific art of governing human beings.”¹⁰ This liberalism is “the general framework of biopolitics” because liberalism equated political existence with biological existence and exerted energy to control the latter.¹¹ For Foucault, the paternalistic liberal goal of promoting life was in fact a biopolitical mechanism of control over the life of populations.

Why such concern with the body? I have elsewhere argued that the body functions for us as a “totem,” in roughly Freud’s sense of the word (but without the Oedipal genealogy Freud gives it).¹² For the contemporary developed world, the body identifies, fascinates, distracts, and is ultimately sacrificed, mirroring the functions of the totem within totemic religions.

The body identifies: as the visible pole of the personal body-soul complex, the body is our shortcut to the much more complex problem of personal identity (“Who am I?”). The body also fascinates, in a religious manner, as the cult of wellness replaces any transcendent orientation. In this way, the body distracts us from our seemingly insoluble personal problems (including the vexing question of identity). Finally, the body is sacrificed: when we are fed up with its demands and its inability to do the impossible tasks we have assigned to it, we tend to make it the scapegoat that is now the cause, not the solution, of those problems.

⁹ Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2: *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 152-84 at p. 152

¹⁰ Lemke, *Biopolitics*, p. 45.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2008), p. 22; HS1, p. 141. Foucault means modern biology, which he argues arose in the nineteenth century

¹² Angela Franks, “The Body as Totem in the Asexual Revolution,” *Church Life Journal* (University of Notre Dame McGrath Institute), January 21, 2021, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-body-as-totem-in-the-asexual-revolution/>.

In other words, we both over- and under-value the body. First, we expect the body to provide us with personal identity and a sense of peace. When it does not live up to our unrealistic expectations, we assume the body's current configuration is the problem. Then we deploy the tools of biopower, such as hormones, surgery, and other medical and pharmacological interventions. The ultimate goal is not merely the manipulation of the body but the achievement of the good life (understood materially) at any cost.

Let's take a distressingly common case: a depressed, autistic girl about to go through puberty.¹³ In part because of the oversexualized culture that surrounds her, she is deeply uncomfortable with the bodily changes that are starting to manifest themselves in pre-puberty.¹⁴ She blames her discomfort, not on her depression and inability to integrate her body into her sense of self—in other words, on psychological challenges—but on her body itself. Here the body is fascinating and distracting her away from problems that are difficult to address and toward a “problem” that is material in nature and technological in solution: her sex. In taking puberty blockers and setting herself up eventually for surgery, she will sacrifice her body and allow its new form, made possible by technology, to identify her. This example is a case of the presuppositions and tools of biopower scapegoating and mutilating a healthy body for problems that are not, in their root, bodily.

Biopower in the Foucauldian sense is both the cause and the effect of such totemism of the body. We see this shift beginning long before it bears scientific fruit in the nineteenth century, I would argue. After the brutal post-Reformation wars of religion and for a complex of different socio-economic and ideological reasons, the vertical and transcendent orientation of the world was abandoned in favor of purely horizontal well-being. I call this the “ninety-degree turn” in secularism, which rotates man's

¹³ Autism and depression are common comorbidities for those who present with gender dysphoria.

¹⁴ See Abigail Favale, “The Newest War on Women,” *Church Life Journal* (University of Notre Dame McGrath Institute), April 12, 2019, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/the-newest-war-on-women/>.

transcendent orientation “ninety degrees” toward the purely immanent, which now is freighted with divine attributes. In secularism, a consensus gelled around key human goods: material thriving, attended to with an altruistic eye for the well-being of one’s fellow-man.¹⁵ Aristotle’s distinction between “life and the good life” (zen kai euzen), with the latter involving contemplation and virtuous action, was collapsed. The good life became simply the flourishing of material life.¹⁶

Alexander Pope reconstituted this worldview with instant gravitas by pouring on the heroic couplets: “That Reason, Passion, answer one great aim; / That true Self-love and Social are the same; / That Virtue only makes our bliss below, / And all our knowledge, ourselves to know.”¹⁷ Or, as a newspaper brought this perspective into the twenty-first century, “When the going gets tough, the tough get to restorative yoga.”¹⁸

In this construct, the goal of “life” becomes increasingly superficial, roughly reducible to comfortable well-being and personal attractiveness. We see this smiling out at us from the cover of any magazine dedicated to “health.” Yet our bodies are annoyingly resistant to life, health, and beauty.

¹⁵ “Our natural Propensity to Benevolence,” as deist Francis Hutcheson put it (quoted in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* [New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989], p. 262). On the “industrious revolution” that promoted economic achievement in a confessionally neutral state, see Jan de Vries in *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), and Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph* (Princeton NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977); Brad S. Gregory relies on these and other sources in *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge MA: Belknap/Harvard Univ. Press, 2015), pp. 235-97

¹⁶ See Taylor, “Foucault,” pp. 155-56. For somewhat different reasons than I express here, Bishop agrees, in *The Anticipatory Corpse*, p. 217.

¹⁷ Alexander Pope, “Essay on Man,” IV.395-98, <https://kalliope.org/en/text/pope2018073101>, emphasis in the original; the whole essay is discussed in Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 274-84.

¹⁸ Margery Eagan, “Dreading 2017: A liberal woman looks ahead to Donald Trump’s America,” *Boston Globe*, Dec. 29, 2016, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2016/12/29/dreading-liberal-woman-looks-ahead-donald-trump-america/O5g3S4aOo9Xy7d1A0j81DO/story.html>, accessed 7/5/2020.

Rather than the dreamed-of plasticity before the latest bodily disciplines, our bodies still get sick, fat, old, wrinkled, and, eventually, lifeless. Without buy-in from our bodies, we cannot fulfill the project of perpetual youth and health. Our bodies persist in evading our control.¹⁹

When matter fails us, the only thing left in the modern ontology is matter and power. So we take matter into our own hands and dispose of it. Death, whether through suicide or euthanasia, becomes a cure: when life is a disease, then death is the only treatment.²⁰ Or we can opt for the hoped-for transhumanist solution, which disposes of the body while uploading the consciousness.

All of these presuppose that, as early bioethicist Joseph Fletcher intoned, “Mere biological life is without personal status.”²¹ The reduction of the good life to material life resulted in the loss of both. If we have no transcendent criteria for a good life, nothing can make an ultimate claim on us, including materialistic living, and it too must go. In this way, a culture obsessed with life-as-the-good-life is also a culture of death.

2. *Biopower and the Fertile Body*

Foucault grasped the directionality of biopower toward a culture of death in his insight that biopower wields death as an instrument in the service of life. It is, however, a commonplace in much biopolitical academic literature (influenced by Marxism, no doubt) that capitalist-influenced biopower has always desired both more production and more reproduction. The two seem to go together, because how can there be production without laborers to produce?

Yet, while this is a good and probably true economic conviction, big business since the middle of the twentieth century has seen things

¹⁹ This uncontrollable feature of our bodies makes them a target for technological biopower. On the importance of control for modernity, see Hartmut Rosa, *The Uncontrollability of the World*, trans. James Wagner (New York: Polity Press, 2020).

²⁰ See Bishop’s argument in *The Anticipatory Corpse* that the dead body (rather than the living man, ordered with final and formal causality) is at the heart of modern medicine.

²¹ Joseph Fletcher, “Indicators of Humanhood: A Tentative Profile of Man,” *Hastings Center Report* 2, no. 5 (1972): 1–3 at p. 1.

differently. As I detail in my book on Margaret Sanger and eugenic population control, the leading figures of capitalism were extensively lobbied and persuaded by population controllers that fewer children meant more consumption.²² At least when it comes to demography, business has been on the side of consumption, not production. As early as 1939, Planned Parenthood was making the argument that birth control meant “More Business”: “Today the businessman sees in medically-guided birth control an effective means for preventing human and economic waste, for expanding consumption, and for raising the quality of the American people.”²³ The word “quality” serves here as a dog-whistle to eugenicists, who, to quote a slogan, believed in “Quality, not Quantity”: eugenic quality over population quantity. This equation guided the eugenic population-control movement, which was not two but one movement, as all historians of it agree.

Scholars writing on biopower have not always understood this basic historical reality.²⁴ Indeed, they often seem unaware of how much propagandistic force was put behind the campaigns for zero or even negative population growth. As historian Allan Chase remarked, environmental population control “would become integral to the conventional wisdom of post-Hiroshima generations of educated Americans” and continue to be taught to school children and college students for the rest of the century.²⁵ In addition to big business,

²² Angela Franks, *Margaret Sanger’s Eugenic Legacy: The Control of Female Fertility* (Jefferson NC: McFarland and Co., 2005), pp. 150-78.

²³ Citizen’s Committee for Planned Parenthood, *The Quality of Life* pamphlet (New York NY: Birth Control Federation of America, 1939), pp. 11-12, Margaret Sanger Papers (Sophia Smith College), quoted in Franks, *Margaret Sanger’s Eugenic Legacy*, p. 206.

²⁴ For an exception, see Claire Hanson, “Biopolitics, Biological Racism and Eugenics,” *Foucault in an Age of Terror: Essays on Biopolitics and the Defense of Society*, ed. S. Morton, and S. Bygrave (New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2008), pp. 106-17.

²⁵ Allan Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism* (New York NY: Knopf, 1977), p. 381, quoted in Pierre Desrochers and Christine Hoffbauer, “The Post War Intellectual Roots of the Population Bomb: Fairfield Osborn’s ‘Our Plundered Planet’ and William Vogt’s ‘Road to Survival’ in Retrospect,” *The Electronic Journal of Sustainable Development* 1, no. 3 (2009):

governments and NGOs all threw their expertise, prestige, and money behind often coercive population-control campaigns, in which demographic reduction was (and is) couched as “women’s health.”

All the markers of biopower are here: the creation of regimes of “knowledge” that insisted on the “science” proving the connection between population growth and reduced economic, social, and environmental flourishing; the utilization of technology designed specifically for the control of populations (in particular the IUD, the Pill, and abortion); and the reduction of persons to quantifiable data-points—or, as the US Agency for International Development program termed fertile women, “at-risk reproducers.”²⁶

The eugenic obsession with quality over quantity was also evident and is another symptom of the totemic function of the body in modernity. Eugenic rhetoric argued for the salvation of man and the entire world through genetic progress and population control. Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger was specific: “Child slavery, prostitution, feeble-mindedness, physical deterioration, hunger, oppression, and war will disappear from the earth” when “birth control and voluntary motherhood” released the “feminine spirit” from the drudgery of childbearing.²⁷ The flip side of this, of course, is the scapegoating of the fertile bodies of those who do not comply with eugenic birth control.

The fertile body was a particular source of vexation for eugenic population controllers. The messy and unpredictable nature of human procreation violated their expectations of “rational” reproduction, which would more resemble animal husbandry. Against such untrammelled childbearing, society would have to respond with coerced or forced sterilization. Sanger exclaimed, “Possibly drastic and Spartan methods may

73-97 at p. 75. While climate change has somewhat eclipsed orthodox Malthusianism as the central environmental concern, much climate-change rhetoric echoes Malthusianism in its anti-humanistic language.

²⁶ Jane S. Jaquette and Kathleen A. Staudt, “Women as At-Risk Reproducers: Biology, Science, and Population in US Foreign Policy” in *Women, Biology and Public Policy*, ed. Virginia Sapiro, Sage Yearbooks in Women’s Policy Studies vol. 10 (Beverly Hills CA: Sage Publications, 1985).

²⁷ Margaret Sanger, *Woman and the New Race* (New York NY: Brentano’s, 1920), p. 234.

be forced upon society if it continues complacently to encourage the chance and chaotic breeding that has resulted from our stupidly cruel sentimentalism.”²⁸ It is no accident that Sanger deliberately popularized the word “birth control,” because it captured the need to control the chaotic procreative power and channel it toward “quality, not quantity.”²⁹ As Sanger wrote in 1955, “I see no wider meaning of family planning than control ...”³⁰

Sanger and her allies won the day a hundred years ago, and their victory continued through the population-adverse twentieth century. Biopower’s concern with “life” is an attempt to improve the quality of life for those already alive and sufficiently powerful, even at the cost of the sterilization and death of others. The reductive “life and the good life” of material flourishing for those who have a say has become the criterion for biopolitical interventions.

3. Biopower and Women

For eugenic population controllers, the female body was seen to be especially bound to irrational and uncontrollable forces. Thus, the female body loomed as a uniquely powerful totem. It is idolized, on the one hand. And then it is scapegoated when it does what it is naturally drawn to do, namely, gestate and nurse babies. Fertile men are of more demographic consequence than fertile women, given that men can father any number of children in a set period, whereas women can gestate only a small number, at most, every nine months. Yet population-control activists have fixated on female fertility. For example, almost all population-control sterilization campaigns (such as those in China, Peru, and the Philippines) targeted women, despite the greater challenge of performing female sterilization.

Population controller and biologist Garrett Hardin, the author of the famous “Tragedy of the Commons,” put his finger on the reason in 1970:

²⁸ Margaret Sanger, “The Eugenic Value of Birth Control Propaganda,” *Birth Control Review*, October 1921, p. 5.

²⁹ See Franks, *Margaret Sanger’s Eugenic Legacy*, p. 29.

³⁰ She continued: “and as for restriction, there are definitely some families throughout the world where there is every indication...that restriction should be an order as an ideal for the betterment of the family and the race” (Sanger to Vera Houghton, 5/10/55, Margaret Sanger Papers, Sophia Smith College).

“[I]n every nation women want more children than the community needs.” The answer, he said, even though “the Women’s Liberation Movement may not like it,” requires that “control must be exerted through females,” because “biology makes women responsible.”³¹

Members of University Faculty for Life will not be surprised to hear that Hardin was a cofounder of NARAL Pro-Choice America and an advocate of free access to contraception and abortion. Many of the earliest advocates of abortion (including Larry Lader and Alan Guttmacher) were converted to this position through a concern for eugenic population control, which conflicts with actual “choice.” In “The Tragedy of the Commons,” Hardin advocated the repetition of the word “coercion” to normalize it,³² while the demographer Kingsley Davis bemoaned the family-planning slogan “every woman has the right to have as many children as she wants.” “We would not,” he said, “justify traffic control by saying that ‘every driver has the right to drive as he pleases.’”³³

This pattern of female scapegoating was established five decades before Hardin by Margaret Sanger. In her 1921 book with the eugenic title *Woman and the New Race*, Sanger argues that “natural law makes the female the expression and the conveyor of racial efficiency.”³⁴ As a result, and prior to contraception, women “incurred a debt to society” that “she must pay.” Women had, therefore, a duty to use birth control: “The task is hers. It cannot be avoided by excuses, nor can it be delegated.”³⁵

It is important to see how revolutionary Sanger’s thesis was. By the time she was writing this, there had arisen a vibrant feminist movement that was interested in all manner of social reform to aid women, including (significantly) the prevention of abortion. The assumption by these feminists was that socio-economic problems led to female oppression.

³¹ Garrett Hardin, “Parenthood: Right or Privilege?” *Science* 169, no. 3944 (1970): 427.

³² Garrett Hardin, “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science* 162, no. 3859 (1968): 1243-48. Hardin called for “mutual coercion mutually agreed upon.”

³³ In a 1982 International Planned Parenthood Federation newsletter, quoted in Betsy Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs: The Global Politics of Population Control*, 2nd ed. (Boston MA: South End Press, 1995), p. 71.

³⁴ Sanger, *Woman and the New Race*, p. 229.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Sanger categorically denied this. Such approaches were, she insisted, “superficial palliatives” that “do not touch the source of the social disease.”³⁶ The problem was not outside of women but rather inside her very body. Woman herself—more precisely, her fertile body—was the source of her own oppression.

This assumption entered into the twentieth-century episteme, to use Foucault’s term. How did this new “truth” express itself concretely? It had an obvious impact on feminism and on the new morality of the sexual revolution in general, which I cannot pursue further here.³⁷ Technologically, the most obvious effect of biopower was in the kinds of contraceptives developed and the methods used in developing them. Eugenic population control dictated that the “ideal” contraceptive would be, as Alan F. Guttmacher of Planned Parenthood enumerated, difficult to remove, cheap, independent from coitus, and long-lasting.³⁸ These are priorities dictated by the needs of population control in the developing world and not by women themselves.

Such priorities prompted the development of the first “simple method,” the birth-control pill. By now, the ethical problems with its testing on mental-asylum patients and poor Puerto Rican women are fairly well-known.³⁹ But the Pill’s fatal flaw (from a demographic perspective)—namely, that it requires the woman to take it voluntarily and regularly—propelled the development of the other great “simple method,” the IUD.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Erika Bachiochi traces some of this history in *The Rights of Women: Reclaiming a Lost Vision, Catholic Ideas for a Secular World* (Notre Dame, IN: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 2021)

³⁸ April 1965, from the Rockefeller Archive Collections, Special Collections (Population Council), series IV3B4, subseries 4b, box 95, folder 1772, cited in Franks, *Margaret Sanger’s Eugenic Legacy*, p. 226.

³⁹ See, e.g., the popular accounts in Jonathan Eig’s *The Birth of the Pill: How Four Crusaders Reinvented Sex and Launched a Revolution* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2014), and Drew C. Pendergrass and Michelle Y. Raji, “The Bitter Pill: Harvard and the Dark History of Birth Control,” *The Harvard Crimson*, Sept. 28, 2017, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2017/9/28/the-bitter-pill/>, accessed 6/3/2021.

The funding for the IUD came almost entirely from the Rockefeller-funded Population Council.⁴⁰ The Population Council got off the ground in 1952 because—appropriately—of an encounter in a men’s room. On an upper floor of Rockefeller Center, banker Lewis Strauss told John D. Rockefeller 3rd that he could secure funding from the National Academy of Sciences for a study of eugenic population control. At least six of the ten men on the Council’s demographic and medical advisory boards were eugenicists, which was in accord with earlier Rockefeller funding of eugenics, including Nazi scientists.⁴¹

A study of the archival documents on the development of the IUD shows that the Council was doing damage control from the beginning because of clear signs that the early devices caused increased pelvic inflammatory disease and ectopic pregnancies. The Council worked to massage the data so that it could release the device.⁴² As one doctor said at a Population Council conference on the IUD,

[IUDs] are horrible things, they produce infection, they are outmoded and not worth using...[but] suppose one does develop an intrauterine infection and suppose she does end up with a hysterectomy and bilateral salpingoophorectomy? How serious is that for the particular patient and for the population of the world in general? Not very.... Perhaps the individual patient is expendable in the general scheme of things, particularly if the infection she acquires is sterilizing but not lethal.⁴³

⁴⁰ See Franks, *Margaret Sanger’s Eugenic Legacy*, pp. 155-63.

⁴¹ Franks, *Margaret Sanger’s Eugenic Legacy*, pp. 37-39. Strauss served on the Atomic Energy Commission and was the driver in getting physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer’s security clearance revoked; I am grateful to Kevin Miller for this information.

⁴² Franks, *Margaret Sanger’s Eugenic Legacy*, pp. 223-24.

⁴³ Dr. J. Robert Willson, Population Council’s First International Conference on Intra-Uterine Contraception, New York City, 1962, quoted in Hartmann, *Reproductive Rights and Wrongs*, p. 213.

4. Conclusion

This paper aimed to show how the category of “biopower” and “biopolitics” can be used to analyze the workings of the culture of death, especially as it negatively impacts women. Is this category essential to such an analysis? I would have to say no. A solid, philosophically informed historical analysis would be able to accomplish essentially the same result.

But what “biopolitics” can provide is a deeper understanding of how fallen human power is crystallized in institutions and in scientific mindsets. The eugenicists I quoted today were (with the exception of Sanger) men of medicine and science. This training did not provide them with a neutral lens through which they peered to come to objective conclusions about the truth of human beings, women, and procreation. Rather, their biases formed their science, while their scientific training perpetuated their biases, in a vicious circle. Then they used their credentials to insist upon policies and medical interventions that molded the social imaginary. All of this, combined with Sanger’s anti-natal female scapegoating under a feminist disguise, formed how women viewed their bodies. Biopower as a scholarly lens can help make sense of this.