

doi:10.1017/mdh.2013.77

Marius Turda (ed.), *Crafting Humans: From Genesis to Eugenics and Beyond*, (Goettingen: V&R Unipress, 2013), pp. 1970, £34.57, hardback, ISBN: 978-3847100591.

A conceptually ambitious and thought-provoking book, Marius Turda's edited volume of eight papers on the past, present and prospective future of projects geared towards *Crafting Humans*¹ ranges from theoretical reflections on medieval and early modern philosophy to current debates on transhumanism. As with almost any book like this, some chapters evoke more enthusiasm in the reader while, as a whole, its remarkable thematic and temporal breadth makes it relevant to a broad range of disciplines and subject areas beyond the narrow confines of interwar eugenics. That said, a fuller introduction would have helped guide the reader through the battery of humanisms, modernisms, and scientisms debated throughout this mostly fascinating deconstruction of competing conceptual characterisations and biological classifications of the human body and its condition. Conversely, though, it is to the book's credit that at times clearly contradictory theses on eugenics and transhumanism can happily coexist, even complement each other.

Rather tellingly, given the volume's emphasis on the trans-national, the volume opens with Frank Ankersmit's conceptual reflections on 'Aftermaths and "Foremaths"'. This also forms the longest chapter in the book. Ankersmit calls upon an impressive spread of thinkers from Kant, Hegel, and Spinoza to Clarke's science fiction in support of his central, and certainly provocatively utilitarian, proposition that history as a discipline ought to adopt the gaze of world history as a means of establishing an inclusive and unifying global historic narrative: a view that resituates man in nature from the dawn of time to transcend the current focus on divisive national introspections, a new perspective capable of comprehending the present as the prelude to, rather than an epilogue of, global events with an eye to foretelling future crises such as global climate change.

In contrast, Antonis Liakos's reflections on 'The End of History as the Liminality of the Human Condition', proposes that history is ultimately the study of human liminality as seen, for example, in apocalyptic and utopian interpretations of the end of history as the act of transfiguring man conceptually, a stark contrast to the transhumanist project of refashioning the human into an actual and distinctly post-historical being. This is an important distinction, the difference between changing and creating, and it would have been all the more rewarding had the chapter been expanded somewhat considering it is the shortest in the volume.

Adding a third dimension to those of the modification or generation of human life, Moshe Idel's chapter on 'Crafting a Golem' addresses the issue of creating life itself from scratch, an act of human and technological hubris akin to that of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. It offers an intriguing analysis of how the triadic relationship between three pillars of European culture – religion, philosophy and magic – interacted and shaped the motivations and methodologies of creating the Golem in central European Jewish thought from the middle ages until the nineteenth century.

While the first three chapters hence largely revolve around philosophical constructions of human nature, science, and global citizenship, with Roger Griffin's chapter on the

¹ Being based in part on papers presented to the 2011 conference with the same title, the podcasts from which can be found on the Pulse-Project.org.

'Bio-nomic Man (and Woman)' the discussion gravitates specifically towards modernity's 'nomic crisis' and the plethora of movements and ideologies jostling to reintroduce meaning into the spiritual void left by secularisation, fin-de-siècle pessimism and, ultimately, the trauma of the First World War. Within this bulging menagerie we find all sorts of illustrative projects geared towards crafting the human mind and body alike, from vitalism and nudism to the body reform movement, the widespread obsession with national health and fitness and state-sponsored sport. Shifting the focus onto the interwar period, Griffin deftly discusses the degree to which these projects fed into burgeoning eugenic and fascist biopolitical fantasies of crafting a revolutionary 'new man' to populate the totalitarian gardening state.

Marius Turda's chapter on 'Crafting a Healthy Nation' provides a particularly valuable overview of the historical contexts within which the eugenic movements of the twentieth century emerged and interacted. This overview was especially rewarding in tandem with considering the often rabid nation-(re-)building schemes of the interwar years and the dual projects of crafting a political self. It also infuses the idealised national body with a secular aesthetic and transcendental value, the currency of which was the perceived biological health of its constituent individual bodies. The eugenicists assumed, or, as it were, presumed to take on the role of guardians over this reconceptualised national organism, defining the yard-stick against which health was measured, determining which branches required pruning or cultivation. In the process, a symbiotic relationship between the state and the eugenic projects emerged, one of mutual legitimisation. Turda lucidly and convincingly argues for understanding the elusive 'ideal healthy nation' as the keyword connecting the various and variable assortment of eugenic movements that sprouted across almost all Europe and beyond, in various guises and with various emphases, from the more putative Anglo-Saxon to the more 'non-eliminationist' Latin models.

Merryn Ekberg's interpretation of the eugenic idea's trajectory in her chapter on 'Eugenics' is somewhat less rewarding when she proposes that it was and is a fundamentally utilitarian endeavour rather than a regenerative ideology. Ekberg carves out three distinct phases bookmarked by scientific advances as they span the past (from Darwin to DNA), the present (molecular genetics and assisted reproductive technologies), and a prospective future of human enhancement (cloning and gene-manipulation).

Returning to the manner in which theories or technologies of race lent themselves to nation-building projects, Maria Sophia Quine's chapter on 'Making Italians' aptly charts the life and work of three pre-eminent Italian anthropologists – namely Giustiniano Nicolucci, Paolo Mantagazza and Giuseppe Sergi – to argue that Aryan theories of race were first formulated not in the 1880s, but during the Risorgimento with the object of deducing a pan-Italian national race, a unifying narrative of national origins and, hence, of belonging. It is a compelling interpretation weaving together the rise of racial anthropology in relation to political discourses in the age of national unification, and the perceived need to craft, or simply invent, a biologically evidenced national body.

Interestingly, Ankersmit's opening embrace of world history chimes with the global perspectives advanced by the biologist and eugenicist Julian Huxley, as do the catastrophic risk theses advanced by the contemporary transhumanists whose self-perception of being without history is deconstructed so effectively by Alison Bashford in the volume's closing chapter on 'Julian Huxley's Transhumanism'. Bashford skilfully illustrates how transhumanists have edited eugenics out of their conceptual history without having a clear grasp of it in that, for example, eugenics was not simply the reserve of right-wing totalitarianisms but was similarly advocated by liberal democracies. With the notable

exception Agar's 'liberal eugenics', this fundamental critique of the self-perception of today's transhumanism coalesces around their defacto disinheriting of Huxley, the 'direct link' between eugenics and contemporary transhumanism, who not only coined the term itself but also set out an agenda that is very much akin to that advanced by Bostrum's Future of Humanity Institute at Huxley's alma mater, Oxford University.

There is, of course, an irony in this considering that almost every one of the chapters of this book ultimately traces and links past attempts to craft humans to the present transhumanist imaginings of human enhancement. That said, this edited volume will also appeal to all scholars in and students of theories of social and biological improvement, of the ideologies and political regimes that ultimately sought to craft and create the human condition in the past and at present, from generation to procreation.

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doi:10.1017/mdh.2013.78

Monica Black, *Death in Berlin: From Weimar to Divided Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 326, hardback, \$72.90, ISBN: 978-0521118514.

Although modern historians have long acknowledged the centrality of violence and death in Europe's twentieth century and Germany's leading role in it, only recently have they turned to death itself as subject of inquiry. With *Death in Berlin*, Monica Black presents us with a captivating, ambitious and well-written cultural history of the practices and mentalities around death in Berlin, spanning the late Weimar years to 1961. Based on a wealth of sources, with actors ranging from individual mourners to clergy, morgue and crematorium operators, municipal administrators, propagandists, folklorists, doctors and architects, her work connects a number of distinct subfields. Yet there are two central questions which give cohesion and great relevance to this work: what became of death in the aftermath of mass death, and what became of individual and community in the light of it?

Black acknowledges the inherent difficulties in writing such a history, for 'much of what happens when we deal with the dead is never recorded in written word' and is thus 'a story that somehow resists being told'. (13). Thanks to her impressive methodology, informed by the earlier work of ethnographers, anthropologists and historians like Philippe Ariès, Carlo Ginzburg, Richard Bessel, or Peter Fritzsche, she tells a fascinating story, focusing mostly on texts rather than artefacts which reflect the practices, fears, hopes and taboos associated with death and the dead.

The book is organised chronologically. The first two chapters highlight the politicisation of death in late Weimar and Nazi years and the emerging cult of the soldier hero, the central chapters focus on the everyday experience with mass death in the city itself between 1943 and 1949, makeshift graves and missing dead featuring prominently, while the last two chapters examine different approaches to death in East and West Germany until 1961 in the light of the Cold War and increased knowledge of the Holocaust.

Historians will find much value in Black's skilful connecting of the momentous, national and international stage of history with the local, deeply personal, sometimes mythical. She argues that the Nazi cult of the war hero, with its idea of the purifying blood sacrifice for Germany, cannot be separated from the racial ideology and colonisation aims which