

through Nazi philosophy – and whether this is why, it seems, the general public currently seem to be so distrustful of scientists and the knowledge we produce? (Consider for example, the distrustful public response to scientific views on global warming, or of evolutionary history itself.)

There are (perhaps surprisingly) very few passages in these lectures that can be described as blatantly ‘racist’, though there are those that are certainly condescending or patronizing toward the ‘unfit in society’. However, some of the ideas expressed – such as Julian Huxley’s notions of ‘improvements’ in evolution – are outdated or simply incorrect. In this sense, at least, I have learned much about the actual nature of eugenics philosophy in contrast to the usual negative and simplistic interpretations typical of textbooks and the popular media. Again paradoxically, the overwhelming attitude expressed in these writings reflects an earnestly positive ambition to resolve society’s problems through science. In this sense, the book might serve as a warning to us all – our most positive intentions may yet produce negative outcomes.

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Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life. By Kaushik Sunder Rajan. Pp. 434. (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2006.) £14.99, ISBN 0-8223-3720-7, paperback. doi: 10.1017/S0021932008003027.

Recently, I skimmed a newspaper article that reported, to my horror, a woman who had her breasts removed, not because she had cancer, but because her mother did. The article then went on to describe how she then had ‘better’, larger breasts implanted and was very happy with the whole process. I cynically suspected that this woman had strategically used a layperson’s biological determinism to get what she, perhaps subconsciously, wanted. However, after reading this book, I find myself rethinking the story in a new light; as a much more complex phenomenon.

This ambitious work is multi-sited, drawing from ethnographic work in the United States and in India as well as from within various organizations involved in the genomic world. From a Marxist and Foucaultian perspective, sprinkled with a bit of retooled Wallerstein and Gramsci, Sunder Rajan develops a concept of biocapital as an emerging facet of the capitalist system. He argues that ‘understanding biocapital involves analyzing the relationship between materiality and modes of abstraction that underlie the comergences of new forms of life science with market regimes for the conduct of such science’ (p. 33). This is not simply biology as subsumed by capitalism, but instead a new capitalism and a new biology imploding into an emergent whole.

Here, it is not a coincidence that genomics has arisen at the same time as the dot.com/venture capital boom. Both have departed from their parent industries in becoming speculative and mediated by hype. Both rely, not on concrete facts or products, but on perceived possible futures. This imagined future is populated by personalised medicine and miracle cures based on an understanding of genetics.

It becomes clear that we are offered a glimpse of a world where life is a commodity. Health is not seen as something to be cultivated or achieved, but, instead, something biologically determined but that can be improved with pharmaceutical or

therapeutic products. This goes a long way towards explaining what may be going on in the vignette I presented in the beginning of this review. However, my main critique of the work is that we only see this perspective through the eyes of the big players in the drama. We only briefly, and superficially, are introduced to the general public as 'consumers' or 'research subjects'. This leaves us with a black box of hegemony to account for the trickle-down ideology, leaving us to speculate on the nature of the motivations of individuals acting within this system.

That said, it is an interesting book where terms are carefully defined and the approaches and theoretical perspectives are laid bare. It would be a great book for an advanced course in medical anthropology or technology studies, though it is a bit complex for introductory classes.

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