Fertility And Totalitarianism: The Nazi Lebensborn

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“It is dreadful that in Germany today women no longer want to be mothers. God grant us that one day this will change.” – Heinrich Himmler

“And this,’ said the Director opening the door, ‘is the Fertilizing Room.” – Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

This paper will investigate the function of the Lebensborn: a SS-sponsored agency, created by Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler in 1935, which acted throughout the duration of the Nazi regime. Its goal was to secure an eternal Aryan race by harboring the pregnancy of “pure” Nazi blood. Also, it met the demand of the Nazi regime to challenge the diminishing statistics, while concurrently conditioning future statistics, of the German population post-World War I and throughout World War II. Through prenatal care, adoption services, health care facilities, and childhood education, the Lebensborn effectively undertook a positive re-declaration of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (people’s community) through its population management. Techniques of fertility became the operative function of thinking towards a chiliastic regime; a population fixed and controlled by determining devices would ensure the solidified repetition of Nazi culture, bodies, and ideology.
The theoretical position of Zygmunt Bauman’s *Modernity and Ambivalence* will articulate the necessity of a regime such as the Third Reich to invest in techniques of fertility. Bauman’s articulation of the modern “gardening state” will literally and rhetorically aid the paper in its essential claims; that not only was gardening used as an allusion to create future generations of a suitable Nazi race, but the symbolic “gardening state” will illustrate a concise function of breeding/fertility, and the value emphasized on both. It will then discuss the utopian critique/dystopian fantasy of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* in comparison with the modern apparatus of the Third Reich. Necessarily, Huxley’s fictional World State prioritized fertility as a paramount instrument of society; Huxley’s World State has effectively solved the problem of both, over and under population. Population, for both modern and utopian societies, finds extreme relevance in the proactive fertilization of future generations.

The paper will conclude with a psychoanalytic interpretation. It will argue that - from the Lebensborn as the source - the positive eugenics of gardening fertility contextually complimented the negative eugenics of the Holocaust. The prevalent compensatory device of “holocaust now/pregnancy, reproduction, and fertility later” will be analyzed using Freudian theory; the self-justificatory nature of positive/negative eugenics will illustrate how The Third Reich cognitively worked around the implementations of the guilty conscious, and its potential negative relation to the population.

By popularizing the Lebensborn agenda, the Third Reich successfully outlined prescriptions of sexuality and gender. Roles were strictly, and traditionally, enforced and accepted. Through a gardening agenda, the Third Reich was able to apply conservative practice into a populist agenda; the females’ role would become crucial for future, and eternal, generations of Nazi purity. Thus pregnancy, and the pronatalist-sponsored policy of The Third Reich, became a paramount mission of the Lebensborn. But only because of their modern technological ambitions could they achieve unprecedented management over techniques of fertility. The Lebensborn’s reliance on overcoming the natural scientific limitations of reproduction, by harnessing technological potential, allowed the totalitarian regime to manipulate the causality of the ego by redirecting harm and guilt, with a propagandistic claim, away from their subjects. The desires of the Lebensborn could successfully orient future generations without the haunting guilt of the Holocaust penetrating the popular conscious.

**Utopian Desires, Modern Designs**

“…And the bottles come in here to be predestinated in detail” – Huxley

*Brave New World* opens with a detailed and vibrant tour of a “Hatchery and Conditioning Center.” The World State of Huxley’s impending future has subjugated the natural process of reproduction and replaced it with complete mechanized functionality. Full achievement in the possibility and potentiality of science became the operative tool for future reproduction and the basis of stability in society. Through the combined techniques of conditioning, predestining, and decanting the World State has full control over future generations; future bodies are merely the offset of the desired, and applied, sciences of the World State.

But this iteration is demonstrative of purely utopian wishes; not only can Huxley’s World State create the conditions for future generations, but they can seemingly obviously manipulate the fertilization process to cast certain characteristics and traits upon fertilization\(^1\). Crucial to the stability of Huxley’s utopia is the normalcy of class distinctions – or, a hierarchal caste system. The modern totalitarian design utilizes many of these ideas, and parallels significantly to the intentions of

utopian desires, but strictly contrasts utopianism in their methodology. At the time of the early 20th century, the limitations of science were rapidly expanding; and the early modern totalitarian regimes were quick to demonstrate control over the production of sciences. Thus, what separates Huxley’s World State and the Third Reich, is the newly founded exploded limitations of science compared to the achieved domination over science; while one regime was flirting with the possibility of reproductive technology, the other achieved its full dominance.

Huxley is often referential to the ingenious beginning scientific developments of the early 20th century. Often deriving plot and material from H.G. Wells, a scientific utopianist, Huxley is in direct dialogue with the impending issue of man’s tenacity to science. The play of science within totalitarian regimes is visibly uncontested, and the relevance of early 20th century political history carries a consistent wave of anxiety for presently uncontrollable – but soon to be controllable – technology; while Huxley was publishing Brave New World, Hitler was drafting the foundations of his thousand-year Reich.

Nazi strategy was necessarily aligned to solving the deficit in Germany’s population. In order to expand territorially - through militarization, colonization, and so on – the problem of population was consistent in the tactics of the Third Reich. Hitler persistently displayed anxiety when discussing the unprecedented falling rate of German births. But unavoidable, Nazi reproductive technological and ideological investment secured a racial hierarchy as a basis for social stability. Similarly to the regime of the World State, Nazism necessitated a system of class – through motions of racism and nationalism - where stability was the offset of what will later be termed as positive and negative eugenics. The concept of equilibrium, in consciousness, reveals the modern structure, and its ambivalence, of the Third Reich in comparison to the utopianism of the World State; Hitler, unlike Huxley, had to locate the affect of domestic/international policy linearly – as in, poles were nominally defined simply due to limitations of technology.

The Malthusian problem presents itself to every regime, regardless of politics and time. In Huxley’s world, citizens wear the “Malthusian belt” – a highly commoditized contraceptive device. The degree of Huxley’s utopianism, at times, reveals a heavily ridden text full of satire and irony. It is as if the World State has so cognitively solved every last problem presented to humanity that there is literally zero space for error. But while the utopianism behind Huxley reveals its satire, Hitler’s, Himmler’s et al. obsession over population control translated into very tangible social policy. Securing the future generations meant prioritizing a modern design with utopian intentions; how can a regime determine it’s future generations without, in actuality and reality, determining the future generations?

The modern design of the Lebensborn – translated as “well of life” - was one, in an excess of social policies, designated by the Nazi authority to institute population control and management. Over its duration, more than 12,000 children were born into the Lebensborn, of more than half supposed to be illegitimate births. The illegitimacy behind the Lebensborn reveals its tenacious goals: to create a population not based upon the tradition of marriage, monogamy, or the orthodox ideas of family planning, but to insist on achieving massive results of a new and furnished population. Often, the Lebensborn would admit unwed pregnancies – in fact, this was more than common. This was not only to discourage abortion, but also to emphasize protecting the delivery of

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4 Ibid.
‘pure’ German fertility. Interestingly, this inadvertently encouraged single pregnant women to turn to the Lebensborn as a safe haven for pregnancy.

The issue of secrecy shows the exact intersection of modern design and utopian desire. Nazi physicians guided patients of the Lebensborn in confidence. They were lead to the Lebensborn as an alternative to the anxieties of motherhood and the consequences, to a regime of control, of a wasted pureblooded abortion. Himmler could encourage the utopian desires of a racially superior breed of beings while utilizing the scientific and modern design of the Lebensborn; this equation, as shown by not only the statistics but also by the conscious prioritization of such a device, was a proven victory for the Nazi totalitarian regime for quite some time.

Pronatalist policy in the Third Reich sharply discouraged the traditional idea of family planning. Labeled as a part of the bourgeois morality that the Third Reich strictly opposed, the discourse surrounding the Lebensborn was contentiously appropriate. The Lebensborn operated in a middle, or ambivalent, space between the opposition of Nazi ideology and Christian/bourgeois morality. Regarding sexuality, the Lebensborn functioned outside the public domain. It was an operation of tangential importance to the goals of Nazism, thus necessarily it had to function at a subliminal level to the public; one had to be aware of the Lebensborn option, but contained by the overwhelming secrecy of totalitarian social policy.

Techniques of Fertility
“…We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage works or future…’ he was going to say future World Controllers, but correcting himself, said ‘future Directors of Hatcheries’ instead.” – Huxley

The modern state, with its ambitious and utopian desires, is one marked by a controlling element towards its population. Zygmunt Bauman, a 20th century Polish sociologist, articulates the strategy of modern states as one that, specifically, gardens their population. Thus, Bauman’s “gardening state” will be topically helpful in referencing the intentions and functions of the Third Reich’s techniques of fertility. The metaphor “gardening” will be used to depict the policy towards fertility, but will also be grounded in actual rhetoric used by the Third Reich. It is in this peculiar case of metaphor and actuality, that the ideas of Bauman’s “gardening state” are relevant to a study of modern totalitarianism. The following quotes provide a conceptual understanding of Bauman’s theory, cited from Modernity and Ambivalence:

“We can say that existence is modern in as far as it is effected and sustained by design, manipulation, management, engineering. The existence is modern in as far as it is administered by resourceful (that is, possessing knowledge, skill and technology), sovereign agencies.

The modern state was a gardening state. Its stance was a gardening stance. It delegitimized the present (wild, uncultivated) condition of the population and dismantled the extant mechanisms of reproduction and self-balancing. It put in their place purposefully built mechanisms meant to point the change in the direction of the rational design.”

7 Ibid, 20.
We can take from this a couple of ideas. For one, the appropriation of science and technology are paramount in totalitarian regime’s techniques of fertility. As articulated previously, science becomes the operative tool for any reproductive technology, thus emphasis in the sciences singularly conditions the outlook for fertile gains. Secondly, there was a concerted emphasis to challenge chaotic attributes of the population. Order was derived by opposing what cannot be controlled; this is the ultimate technique, for Bauman, that allowed the modern state to operate against the uncontrollable. What is natural, under the modern state, becomes synonymous with what is chaotic. Modern regimes must master this potential, and subordinate and/or contain its force.

Modern governors had to isolate the ambivalence within society, and define it as such. “Nothing is more artificial than naturalness,” articulates the ability of modern rulers to define what is chaotic and uncontrollable under extremely arbitrary circumstances. Essential to Bauman’s theory is the dichotomizing force of the modern state; the false tool of dichotomizing is the precise seat of power for modernity. Again, “modern rulers and modern philosophers were first and foremost legislators; they found chaos and set out to tame it and replace it with order.” The ambiguity that arises from natural processes, like fertility and reproduction, fails to meet the demands of the ordering, and gardening, modern state.

The work of Jacques Derrida is referenced explicitly and implicitly throughout the entirety of Bauman’s work. Relevant application of Derrida occurs when the line between metaphor and reality become intermittently obscured. The text soon becomes reality, reality soon becomes text, and the immediate result is delirium. What is contained in simple allusion, the imagery of a garden that necessarily needs to be tended or else it is overcome by invasive weeds, becomes the platform and justification of an oppressive administration.

Bauman’s sociological nature alludes to the politically grounded application of his abstraction. As a 20th century Polish Jew, he is in consistent dialogue with Nazi policy. The allusion of gardening, its relevance to Nazi policy, and its continuity with metaphor comes full circle within the public work of Nazism. Nazi ideology remains consistent with Bauman’s theory; within the Nazi publication, *Marriage Laws and the Principles of Breeding*, leading Nazi ideologist Richard Darré articulates the following:

“He who leaves the plants in a garden to themselves will soon find to his surprise that the garden is overgrown by weeds and that even the basic character of the plants has changed. If therefore the garden is to remain the breeding ground for the plants, if, in other words, it is to lift itself above the hard rule of natural forces, then the forming will of a gardener is necessary…thus we are facing the realization that questions of breeding are not trivial for political thought, but that they have to be at the center of all considerations.”

Bauman responds: “To underline the ambitions of the state now firmly set on substituting a designed and state-monitored plan for uncontrolled and spontaneous mechanisms of society, the medical metaphor soon joined forces with the tradition gardening one.” What happens here, in true Derridean fashion, is a complete collapse of the historical text. What was once allusion and metaphor becomes the realistic operation of totalitarian regimes. A benign text of social policy becomes the cornerstone of positive eugenics. One must necessarily deconstruct the fictitious

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metaphor of gardening with a regressive apparatus; the relation that subsumes reveals the potential of techniques of fertility in their actuality. Within Derrida’s essay *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, he identifies how the lack of a center problematized discourse involving a center-set; as in, the role of presence or being was conditioned by the centered belief in itself. But, Derrida critiques the center as an area of concern, and dismisses it as a major prejudice of Western thought. Substitution, or *bricolage*, becomes the dependent tool of presence, man, and being; only by substituting text and speech with language, can one use text for themselves. Textual representation exists solely as supplement.

At the interplay of fiction and reality – or the written policy and the actual implementation – one is revealed of the decentering of any sort of original point from which this relationship stems. It is beyond the subject’s ability to comprehend this point of origin; one can only assume a decentered source, “The absence of a center is here the absence of a subject and the absence of an author.”

Here, one sees the allusionary depiction of gardening adjacent to eugenic reproduction and is immediately lost.

The attempt to locate a source, and its infinite regression of totalization results in the subject simply supplementing speech, text, and action with play; defined as, “a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions.”

The use of play becomes the operative tool that blurs the distinction from what is actual and what is replicated; there is no center because there are infinite centers, the main tension that arises is between play and history itself.

Techniques of fertility are clearly appealing to totalitarian regimes. They allow the conditioning devices for future generations to come to be – they effectively determine the ontological presence of the regime. Thus, for a regime concentrated not only on immediate success, but also with obligation towards the future – such as Huxley’s World State or Hitler’s Third Reich – fertility becomes an essential component to any party platform. With devices such as the Lebensborn and “Hatchery and Conditioning Centers,” totalitarian regimes can refine and edit their place within their very own history. But within the tension of history and text (Derrida) one assumes the limiting of sources of original history with a device of supplementation; it becomes obvious, under the example of the Lebensborn, that Derrida’s critique is forcibly applicable to Himmler’s techniques of fertility.

**Himmler, the Father, and Psychoanalysis**

“Our Ford - or Our Freud, as, for some inscrutable reason, he chose to call himself whenever he spoke of psychological matters - Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers - was therefore full of misery; full of mothers - therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts - full of madness and suicide.” - Huxley

The fascist right often located danger within prominent philosophers, theorists, and analysts of the time. For Nazism, this was especially true in the case of Sigmund Freud. Often, such as in the rampant Nazi student literary “cleansing,” book burning would explicitly target the works of Freud, and his psychoanalysis, as detrimental to Nazi values. This section will be riddled in one major assumptive paradox: that the ideology behind Himmler, and the motivation behind devices such as the Lebensborn, complimented and ultimately followed the works of Freud. Also, the

13 Ibid.
works of Freud will supplement the history of the Third Reich with an alternative explanation for the implementation of positive eugenic devices such as the Lebensborn.

The reliance on “anti-bourgeois morality” rhetoric within the Nazi party is central in their unconscious alignment with Freud. They adamantly opposed the bourgeois mentality in avocation of a mass movement ideology. For Himmler, the tradition of bourgeois mentality was what weakened the German birthrate. Family planning, which encouraged monogamous marriages, was not in the interest of a hopefully rapidly expanding population. Similarly to abortion, family planning was considered an economic waste in the eyes of the Nazis. Religious fundamentalism governing sexual conduct had no place in the prosperity of a thousand year Reich, and Himmler was certain of the detriment of such a mentality.

As the father of the Lebensborn, Himmler assumed a major paternalist ego gratification; his obsessions with techniques of fertility lead to his fascination with every aspect of the Lebensborn. The “positive” function of the Lebensborn – birthing of children, providing orphans with homes, offering health services to mothers, and so on – motivated Himmler to continue and prioritize the role of the Lebensborn; its definite effects on Himmler’s ego is uncontested. The singular role of the Lebensborn was to produce, efficiently. Anything inhibiting these results was labeled as wasteful and ultimately bourgeois. Thus, Himmler “asserted that sex was natural and that in establishing artificial restrictions on sexual relations society created the unhealthy conditions which currently threatened Germany.” Moral repression lead to marital fidelity and sexual chastity. Himmler, as both father of the Lebensborn and cultural critic of the Third Reich, denounced asceticism while promoting natural instincts, desires, and sexual impulses – quite the Freudian position.

A crucial component to Civilization and Its Discontent, Freud’s socio-historical opus, is the concept of guilt, “the sense of guilt is the most important problem in the development of civilization and to show that the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt.” The way in which society manages guilt significantly alludes to the way in which modern subjects must as well. Guilt arises as a natural affect of civilization, but its direction and motivation is significantly determined by the social forces at will. For Freud, one feels guilt when one doesn’t necessarily commit to “bad” actions; all one needs is the intention, will, or desire to do something bad. This can relate to any action that can be deemed morally wrong, such as the negative eugenics of millions, Final Solution, and the Holocaust. Paramount to Nazi ideology was the complete elimination of the Jewish culture. For Freud, one cannot simply disperse an entire population without inflicting difference within one’s psychological compartment. Thus, the operation of the Lebensborn acted as a redirection of guilt; from the negative eugenics of the Holocaust to the positive eugenics of the Lebensborn, Nazis were relieved of the guilt inflicted to their conscious. Theories such as these are strengthened when one has, as a major case-in-point, figures like Himmler – who took it upon himself to make sure the Lebensborn reached its objectives.

This theory is based upon the use of compensation within the subject. A compensatory apparatus arises out of the need of the ego to find happiness and suitable love for oneself. Guided by narcissism, Himmler and his colleagues issued the ultimate act of love through the controlled birth of thousands of pureblooded Aryan babies – an ultimate ego satisfaction. But also, the subject’s ego distances itself from bad actions and its implications. Violence and aggression are

15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
welcomed as natural to the ego, but dispersed to realms beyond the conscious subject. The social anxiety that arises from this complex places the subject within a “bad conscious;” a predicament that is not only unhealthy to the subject, but is cognitively disavowed. Thus, the Lebensborn and other similar operations played a crucial role in alleviating the violence inflicted to the conscious as a result of the negative eugenics of the Holocaust by satisfying subjects through compensation.

Returning to Bauman, “modern genocide is not an uncontrolled outburst of passions, and hardly ever a purposeless, totally irrational act. It is, on the contrary, an exercise in rational social engineering, in bringing about, by artificial means, that ambivalence-free homogeneity that messy and opaque social reality failed to produce.” The negative eugenics of the Holocaust complimented the positive eugenics of the Lebensborn and solved a conscious equilibrium within the ego of the perpetrators of the Third Reich. Even without the application of Freudian theory, Himmler unconsciously distributed the guilt of murder away from the happiness and love of childbirth. Himmler, Hitler, and the SS didn’t need to make the connection for themselves; the ego is unaffected by such attempts. Instead, psychoanalysis shows the instinctual desires of the mind and how these desires promoted a severe underpinning of real events by revealing tenacity for compensatory devices, such as the Lebensborn.

Conclusion

The Frankfort School thesis that liberal ideology masks a deep authoritarianism comes full circle within the context of Bauman’s modernity. The concerted effort of modern regimes to classify and categorize order contrasts its inability to locate chaos and ambivalence. But nevertheless, this strategy is at the forefront of totalitarianism - seen throughout the context of Huxley and Himmler. But for Bauman and the intentions of this paper, modern experience does not neatly conform to these modern dichotomies; there are, inevitably, natural forces that remain outside the rhetoric-induced power of categorization. But for the totalitarian regimes of utopian desire and modern design, science becomes the operative tool to remove the ambiguity of ambivalence and to predestine their very own presence.

The Lebensborn utilized techniques of fertility to its fullest potential. It acted as an apparatus that not only saw concrete methodological influence to the stability of the Nazi party, but also alleviated the social anxiety of a regime based upon genocide. Psychoanalysis works to unpack the drives that inspire subjects to commit conscious action, but particularly looks at the unconscious consequences of these actions. For Himmler, the Lebensborn was penultimate to Nazi Ideology itself; they were synonymous and one of the same. Singularity within the party position allowed an extreme ambivalence towards the goals and intentions of the Third Reich; thus what subsumes the consciousness of the Nazis is the equilibrium provided by the calming Lebensborn. Derived from the positive eugenics of the Himmler and the negative eugenics of the Holocaust, the Lebensborn provided soma to murderers, babies to Himmler, and a euphoric happiness to the directors of the Third Reich.