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# Review of Politics of Eugenics: Productionism, Population, and National Welfare, by Alberto Spektorowski and Liza Ireni-Saban.

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ects continued divergences in health and mortality between and within societies. The chapter by David Lindstrom on return-migration of Mexicans in the US is the only paper with a non-European focus. The published contributions are revised and updated versions of the conference papers with references to the literature up to 2012. Although the book lacks a concluding chapter summarizing the papers, the individual contributions provide overviews of the state-of-the art on various topics and point to the need for cross-disciplinary research to improve our understanding of demographic developments in Europe. —J.B.

**ALBERTO SPEKTOROWSKI AND LIZA IRENI-SABAN**

*Politics of Eugenics: Productionism, Population, and National Welfare*

New York: Routledge, 2013. 224 p. \$130.00.

In their introduction the authors, two Israeli political scientists, contend that Western European welfare societies face a difficult dilemma. Having aging populations, they need more productive workers to keep their generous welfare systems solvent. Immigration has not been able to generate these workers because “what really happens is a crowd of immigrants are kept in third world pockets, supported by a welfare state that barely gets a contribution from them” (p. 3). If these countries chose to “drop their welfare system,” immigrant productivity might be enhanced but then increased diversity would “jeopardize national identity,” erode social solidarity, and make an eventual return to the welfare state unlikely. If they chose simply to restrict immigration, they could preserve national identity but then the shrinking proportion of workers and economic stagnation would vitiate the welfare state. How can the welfare state be preserved? The authors contend that the current policy choices being made by Sweden, Denmark, and Finland constitute a “eugenic” way out: focus less on integrating immigrants, fund significant parental leave and child support payments, and support liberal ART (assisted reproductive technology) policies aimed at enhancing the fertility of productive middle-class nationals, including gay and lesbian couples. The eugenic label is warranted, they argue, since these choices, especially the liberal ART policies, are really a continuation of earlier eugenic policies implemented during the first half of the twentieth century. In chapters 1 and 2 the authors review the history of these countries’ eugenics movements as they developed from the late nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth. A focus on race dominated the movements before World War I, but during the 1930s and 1940s there was a distinct move from “race hygiene” to “national-productivist hygiene” rationales. Inter-war eugenic policies, such as sterilization laws limiting reproduction by the mentally ill and those with severe intellectual disability, were adopted to deal with specific social problems, and not to produce a superior race. During this time of low fertility, the goal was more reproduction from the productive sectors of society and less from “fringe” elements; sterilization laws expanded to include individuals displaying “anti-social” behaviors such as alcoholism and sexual assault. The authors use Alva and Gunnar Myrdal’s *Crisis in the Population Question* (1934) to exemplify the “national-productivist hygiene” position. In chapters 3 and 4 the authors attempt, with limited success, to tie the three countries’ current im-

migration, family support, and ART policies to their earlier eugenic policies by way of Foucauldian concepts and theory, with the “politics of population studies” providing the theoretical connection between contemporary genetics and the eugenics of the past. They contend that current policies have a eugenic intent, at least of the national-productivist hygiene type, since their true “biopolitics” goal is survival of their “national stocks.” Chapter 5 attempts to provide, again not very successfully, empirical support for the authors’ thesis by comparing the fertility, immigration, family support, and ART policies of three countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark) high on the welfare-state scale with three countries (France, Germany, and the Netherlands) lower on that scale. However, showing that Denmark expended 0.06 percent of its GDP on assisted reproductive technology in 2007 compared to the 0.04 percent expended by France is unlikely to convince many readers that this very provocative thesis rests on a firm foundation.—D.H.

#### ALAN WEISMAN

#### *Countdown: Our Last, Best Hope for a Future on Earth?*

New York: Little, Brown, 2013. xii + 513 p. \$28.00.

Alan Weisman’s previous book, *The World Without Us*, was a happily misanthropic essay on how the Earth could recover once it was wholly freed of its plague of humans. The present work looks at the possibilities for a future in which humans are still present, though ideally in much smaller numbers. It is leisurely, long-form journalism of the sort that conveys its information and argument bound up with human stories and travel anecdotes—not an efficient means of communication but, for those not pressed for time, very readable. The book is roughly structured around four motivating questions: How many people can the planet sustain? How can people be persuaded that the world’s population growth needs to be halted or, better, reversed? How much of nature must be exploited to maintain human life? And how do we design an economy that can prosper with a stationary or even a shrinking population? Each question is pondered rather than answered, drawing on conversations with the many scientists, officials, and activists Weisman meets in the course of his extensive travels and offering historical digressions on topics of interest along the way. The starting point is that world population has grown far beyond what can be supported in the long run, with devastating ecological effects: a plausible steady-state population at high consumption levels might be some 2 billion or fewer. Paul Ehrlich and his colleagues, notably Gretchen Daily, are the luminaries here, documenting the environmental havoc. Expanding, fertilizer-dependent monocultures reliant on ever-improving agricultural technologies displace natural habitats and diminish biodiversity—trends now being hastened by climate change. On what can be done, the policies are the standard-order pair: family planning and women’s education. Iran and Thailand are the showcased instances of success with such measures. China is portrayed as an anomalous case where policy effect came from harsh interventions designed by engineers, usurping the demographers. At the other outcome extreme, Niger, Pakistan, and the Philippines are exhibits of entrenched high fertility and resistance to change—in