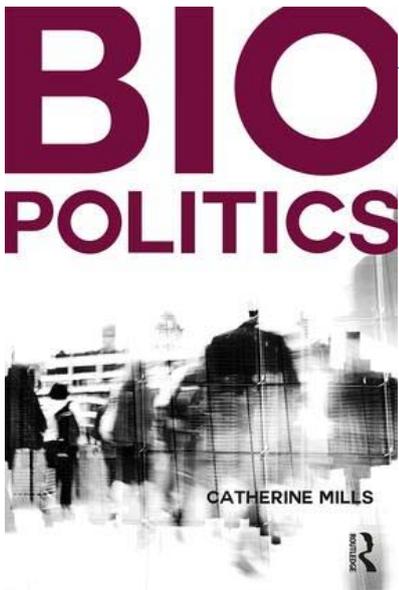



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**From Bioethics to Biopolitics:**  
**The case of CRISPR**

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### Biopolitics

**Catherine Mills**, Monash University, Australia.  
*"Catherine Mills's book is a brilliant introduction to the emerging field of research on biopolitics. It offers a sophisticated yet accessible overview of the main theories and thematic areas in the studies of biopolitics and will be indispensable reading both for beginners in this field and the more advanced readership."* - **Sergei Prozorov**, University of Helsinki, Finland

The concept of biopolitics has been one of the most important and widely used in recent years in disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. In *Biopolitics*, Mills provides a wide-ranging and insightful introduction to the field of biopolitical studies. The first part of the book provides a much-needed philosophical introduction to key theoretical approaches to the concept in contemporary usage. This includes discussions of the work of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Hannah Arendt, Roberto Esposito, and Antonio Negri. In the second part of the book, Mills discusses various topics across the categories of politics, life, and subjectivity. These include questions of sovereignty and governmentality, violence, rights, technology, reproduction, race, and sexual difference.


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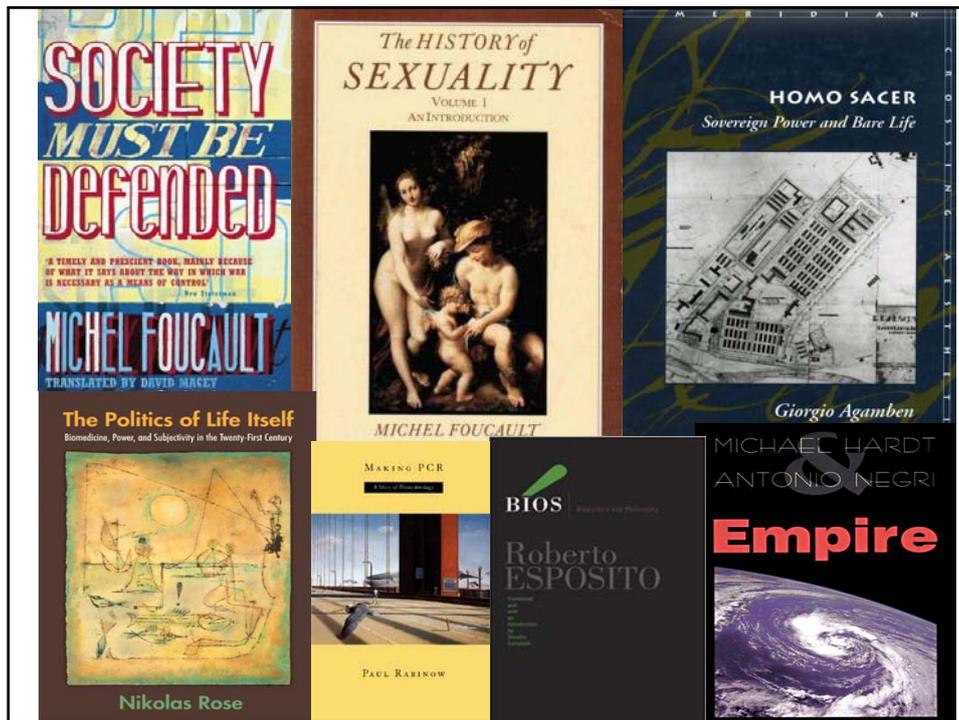
### 2017 Discovery Projects

Investigator(s)	A/Prof Catherine Mills; Dr Karinne Ludlow; Prof Robert Sparrow; Dr Narelle Warren
Administering Organisation	Monash University
Project Title	Legal and ethical issues in the inheritable genetic modification of humans
Project ID	DP170100919

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## The structure

1. Bioethics and CRISPR. (RS)
2. Biopolitics
  1. What does 'biopolitics' mean? (CM)
  2. What does 'life' mean? (RS)
3. CRISPR and Biopolitics. (CM)



## Bioethics and CRISPR I

- CRISPR/Cas9 is one of several members of a new class of molecular tool kits that allow very precise genetic modification of organisms, including (potentially) human embryos.

- “Germline gene editing”

- Widespread public concerns about “designer babies” and “playing god”



- Standard bioethical approaches have had little success in identifying what might be wrong with CRISPR

## Bioethics and CRISPR II

### ■ Risks (non-maleficence)

- All ARTs experimental with first use; coming into existence is risky; technology will improve

### ■ Welfare (beneficence)

- Both (putative) therapeutic uses and enhancement improve edited person's welfare by definition
- Social impacts unlikely to be more problematic than environmental modifications

### ■ Justice

- We already tolerate differences in wealth that have more dramatic implications for the welfare of children born today than genome editing will produce

### ■ Rights (autonomy)

- Parents already shape children through environmental manipulation; no child is unconstrained by genetics; both therapeutic interventions and enhancements will typically be autonomy promoting; “reproductive liberty” of parents

## Biopolitics: what does it mean?

- Biopolitics may offer a new framework for analysis, but engagement so far limited by lack of clarity over key terms

- At least 7 different ideas of ‘biopolitics’

- 1<sup>st</sup>: different ways of understanding the relationship between institutional power and life; 2<sup>nd</sup>: a matter of method or intellectual orientation

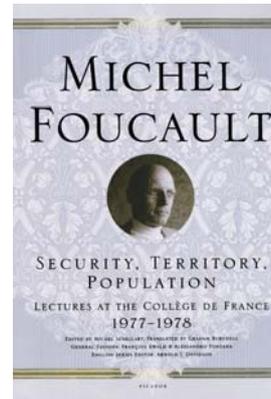
- *Biopolitics 1 (institutional): a specific form of rule wherein the object and target of political power is human biology*

“Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life, an individual and collective welfare...For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention” (Foucault, 1990, 142).

## Biopolitics: what does it mean?

- **Biopolitics 2 (institutional):** a specific form of rule wherein the government is concerned with the health and welfare of the population

“What can the end of government be? Certainly not just to govern, but to improve the condition of the population, to increase its wealth, its longevity, and its health. And the instruments that government will use to obtain these ends are, in a way, immanent to the field of population; it will be by acting directly on the population itself through campaigns, or, indirectly, by, for example, techniques that, without people being aware of it, stimulate the birth rate, or direct the flows of population to this or that region or activity. Population, then, appears as the end and instrument of government”. (Foucault, 2007, 105)



## Biopolitics: what does it mean?

- **Biopolitics 3 (institutional):** a society wherein the sovereign power operates by constituting “social life itself”

biopolitical production entails “the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another” (Hardt and Negri 2000, xiii)

- **Biopolitics 4 (transhistorical):** the general form of relations between sovereigns and subjects in “Western” societies, wherein the sovereign assumes power over “life itself”

“the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original – if concealed – nucleus of sovereign power. It can even be said that the production of a biopolitical body is the original activity of sovereign power. In this sense, biopolitics is at least as old as the sovereign exception” (Agamben 1998, 6).

## Biopolitics: what does it mean?

■ **Biopolitics 5 (subject area):** the form of regulation of biological materials (including living organisms) in a particular institution, or set of institutions, at a particular time.

– Rose, Rabinow et al

■ **Biopolitics 6 (methodological):** a mode of analysis that foregrounds questions regarding “life itself” as a means of better understanding a broad range of social and political phenomena.

– Waldby, et al

■ **Biopolitics 7 (ideological):** a particular set of motivational beliefs/principles arising from a concern with “life itself”, or perhaps, from a critical perspective on Biopolitics 1, 2, 3, or 4.

– Esposito, Agamben et al

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## Biopolitics: the meaning of life

13 different meanings of life as noun in OED, not all of which relevant to biopolitics debate. Most significant:

- Life 1 (experiential): the subjective experience of being alive
  - “How’s life?”
- Life 2 (social): a daily pattern of human activity
  - “Life in Hong Kong”
- Life 3 (Biographical): the period between the birth and death of an organism and the activities of the organism therein
  - She had a long and prosperous life

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## Biopolitics: the meaning of life

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- Life 4 (vitalist)
  - The opposite of death
  
- Life 5 (class of): all those things that are alive
  - “Is there life on Mars?”
  
- Life 6 (biological process): the processes and mechanisms whereby living organisms (and their parts) maintain themselves, change and grow.
  - What biologists study when they study any particular living thing
  - As in Biopolitics VI

*There is significant confusion between these concepts in the extant literature.....*

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## Conclusions: CRISPR and biopolitics

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Hopefully we are now better placed to see how a concern with biopolitics might inform debates about genome editing.

- Attention to the institutional politics (Biopolitics V) surrounding the development and application of this technology illuminate limits of plausible public policy
- Biopolitics I and II highlight the State’s interests in CRISPR and the risks involved in its widespread application; challenge the role of bioethics
- Biopolitics III doesn’t single out CRISPR unless via “geneticisation” of subjectivity
- Implications of Biopolitics IV are obscure
- Implications of “thinking biopolitically” await a more fulsome account
- A “biopolitics” might commit one to particular policies depending on the content of that politics.

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