This chapter concentrates on the practical application of eugenics and its relationship to the idea of national regeneration, with a particular focus on the period between 1918 and 1933. According to Emilio Gentile, “[d]uring the twentieth century, national regeneration was presented as a total revolution to be achieved by one of two means: by new culture or by new politics. Until the Great War, the first method prevailed. After the war, with fascism, the new politics – totalitarian politics – claimed for itself the task of regenerating the nation.” There was, however, another method of national and racial improvement, which Gentile does not discuss, namely science. It does not suffice to explain modernist nationalism through the themes of rejuvenation created by avant-garde poets, artists or novelists. As I have argued elsewhere, eugenics aimed to create a national ontology wherein the nation as an object was paramount. By offering a physical representation of the nation eugenicists engaged in allegedly objective incursions into the ethnic fabric of society, contrasting their diagnoses of modernity’s troubles with those offered by literary texts or artistic images.2

After the First World War, eugenics intensified its regenerative content, verbalising its ambition to reconfigure the national community less with notions of egalitarian participation in public life than with programmes based on the biological selection of valuable racial elements.3 In the name of science, eugenicists synthesised hereditarian determinism with the modernist political revolution,
insisting that both pursued the same goal: to seal the societal and cultural chasms torn open by modernity. Whether in the form of national celebrations, as in the case of the victorious nations, or collective mourning, as in the case of the defeated countries, eugenicists heralded the reconciliation between state and nation, positing science as a solution to a number of problems nations faced after the war. Bemoaning that the nation's perceived decline was intensifying, eugenicists called for immediate legislation to prevent the social collective's further deterioration. They campaigned vigorously for the nation's social and biological improvement and, as we shall see, in many instances they were successful.

Eugenic Stigma

At the Fifteenth International Congress of Medicine gathered in Lisbon in 1906, Ladislav Haškovec, the most prominent and influential Czech eugenicist of his day, presented his views on marriage restrictions which he had already published in a Czech article in 1902. In Lisbon, he meticulously demonstrated the relationship between heredity and disease, insisting on the importance of restructuring social hygiene and public health around the developing ideas of eugenics. “We must go down to the root of evil,” Haškovec summoned his colleagues. “If,” he added, “in founding the family, consideration is given to the consequences of pathological heredity and to congenital maladies, one may absolutely affirm the diminution of the number of feeble-minded persons, of syphilitics, of tubercular persons, of criminals, and of children afflicted with nervous diseases or otherwise degenerate.”

As eugenics' popularity grew amongst European physicians and intellectuals after 1900 so too, in similar fashion, ideas of normative health and racially perfect communities matured amongst eugenicists. With the growing acceptance of heredity as the main factor in determining any individual's physical and psychological evolution, Haškovec and others could turn to the social and biological project of improving the population according to the Mendelian laws of inheritance. The Swiss psychiatrist Auguste Forel, for instance, was renowned for his elaborate eugenic edifice designed to protect society from the danger of deviancy and biological malfunction. In his 1905 *The Sexual Question*, Forel entrusted the state with