

Foucault Lectures

A series published by Foucault Studies

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ISSN: 2597-2545

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22439/fsl.vi0.6150>

Foucault Lectures, Vol III, no. 1, 1-4, December 2020

INTRODUCTION

Biopower, Governmentality, Liberalism and the Genealogy of the Modern Subject

Michel Foucault's Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1980:

***Security, Territory, Population; The Birth of Biopolitics;
On the Government of the Living***

Volume III of the Foucault Lectures series

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We are very pleased to guest edit and publish this special edition of *Foucault Studies* entitled *Michel Foucault's Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1980. Security, Territory, Population; The Birth of Biopolitics; On the Government of the Living*. As pronounced in the editorial, this special edition contains three articles, each devoted to discussing one yearly series of Foucault's lectures at the *Collège de France* in the period ranging from 1977 to 1980.

SECURITY, TERRITORY, POPULATION

"The Beginning of a Study of Biopower," written by Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson (Syracuse University) centers the attention on Foucault's 1978 lecture sequence entitled *Security, Territory, Population*. Here Foucault resumes lecturing at the *Collège de France* after a sabbatical year and an almost two-year long absence from his teaching responsibilities. While beginning the lecture series by proclaiming that this year he "would like to begin studying something that I have called, somewhat vaguely, bio-power," three weeks later Foucault indicates that what he would really like to undertake is "something that I would call a history of governmentality."

In prolongation of the latter indication, the reception of the lectures has widely regarded them as a new departure that initiates Foucault's ensuing studies of governmentality and the genealogy of (neo-)liberalism. By contrast, Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson argues that this important reception not only risks downplaying or disguising other important aspects of the lecture course, such as its role in elaborating the later notions of conduct, the conduct of conduct, and technologies of the self; she also aims to show that the conceptual innovations and changes in direction in *Security, Territory, Population* ought to be understood as a reworking and clarification of earlier material and as a refraction of earlier studies of power.

As a consequence, Erlenbusch-Anderson situates the lectures in the broader context of an analytics of power, already under development in Foucault's *oeuvre*, that would permit an understanding of how a specific form of power, i.e., biopower, has functioned since at least the end of the eighteenth century. According to Erlenbusch-Anderson, *Security, Territory, Population* is best understood not as a radical change in direction but rather as a continuation-with-modification of his analytics of power. In this manner, the lecture course illustrates the dynamic and generative character of Foucault's intellectual practice in which the results of genealogical inquiry are cast back on the empirical material out of which they emerge.

The genealogy of biopolitics traced in the lecture course may seem convincing even today. It forms an empirically informed investigation of the gradual emergence of a new technology of power that takes the form of a government of the population, intervenes in its milieu, works within reality by letting it run its course, and has as its effect the modern state that is so descriptively rich that it can provide us with orientation and the tools to engage in a critique of the present. Nevertheless, Foucault's analysis may also lead us astray if we content ourselves with applying his analysis today and fail to realize the present at stake is ours, not Foucault's.

THE BIRTH OF BIOPOLITICS

The article "The Appearance of an Interminable Natural History and its Ends" by Sverre Raffnsøe (Copenhagen Business School) and Knut Ove Eliassen (Norwegian University of Science and Technology) examines Foucault's Lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* at the Collège de France in 1979.

While the subject of liberalism appears to occupy most of the space in *The Birth of Biopolitics* and has been given particular attention in the ensuing reception and debate of the lectures, here Foucault is actually establishing a diagnosis of a dynamic equivocal and still somewhat enigmatic contemporary condition where welfare governance, biopolitics and neo-liberalism inter-sect, challenge and struggle with one another. To establish this complex diagnosis, he examines how this ambiguous state came to be within a wider long-ranging historical context, including the constitution of the reason of state and the birth of biopolitics as they are described in the lectures of the previous year and in *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge*. To prove these points, the article, like the previous

article, thus examines *The Birth of Biopolitics* as a prolongation and a modification of Foucault's lectures the previous years.

The article describes how governmentality is established with the first specific secular rationalization of the art of government in the reason of state, in contradistinction to previously established pastoral power, and gives rise to the appearance of a conception of indefinite history that has already begun and seems never-ending.

While the open-ended history in which governmentality and the reason of state find themselves is externally an undecided and precarious European balance of power between competing states, governmental rationality internally leads to the establishment of a developed policing that collects a detailed knowledge of the object of government to face external competition. Insofar as the logic of the population as a collection of living beings saturated with the dynamic of life here comes to the fore as a primary target of intervention of government, on which it also depends, this gives rise to the birth of biopolitics and the politics of health.

When governing comes to be perceived as a form of power that targets the social biology of human beings, politics acquires an essential importance for human subsistence hitherto unheard of. This rationalization of government is still with us and exerts a decisive influence today. It may be seen in the insistent care of bio-politics for the population not only as it comes to the fore in the totalitarianism and welfare politics of the 20th and 21st centuries but also in recent political responses to terrorism and the Covid pandemic.

According to Foucault, liberalism is to be understood as a rationalization of government that internally addresses and refines governmentality as it has been established previously in the tradition from the reason of state. Instead of breaking with the fundamental assumptions of governmentality, liberalism reminds the former of its basic criteria for good government. Liberal criticism points out that government needs to acknowledge that it must take account of and incorporate the self-regulation of the population it governs.

With liberalism perceived as a new rationality of government, a new kind of naturalness is embraced as a basic principle for governmentality. It is a naturalness that is intrinsic to the population in constant development and that appears as a result of the interaction and the social antagonism between human beings focusing on their own self-interest. The natural history that appears here without beginning or end is not only a history driven by social antagonism but also a mode of history or historicity in which the motor driving historical development constantly calls itself and its own exercise into question. It is a secular and merciless, tragic natural history in which freedom can never be taken for granted insofar as its participants constantly constitute a danger for one another. It is also a mode of history in which the art of government is constantly called upon and forced to organize and secure the conditions for the exercise and development of freedom.

For Foucault, thus, the liberal art of government is not a position to be affirmed or denied, as is often taken for granted in the reception and discussion of *The Birth of*

Biopolitics. Rather, the liberal art of government draws the outline of an experience of historicity that is an experience of an ongoing and unsettling, but also unending, crisis.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE LIVING

Written by Daniele Lorenzini (Warwick University), "Anarcheology and the Emergence of the Alethurgic Subject" discusses Foucault's 1980 lecture course entitled *On the Government of the Living*.

The article sets off the pivotal role of the lecture sequence in the development of Foucault's thought. Foucault's 1980 lecture course forms a laboratory in which he forges the methodological and conceptual tools necessary to carry on his study of governmentality independently from his *History of Sexuality* project. Central among these tools are the notions of "anarcheology," "alethurgy" and the "alethurgic subject."

While linked to the genealogy of the subject of desire, Foucault's projection of an anarcheology of the government of human beings through the manifestation of truth in the form of subjectivity is also conceptually independent from the former. Even though both are related to one another as essential complementary contributions to a genealogy of the modern subject, it is essential to treat them as autonomous examinations and to avoid conflating them in order to be able to perceive how the lecture sequence in 1980 is fraught with consequences.

In particular, it is the anarcheology of the government of human beings through the manifestation of truth in the form of subjectivity, conceptually and methodologically forged in the laboratory *On the Government of the Living*, that provides us with the key to understanding Foucault's developing interest in *parrhesia* and the care of the self.

Equally, the project of an anarcho-genealogical investigation of the government of self and others through truth not only connects *The Government of the Living* to the last three lecture courses at the *Collège de France* and other main lecture cycles in the 1980s but also permits us to see how this investigation is foreshadowed in and forms an integral part of Foucault's analyses of governmentality and his critical attitude towards the end of the 1970s. The anarcho-genealogical investigation even formed the backdrop for an envisaged monograph, *The Government of Self and Others*, which Foucault planned to publish independently from the *History of Sexuality* series.

Happy reading!