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ARTICLE

The Beginning of a Study of Biopower: Foucault's 1978 Lectures at the Collège de France

VERENA ERLENBUSCH-ANDERSON

Syracuse University, USA

ABSTRACT. While Foucault introduced the 1978 lecture course *Security, Territory, Population* as a study of biopower, the reception of the lectures has largely focused on other concepts, such as governmentality, security, liberalism, and counter-conduct. This paper situates the lecture course within the larger context of Foucault's development of an analytics of power to explore in what sense *Security, Territory, Population* can be said to constitute a study of biopower. I argue that the 1978 course is best understood as a continuation-through-transformation of Foucault's earlier work. It revisits familiar material to supplement Foucault's microphysics of power, which he traced in institutions like prisons or asylums and with regard to its effects on the bodies of individuals, with a genealogy of practices of power that target the biological life of the population and give rise to the modern state.

Keywords: Foucault, biopower, governmentality, (neo)liberalism, genealogy

INTRODUCTION

On January 11, 1978, after a sabbatical year and an almost two-year long absence from his responsibilities to present ongoing research at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault returned to the lectern on January 11, 1978, to deliver his course *Security, Territory, Population*. He announced that "this year I would like to begin studying something that I have called, somewhat vaguely, bio-power."¹ But three weeks later, on February 1, he suggested that what he "would really like to undertake is something that I would call a history of governmentality."²

Indeed, the *Security, Territory, Population* lectures have been widely received as the "first of the governmentality lectures."³ Their publication, alongside the 1979 course *The*

¹ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (2007), 1.

² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 108.

³ Thomas Biebricher, "Disciplining Europe—The Production of Economic Delinquency," *Foucault Studies* 23 (2017), 66; Marit Rosol, "On Resistance in the Post-Political City: Conduct and Counter-Conduct in

Birth of Biopolitics, spawned an ever growing and immensely productive research program on governmentality.⁴ But this reception has obscured other important aspects of the lecture course, such as its role in understanding Foucault's subsequent work on technologies of the self. As Arnold Davidson argues, "the fact that the main legacy of this course has been to give rise to so-called 'governmentality studies'" obfuscates its "essential moment," namely the elaboration of the notion of conduct as a "conceptual hinge ... that allows us to link together the political and ethical axes of Foucault's thought."⁵ Others, by contrast, have emphasized the contemporary relevance of the lectures as part of a genealogy of (neo)liberalism or as an effort to excavate practices of resistance immanent in (neo)liberalism's historical emergence.⁶

Vancouver," *Space and Polity* 18:1 (2014), 81n5. On *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics* as Foucault's "governmentality lectures" see also Thomas Biebricher, "Genealogy and Governmentality," *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2:3 (2008), 363–96; Thomas Biebricher and Frieder Vogelmann, "Governmentality and State Theory: Reinventing the Reinvented Wheel?," *Theory & Event* 15:3 (2012); Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, eds., *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges* (2011); Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade* (2016); Stephen Legg, "Subject to Truth: Before and after Governmentality in Foucault's 1970s," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34:5 (2016), 858–76; Thomas Lemke, "Canalizing and Coding: The Notion of 'Milieu' in Foucault's Lectures On Governmentality," *Социологически Проблеми* 48:3-4 (2016), 26–42; Mark Usher, "Veins of Concrete, Cities of Flow: Reasserting the Centrality of Circulation in Foucault's Analytics of Government," *Mobilities* 9:4 (2014): 550–69; Jonathan Joseph, "Governmentality of What? Populations, States and International Organisations," *Global Society* 23:4 (2009), 413–27.

⁴ For some key contributions see Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (1991); Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: Power And Rule In Modern Society* (1999); Stephen Legg and Deana Heath, eds., *South Asian Governmentalities: Michel Foucault and the Question of Postcolonial Orderings*, South Asia in the Social Sciences (2018); Thomas Lemke, "Governmentality Studies," in *Foucault-Handbuch: Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Clemens Kammler et al. (2014), 380–85; Thomas Lemke, *Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique* (2016); Sylvain Meyet, "Les trajectoires d'un texte: 'La gouvernementalité' de Michel Foucault," in *Travailler avec Foucault. Retours sur le politique*, ed. Sylvain Meyet, Marie-Cécile Naves, and Thomas Ribemont (2005), 13–36; Ramón Reichert, ed., *Governmentality Studies. Analysen liberal-demokratischer Gesellschaften im Anschluss an Michel Foucault* (2004); David Scott, "Colonial Governmentality," *Social Text* 43 (1995), 191–220.

⁵ Arnold I. Davidson, "Introduction," in *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, by Michel Foucault, ed. Michel Senellart et al. (2007), xviii. See also Arnold I. Davidson, "In Praise of Counter-Conduct," *History of the Human Sciences* 24:4 (2011), 25–41.

⁶ See Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas S. Rose, eds., *Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism, and Rationalities of Government* (1996); Thomas Biebricher, "The Biopolitics of Ordoliberalism," *Foucault Studies* 12 (2011), 171–91; Thomas Biebricher, *The Political Theory of Neoliberalism* (2019); Louisa Cadman, "How (Not) to Be Governed: Foucault, Critique, and the Political," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28:3 (2010), 539–56; Trent H. Hamann, "Neoliberalism, Governmentality, and Ethics," *Foucault Studies* 6 (2009), 37–59; Vanessa Lemm and Miguel Vatter, eds., *The Government of Life: Foucault, Biopolitics, and Neoliberalism* (2014); David T. Mitchell, *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment* (2015); David Newheiser, "Foucault, Gary Becker and the Critique of Neoliberalism," *Theory, Culture & Society* 33:5 (2016), 3–21; Sverre Raffnsøe, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, and Morten S. Thaning, "The (Neo)Liberal Art of Governing," in *Michel Foucault: A Research Companion*, ed. Sverre Raffnsøe, Marius Gudmand-Høyer, and Morten S. Thaning (2016), 280–332; Shannon Winnubst, "The Queer Thing about Neoliberal Pleasure: A Foucauldian Warning," *Foucault Studies* 14 (2012), 79–97; Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent, eds., *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (2016).

Whatever one takes to be the central theme and function of the lectures, their reception is marked by a general consensus that despite Foucault's opening remarks, they are not about biopower.⁷ Thus, it might seem misguided to take at face value Foucault's claim that the lectures are the beginning of a study of biopower and, more specifically, of "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species."⁸ And yet, I am interested, here, in situating the 1978 lecture course within the larger context of Foucault's development of an analytics of power that allows us to understand how a specific form of power has functioned in the world "in which we have been living for a considerable length of time, that is, since at least the end of the eighteenth century."⁹

My aim is not to cast doubt on Foucault's ostensible reorientation from an interest in biopower to a concern with governmentality, nor do I want to downplay the relevance of the research programs of governmentality studies and Foucauldian analyses of (neo)liberalism. Instead, I hope to show that the conceptual innovations and changes in direction in *Security, Territory, Population* can plausibly be understood as a reworking and clarification of earlier material, refracted through insights yielded by those previous studies.

On this view, Foucault's famous distinction between an anatomo-politics of the human body and a biopolitics of the population is not only a summary statement of his view of power but also a relay for further genealogical inquiry. Only when his patient empirical analysis yields the insight that biopower operates within "two series: the body-organism-discipline-institutions series, and the population-biological processes-regulatory mechanisms-State," can the "biological and Statist set, or bioregulation by the State" become the object of genealogical inquiry in its own right.¹⁰ Therefore, the 1978 lecture course can usefully be read as a continuation-through-transformation of Foucault's analytics of power.

In what follows, I offer a brief discussion of Foucault's conceptual framework for studying power and show how his increasingly nuanced conceptualizations are made possible by, at the same time as they reorient and advance, his genealogical practice. I then show how Foucault's claim *that* a nondisciplinary form of biopower over the population emerged in the eighteenth century in the apparatuses of the state is supplemented, in *Security, Territory, Population*, with a genealogical account of *how* this power was made possible by contingent historical events. I conclude with a brief consideration of the key insights and continued relevance of Foucault's lectures.

⁷ For a notable exception see Michel Senellart, "Course Context," in *Security, Territory, Population*, 369–401.

⁸ *Security, Territory, Population*, 1.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974-1975* (2004), 50.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (2004), 249–250.

POWER AND METHOD

As Foucault notes in the opening lecture of *Security, Territory, Population*, the notion of biopower is rather vague in his work. One key difficulty is that Foucault at times appears to use the terms “biopower” and “biopolitics” interchangeably, while on other occasions he seems to suggest that biopolitics is one particular form of biopower, the other one being disciplinary power. Consequently, there is some conceptual ambivalence both in Foucault’s work and in secondary literature on biopolitics and biopower.¹¹ Foucault’s perhaps clearest articulation of the notion of biopower can be found in the last lecture of his 1976 Collège de France course, “*Society Must Be Defended*,” where he diagnoses the emergence of a power over the biological life of human beings. Foucault argues that in this period, the classical right of sovereignty to “either have people put to death or let them live” was complemented by “the right to make live and to let die.”¹² He further insists that this new power over life was not articulated in political thought and theory but rather exercised in the mechanisms and techniques of power. Specifically, Foucault argues that it took shape in the disciplinary control of individual bodies at the end of the seventeenth century and, in the eighteenth, in a “nondisciplinary power [that] is applied not to man-as-body but to ... man-as-species.”¹³

Foucault describes this nondisciplinary form of power over life as a “biopolitics of the human species” and explains that “this biopolitics, this biopower that is beginning to establish itself” has as its field of intervention the biological processes intrinsic to the population (fertility, morbidity, mortality, etc.), on the one hand, and, on the other, the environment, or milieu, in which the population lives. He further suggests that biopolitics deploys medicine as a technology of public health and relies on mechanisms of insurance, savings, and safety.¹⁴ Biopolitics, in other words, comes into view as that “technology of biopower” that takes hold not of individuals but of the population and is exercised over human beings “insofar as they are living beings.”¹⁵ Reiterating this account in the final chapter of *La volonté de savoir*, Foucault thus offers the following summary statement of his account of biopower:

[S]tarting in the seventeenth century, this power over life evolved in two basic forms; these forms were not antithetical, however; they constituted rather two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations. One of these poles—the first to be formed, it seems—centered on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized

¹¹ See Paul Patton, “Life, Legitimation and Government,” *Constellations* 18:1 (2011), 35–45; for a helpful discussion of the concepts of biopower and biopolitics see Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, “Biopower Today,” *BioSocieties* 1:2 (2006), 195–217.

¹² Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 240–241.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 242.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 247.

the *disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body*. The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population*. The disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed. The setting up, in the course of the classical age, of this great bipolar technology – anatomic and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed toward the performances of the body, with attention to the processes of life – characterized a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through.¹⁶

This succinct formulation distills the central insights of a research program Foucault began in the early 1970s. His inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970 is a pivotal moment in this process, since it marks the introduction of a productive notion of power that constitutes domains of objects of knowledge.¹⁷ In subsequent years, Foucault refined this idea and elaborated an “analytics of power that no longer takes law as a model and a code”¹⁸ but instead grasps power in its “productive effectiveness, its strategic resourcefulness, its positivity.”¹⁹

Foucault himself described the year 1970 as a “moment of transition” and suggested that up until that point he had “accepted the traditional conception of power ... as that which lays down the law, which prohibits, which refuses, and which has a whole range of negative effects.” However, his “concrete experience ... with prisons, starting in 1971–72” revealed this view to be inadequate.²⁰ In a 1976 interview, Foucault describes the challenge of articulating a more adequate understanding of power. While he argues that the positivity of power had already been a central concern of his early work, Foucault admits that he “had not yet properly isolated” the “central problem of power”²¹ and recounts being “struck by the difficulty I had in formulating it.”

When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in *Madness and Civilisation* or *The Birth of the Clinic*, but power? Yet I’m perfectly aware that I scarcely ever used the word and never had such a field of analyses at my disposal.²²

Foucault attributes this difficulty to the political situation of the time, which confined the analysis of power to the juridical theory of sovereignty, on the one hand, and state

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1990), 139.

¹⁷ See Foucault’s insistence on the “affirmative power” of discourse, which has the power to “constitute domains of objects, in respect of which one can affirm or deny true or false propositions” in “The Order of Discourse,” in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (1981), 73.

¹⁸ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 90.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, “The History of Sexuality,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (1980), 183-184.

²¹ Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (1980), 113.

²² Foucault, “Truth and Power,” 115.

apparatuses, on the other. The task of studying “the way power was exercised—concretely and in detail—with its specificity, its techniques and tactics,” only became conceivable after 1968—“that is to say on the basis of daily struggles at grass roots level, among those whose fight was located in the fine meshes of the web of power.”²³ The political struggles of the late 1960s, in other words, provided Foucault both with a new model of power and a way of studying it in terms of “technology, of tactics and strategy” in order to grasp power in its productive dimension and at the levels at which it is exercised.²⁴

As Colin Koopman shows, this “methodological expansion”²⁵ is clearly underway in Foucault’s 1970/71 lecture course, *Lectures on the Will to Know*, even though he uses the term “morphology” rather than “genealogy” to describe his new approach.²⁶ But, by 1973, he characterized this method as a “dynastic, genealogical type of analysis,” which supplements his earlier archaeological studies of the rules of discourse that determine the limits of the sayable and knowable with an analysis of a larger set of practices and power relations with which discourses and knowledges are entangled.²⁷ Genealogy serves to examine how power is exercised in strategic confrontations at capillary levels throughout the social field and linked to the production of knowledge “in an absolutely specific fashion and according to a complex interplay.”²⁸ As Stuart Elden compellingly shows in his study of Foucault’s work on power, it is Foucault’s expansion of method in the early 1970s that allows him to come “closer and closer to his mature view of power” and enables him to “[begin] to sketch the broad contrast between sovereign power and a type of power he alternatively calls disciplinary power, punitive power, or the power of normalization.”²⁹

In a lecture on social medicine delivered in Rio de Janeiro in 1974, Foucault adds to this array of concepts the notions of “biopolitics,” “bio-history,” and “somatopolitics”³⁰ in order to describe a new political “regime that sees the care of the body, corporal health, the relation between illness and health, etc. as appropriate areas of State intervention.” The particular feature of this regime, Foucault argues, is that medicine functions, first, as

²³ Ibid., 115–116.

²⁴ Foucault, “The History of Sexuality,” 183–184.

²⁵ Colin Koopman, “Conduct and Power: Foucault’s Methodological Expansions in 1971,” in *Active Intolerance: Michel Foucault, the Prisons Information Group, and the Future of Abolition*, ed. Perry Zurn and Andrew Dilts (2016), 59–74.

²⁶ See in particular the first lecture in Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1970-1971 and Oedipal Knowledge*, ed. Daniel Defert (2013).

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Punitive Society. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1972-1973*, ed. Bernard E. Harcourt, (2015), 84.

²⁸ Foucault, *The Punitive Society*, 233.

²⁹ Stuart Elden, *Foucault: The Birth of Power* (2017), 102.

³⁰ Michel Foucault, “The Crisis of Medicine or the Crisis of Antimedicine?,” trans. Edgar C. Knowlton, William J. King, and Clare O’Farrell, *Foucault Studies* 1 (2004), 7. The three Rio lectures are Foucault, “The Crisis of Medicine or the Crisis of Antimedicine?”; Michel Foucault, “The Birth of Social Medicine,” in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion (1994), 134–156; Michel Foucault, “The Incorporation of the Hospital into Modern Technology,” in *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*, ed. Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden (2007), 141–151.

a social practice in the sense that it intervenes at the level of the species as well as the individual, and, second, as a “biopolitical strategy” whose target is “the somatic, the corporeal.”³¹ While Foucault does not systematically develop these concepts in the Rio lectures and largely abandons the terms “bio-history” and “somatocracy,”³² the notion of biopolitics nevertheless opens up a new register of analysis and a new set of discourses and practices relevant for genealogical inquiry. Specifically, the concept of biopolitics stakes out a new field of investigation in a power over life that operates in the apparatuses of the state and targets the biological life of populations.

Therefore, Foucault’s introduction of the notion of biopolitics in 1974 anticipates his later distinction between an anatomo-politics of the human body articulated in “the body-organism-discipline-institutions series” and a biopolitics of the population invested in a “biological and Statist set, or bioregulation by the State.” With this distinction in place, Foucault can train his genealogical method on the series “population-biological processes-regulatory mechanisms-State” as the grid of intelligibility for biopower.³³ As I suggest in the following section, this is the program for *Security, Territory, Population*.

THE 1978 LECTURES: A STUDY OF BIOPOWER

Foucault delivered the lecture course *Security, Territory, Population* between January and March 1978, after a sabbatical year had freed him from his obligation to report on ongoing research for a period of nearly two years. Foucault had completed his previous lecture course, “*Society Must Be Defended*,” in March 1976. Later that year, he lectured on alternatives to the prison in Montreal and completed the manuscript for *La Volonté de savoir*, which was published in December 1976. 1977 saw the publication of “The Lives of Infamous Men” and the collaborative project *Politiques de l’habitat*.³⁴ Foucault also wrote about the church fathers, gave interviews and talks on dissidence, madness, and psychiatry, and participated in political protests, for instance against the extradition to France of Klaus Croissant, a lawyer of the German Red Army Faction.³⁵ When Foucault returned to the Collège de France in January 1978 to deliver the *Security, Territory, Population* lectures, his attention had seemingly shifted from prisons and sexuality to new ideas: security, population, pastoral power, conduct, and, above all, governmentality.

But in many ways, the lecture course returns to and develops central themes Foucault had explored earlier. As Michel Senellart points out, for instance, the lectures appear to be “in absolute continuity with the conclusions of the 1976 lectures,” given Foucault’s

³¹ Foucault, “The Birth of Social Medicine,” 137.

³² Foucault uses the term “bio-history” and “bio-politics” in his short review of Jacques Ruffié’s book, *De la biologie à la culture: “Bio-Histoire et Bio-Politique,”* in *Dits et Écrits III, 1976-1979*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (1994), 95–97.

³³ *Society Must Be Defended*, 249–250.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, “Lives of Infamous Men,” in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion (1994), 157–175; Michel Foucault, *Politiques de l’habitat: 1800-1850* (1977).

³⁵ Daniel Defert, “Chronologie,” in *Dits et Écrits I, 1954-1969*, by Michel Foucault, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (1994), 13–64; Elden, *Foucault’s Last Decade*.

appeal to biopower as the unifying theme of the 1978 lectures and the subsequent lecture course, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Yet Senellart insists that even though “it would seem that the two courses do nothing else but retrace the genesis of this ‘power over life,’” Foucault’s “detours” lead him away from his “initial objective and reorient the lectures in a new direction.”³⁶ What I want to suggest is that this reorientation is not so much a departure from earlier themes but an expansion and enrichment of Foucault’s analytics of power through a reworking of familiar material on a different level and through a different set of discourses and practices. On this view, the 1978 lecture course can be read as a careful explication of the final lecture of “*Society Must Be Defended*” by means of a genealogy of biopower on the register of the series population-regulatory mechanisms-state. This is not a denial of the central role of other concepts, such as security, probability, or normalization, but a shift of emphasis intended to draw attention to the specific ways in which *Security, Territory, Population* continues, supplements, and extends Foucault’s earlier work.

Foucault begins the lecture course by revisiting the problem of infectious disease—a recurring point of reference throughout his work³⁷—to bring into focus this new biopolitical form of biopower. In the 1973 lecture course, *Abnormal*, Foucault identifies in different responses to infectious disease “two major models for the control of individuals in the West: one is the exclusion of lepers and the other is the model of the inclusion of plague victims.”³⁸ While the response to leprosy illustrates the sovereign model of exclusion, the plague model exemplifies a disciplinary technology of power that emerged in the eighteenth century and that exercises control not by excluding and banishing the sick but by taking hold of, managing, and correcting their bodies. In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault adds a third model, which he finds in practices of variolization and inoculation against smallpox. He argues that the “medical campaigns that try to halt epidemic or endemic phenomena” are absolutely specific in their function and irreducible to the mechanisms of law and discipline. Insofar as they are “mechanisms with the function of modifying something in the biological destiny of the species,”³⁹ they are emblematic of a biopolitical technology that manages populations and operates through a *dispositif* of security.

The first three lectures serve to isolate and explicate a number of elements that characterize this technology of power: the milieu, the aleatory, and normalization. While Foucault mentions these elements without much further discussion at the end of the 1976

³⁶ Senellart, “Course Context,” 369.

³⁷ See in particular Foucault, *Abnormal*; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1994); Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalifa (2006); “The Birth of Social Medicine”; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1995). For a helpful discussion of infectious disease in Foucault’s work see Philipp Sarasin, “Vapors, Viruses, Resistance(s): The Trace of Infection in the Work of Michel Foucault,” in *Networked Disease*, ed. S. Harris Ali and Roger Keil (2008), 267–80.

³⁸ *Abnormal*, 44; see also “The Birth of Social Medicine,” 145; Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 198.

³⁹ *Security, Territory, Population*, 10.

lecture course,⁴⁰ he now develops them in detail by contrasting how dispositifs of discipline and security deal with space, the event, and normalization.

With regard to space, Foucault considers changes in the spatial organization of the town from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. The transformation of urban space shows that whereas “sovereignty capitalizes a territory” and “discipline structures a space and addresses the essential problem of a hierarchical and functional distribution of elements, security will try to plan a milieu in terms of events or series of events or possible elements, of series that will have to be regulated within a multivalent and transformable framework.”⁴¹ By milieu, Foucault understands a “field of intervention in which, instead of affecting individuals as a set of legal subjects capable of voluntary actions ... and instead of affecting them as a multiplicity of organisms, of bodies capable of performances ... one tries to affect, precisely, a population.”⁴² The space of security, in other words, is a space of natural and artificial givens in which the population lives and in which one must intervene to govern the population. Accordingly, biopolitics comes into view as a mode of exercising power over the population through government of the milieu.

The second feature of the dispositif of security lies in its particular relationship to the event, which Foucault illustrates through a discussion of scarcity of grain. In the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, the response to scarcity was essentially one of prevention. For mercantilists, shortage of grain was something to be avoided through active intervention and regulation. Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, struggles over freedom of grain led to changes in governmental techniques that established the free circulation of grain as a political practice and an economic doctrine. Foucault identifies this new approach in the physiocratic answer to scarcity, but he cautions against the idea that the free circulation of grain was an application of physiocratic principles. Instead, he shows that physiocracy was itself an effect of changes in practices of government as well as of a larger transformation of governmental reason that works with the natural processes of phenomena and “respond[s] to a reality in such a way that this response cancels out the reality to which it responds—nullifies it, or limits, checks, or regulates it.”⁴³ In contrast to sovereignty, which imagines and then prohibits what could happen, and in distinction from discipline, which complements reality with artificial measures of control and regulation, biopolitics thus operates within reality by letting it run its natural course.

The third feature of the dispositif of security comes into view in the form of normalization specific to it.⁴⁴ Foucault argues that whereas law codifies a norm, disciplinary normalization works by first positing an optimal model as a prescriptive

⁴⁰ The final lecture of the “*Society Must Be Defended*” course also links biopolitics to the population, the town, insurance and safety, epidemics, statistics, and the economy. All of these notions play a central role in the 1978 lecture course.

⁴¹ *Security, Territory, Population*, 20.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 21. On the notion of the milieu see Lemke, “Canalizing and Coding.”

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁴ For a detailed study of the norm and normalization in Foucault’s account of (bio)power see Mary Beth Mader, “Foucault and Social Measure,” *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 17:1 (2007), 1–25.

norm and then distinguishing between the normal and the abnormal in reference to this norm. Foucault introduces the term “normation” to describe this particular mode of disciplinary normalization and to distinguish it from biopolitical normalization. Returning to the example of smallpox, he charts a brief genealogy of variolization and vaccination to show how these practices, which were “unthinkable in the terms of medical rationality of this time,” became acceptable.⁴⁵ He identifies these conditions of acceptability in the emergence of statistics and the calculus of probability—what he describes as the “rationalization of chance”⁴⁶—and in their integration with other mechanisms of security that sought to govern chance by working with reality itself. Just like the physiocratic response to scarcity arranged the circulation of grain so as to cancel out the phenomenon of scarcity, variolization provoked smallpox “but under conditions such that nullification of the disease could take place.”⁴⁷ Variolization is, then, indicative of an apparatus of security that determines the normal distribution of infection, morbidity, and mortality in healthy and sick populations in order to then “reduce the most unfavorable, deviant normalities in relation to the normal, general curve.”⁴⁸ This, for Foucault, is “normalization in the strict sense:” a deduction of the norm from the play (*jeu*) of different normal distributions.⁴⁹ Biopolitics, therefore, operates through regulatory controls whose purpose is to “bring in line” the most disadvantageous normalities with the more favorable.⁵⁰

Foucault’s opening discussion of the town, scarcity, and contagion is intended to bring into relief a series of elements that characterize the dispositif of security through which biopolitics operates. But it also draws attention to the emergence of the population as the “pertinent level of government action.”⁵¹ In particular, Foucault argues that the phenomena of the town, scarcity, and contagion presuppose a particular notion of collectivity as the relevant level of governmental intervention. This collectivity is the population.

Importantly, the population is not only a new political reality but also a normative category that prescribes behaviors and modes of being a subject. In an instructive yet underdeveloped discussion of the physiocrat Louis-Paul Abeille, Foucault introduces a critical distinction between those who “really act as members of the population” and those who “throw themselves on the supplies” or “hold back grain” and, in so doing, “conduct themselves in relation to the management of the population, at the level of the population, as if they were not part of the population as a collective subject-object, as if they put themselves outside of it.” Abeille identifies the latter as “the people” who, “refusing to be the population, disrupt the system.”⁵²

⁴⁵ *Security, Territory, Population*, 58.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 59; see also Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (1990).

⁴⁷ *Security, Territory, Population*, 59.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 43–44.

Foucault emphasizes the importance of “this people/population opposition,”⁵³ but he does not, in the 1978 lecture course, relate this internal division within the population to earlier discussions of racism, by which he understands a “principle of exclusion and segregation and, ultimately, ... a way of normalizing society” that serves to defend the population and, indeed, the human race against abnormal elements within itself.⁵⁴ Indeed, the question of racism as a central mechanism in the “life and death game” that accompanies the entrance of life into the political calculations of the state is curiously absent in *Security, Territory, Population*. Foucault explores these connections elsewhere, however, suggesting that liberalism, the rule of law, and the modern state all revolve around “one of the central antinomies of our political reason,” namely the “coexistence in political structures of large destructive mechanisms and institutions oriented toward the care of individual life.”⁵⁵ This antinomy has its roots at least in part in the birth of the population as an internally divided entity whose government, consequently, not only requires techniques for fostering the life of the population but also needs mechanisms for excluding, rejecting, and eliminating “the people.” As Foucault argues, the state “exercises its power over living beings as living beings, and its politics is, therefore, necessarily a biopolitics.”

Since the population is never more than that of which the state takes care in its own interest, of course, the state can, if necessary, massacre it. So thanatopolitics is the other side of biopolitics.⁵⁶

In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault is focused on the side of biopolitics and on the entry into political calculation and practice of the population as a new problematic for government. Because the population depends on variables such as the climate, environment, or social customs, and because it is a totality that is, nevertheless, constituted by individuals with their own desires, it cannot simply be directed by sovereign decree. Instead, it can only be governed indirectly through actions on seemingly distant elements. Moreover, while government must pursue the well-being of the population as a whole, this can only be accomplished through the free play of individual desire. The emergence of the population in the eighteenth century, therefore, requires a new technology of power and a new governmental rationality that allow for governing this peculiar collective subject.

Readers will note, as Foucault does, that the term “government” plays a central role in his discussion of the population: “The more I have spoken about population, the more I have stopped saying ‘sovereign.’” This, he suggests, is not an entirely deliberate terminological intervention that indicates the emergence of a “new technique” which exceeds the scope of sovereignty and discipline but is, instead, tied to the problematics of

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁴ *Society Must Be Defended*, 61.

⁵⁵ Michel Foucault, “The Political Technology of Individuals,” in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. James D. Faubion (2001), 405.

⁵⁶ Foucault, “The Political Technology of Individuals,” 416; translation modified.

the population and of bioregulation of the population by the state.⁵⁷ Foucault's study for the remainder of the lecture course of the historical emergence and transformation of the problem of government is, thus, a genealogy of this technique that operates at the level of the state and takes as its object the population and its biological processes. This is why Foucault's study of biopolitics is simultaneously a genealogy of government and a "genealogy of the modern state and its apparatuses that is not based on, as they say, a circular ontology of the state asserting itself and growing like a huge monster or automatic machine" but a "genealogy of the modern state and its different apparatuses on the basis of a history of governmental reason."⁵⁸

Foucault had introduced the notion of government five years earlier. In *Abnormal*, he argues that "the Classical Age invented techniques of power that can be transferred to very different institutional supports, to State apparatuses, institutions, the family, and so forth" and that "the Classical Age developed therefore what could be called an 'art of governing,' in the sense in which 'government' was then understood as precisely the 'government' of children, the 'government' of the mad, the 'government' of the poor, and before long, the 'government' of workers."⁵⁹ Foucault does not develop this notion of government in any more detail, but his claim suggests that techniques of government are relays for power at the different levels of institutions and the state. He reiterates this point in the final lecture of "*Society Must Be Defended*," where he emphasizes that the series of "organo-discipline of the institution" and "bioregulation by the State" "do not exist at the same level" and, for this very reason, "can be articulated with each other."⁶⁰ Foucault again returns to this idea at the very end of *Security, Territory, Population*, where he suggests that the lectures demonstrate that "there is not a sort of break between the level of micro-power and the level of macro-power" and that "an analysis in terms of micro-powers comes back without any difficulty to the analysis of problems like those of government and the state."⁶¹ These comments not only suggest that the lecture course is indeed a continuation and expansion of earlier work but also identify the notion of government as the key for understanding the complex interplay of practices of power at the micro-level of the institution and the macro-level of the state.

Foucault's account of government in the 1978 lecture course is a wide-ranging and detailed study and, in its proliferation of discourses and practices that give rise to the modern state, an exemplar of genealogical inquiry. Among the conditions of possibility of the techniques of exercising power over the population that have as their correlate the modern state, Foucault names the generalization of the problematic of government in the sixteenth century as well as the crisis of the Christian pastorate and the formation of the Classical episteme in the same period.

⁵⁷ *Security, Territory, Population*, 76.

⁵⁸ *Security, Territory, Population*, 354.

⁵⁹ *Abnormal*, 49.

⁶⁰ *Society Must Be Defended*, 250.

⁶¹ *Security, Territory, Population*, 358.

According to his genealogy, the problem of government can be found in treatises of antiquity and the Middle Ages that offered advice to the princes, but he traces the formation of a specifically political problematic of government to an explosion, in the sixteenth century, of questions of the government of the self, of souls, of children, and of the state by the prince. In particular, the literature on government developed in distinction from Machiavelli's effort to articulate the relationship of the prince to their principality. What emerged in the sixteenth century, by contrast, was an art of government that situated political government within a plurality of forms of government and defined it as the exercise of power in the form of the economy. That is, government was conceived as the right disposition of things in pursuit of an end specific to the things being governed.

This art of government was not only elaborated by political theorists and philosophers; it was also linked to the development of the administrative apparatus of the state and its attendant forms of knowledge, namely statistics and mercantilism. For Foucault, in other words, the process of state centralization and the transition from feudalism to "the great territorial, administrative, and colonial states" is one of the key conditions of possibility for the formation of an art of government, even though its full elaboration was blocked by the institutional forms of administrative monarchy, historical events like wars and other crises, and a focus on sovereignty as the theoretical model and practical principle of political organization.⁶² It was not until the emergence of the population in the eighteenth century that the art of government could be extricated from the structures of sovereignty and transformed into a political science concerned with techniques of government that have the population as their object and political economy as their form of knowledge.

Foucault gives the name "governmentality" to these techniques and defines this term as "the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument." But "governmentality" also means "the tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the pre-eminence over all other types of power—sovereignty, discipline, and so on—of the type of power that we can call 'government' and which has led to the development of a series of specific governmental apparatuses (*appareils*) on the one hand, and, on the other to the development of a series of knowledge." Finally, "governmentality" describes "the process, or rather, the result of the process by which the state of justice of the Middle Ages became the administrative state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was gradually 'governmentalized.'"⁶³ The notion of governmentality, therefore, allows Foucault to recast his analysis of power by orienting it around the contingent historical emergence of a set of practices for governing populations, which produce knowledge in the form of political economy and have as their correlate the modern state. Accordingly, his genealogy of governmentality identifies its

⁶² *Security, Territory, Population*, 89.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 108.

conditions of possibility in the twin crises of the Christian pastorate and the break-up of the cosmological-theological continuum in the sixteenth century.

The pastorate is a particular type of power whose origins Foucault locates in the pre-Christian East and which was introduced to the West through the constitution of Christianity as a church as well as through practices of spiritual direction. The model of pastoral power is the shepherd's power over their flock: an individualizing power exercised over a multiplicity in movement, aimed at the salvation of the flock, invested in an office that is a burden and duty. With its uptake in Christianity, pastoral power began to circulate in an economy of faults and merits, within a generalized field of obedience, and in practices of spiritual direction and the direction of conduct that serve to produce hidden truths about the subject.⁶⁴ But from the Middle Ages to the eighteenth century, the Christian pastorate was gradually opened up by external and internal resistances, such as active resistance to Christianization, heresies and witchcraft, and revolts of conduct which searched for different ways of conducting oneself and being conducted. These counter-conducts led to a crisis of the Christian pastorate and disseminated the question of the conduct of men outside of the authority of the church.⁶⁵

At the same time, in a rather distant field, the foundation of the classical episteme in the sixteenth century gave rise to new scientific practices and knowledges that did away with the great theological-cosmological continuum, which had offered both justification and model for political rule: a good sovereign ruled in continuity with God's rule over creation and fathers' rule over their families. With new scientific discoveries and the loss of an omnipotent and benevolent God as the model for political rule, however, a new model for governing human beings was needed. This model was found in the pastorate, which served as a relay for sovereign power in the context of the development of a new art of government.

⁶⁴ Foucault fills out the genealogy of the subject announced here in Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-1982* (2005); Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the College de France, 1982-1983*, ed. Arnold I. I. Davidson (2011); Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (The Government of Self and Others II). Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984*, ed. François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and Arnold I. Davidson, (2011).

⁶⁵ For discussion of the importance of the notion of counter-conduct for Foucault's later work on practices of the self and an ethics of resistance see Davidson, "In Praise of Counter-Conduct." On conduct and counter-conduct more generally see Mark Bevir, "Foucault and Critique: Deploying Agency Against Autonomy," *Political Theory* 27 (1999), 65-84; Carl Death, "Counter-Conducts: A Foucauldian Analytics of Protest," *Social Movement Studies* 9:3 (2010), 235-51; Olga Demetriou, "Counter-Conduct and the Everyday: Anthropological Engagements with Philosophy," *Global Society* 30:2 (2016), 218-37; James F. Depew, "Foucault Among the Stoics: Oikeiosis and Counter-Conduct," *Foucault Studies* 21 (2016), 22-51; Daniele Lorenzini, "From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude: Michel Foucault and the Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much," *Foucault Studies* 21 (2016), 7-21; Corey McCall, "Rituals of Conduct and Counter-Conduct," *Foucault Studies* 21 (2016), 52-79; Louiza Odysseos, Carl Death, and Helle Malmvig, "Interrogating Michel Foucault's Counter-Conduct: Theorising the Subjects and Practices of Resistance in Global Politics," *Global Society* 30:2 (2016), 151-56; Miikka Pyykkönen, "Liberalism, Governmentality and Counter-Conduct; An Introduction to Foucauldian Analytics of Liberal Civil Society Notions," *Foucault Studies* 20 (2015), 8-35; Rosol, "On Resistance in the Post-Political City."

Foucault provides an intricate account of this new governmental rationality from its first articulation in *raison d'État* and its subsequent transformation into *raison économique*.⁶⁶ Examining the writings of Botero, Chemnitz, and Palazzo, he describes how, with the formation of *raison d'État*, the state entered into reflected practice. According to *raison d'État*, government serves the exclusive purpose of preserving the state. As such, it refers to nothing other than the state and specifies the necessary and sufficient means for its preservation. Thus, *raison d'État* also constitutes the knowledge that is necessary for preserving the state. The focus on preservation makes *raison d'État* a distinctly conservative governmental rationality that negates questions of the state's origin, foundation, legitimacy, or telos. Instead, "one is within government, one is already within *raison d'État*, one is already within the state," whose salvation must be assured by any means necessary.⁶⁷

Foucault shows that *raison d'État* was made to function at the level of political practice through the police and a military-diplomatic apparatus, which gave rise to a gradual transformation of *raison d'État* through the emergence of the population as a reflected element of governmental action. Their task was to increase the state's forces and maintain peace. The pursuit of these tasks required activities such as the organization of commerce and competition between states, the circulation of goods within states, the regulation of people's activity, the maximization of the number of citizens, the guarantee of necessities of life and health. These activities, however, were contested at the level of political practice, where the interventionism of the police and the military-diplomatic apparatus ultimately gave way to the spontaneous adjustment of the optimal number of citizens, the free circulation of grains, free trade between countries, and the realization of the common good through the free play of individual interests.

These new practices allowed for the articulation of a new governmental reason, *raison économique* or liberal reason, which no longer subordinates the law to the state but, instead, makes government subservient to the laws of economic processes and the population. For liberal reason, the prosperity of the state is not a matter of intervention but of leaving things alone (*laissez faire*) so they can run their natural course.

Liberal reason, therefore, constitutes a new governmental rationality that differs in key respects from the mercantilist and police state of *raison d'État*. Where *raison d'État* carved out the domain of the state when the problem of government was posed by the break-up of the theological-cosmological continuum, liberal reason pursued the question of government by carving out the domain of the economy. Further, the naturalness of the theological-cosmological continuum according to which sovereign rule was modeled after

⁶⁶ For a more detailed discussion of Foucault's account of this transformation see my "From Race War to Socialist Racism: Foucault's Second Transcription," *Foucault Studies* 22 (2017), 134–52 and *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Terror, Empire* (2018), 28–31. A further transformation is the focus of Foucault's subsequent lecture course, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, which examines neoliberalism as another governmental rationality. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* (2010); see also Daniele Lorenzini, "Governmentality, Subjectivity, and the Neoliberal Form of Life," *Journal for Cultural Research* 22:2 (2018), 154–66.

⁶⁷ *Security, Territory, Population*, 259; translation modified.

God's rule over nature and creation was, first, supplanted by the artificiality of *raison d'État*. Second, it reappeared in liberal reason, where it was, however, displaced onto society and the economy. From now on, the task of government was the management and arrangement of natural processes through mechanisms of security. The transition from *raison d'État* to liberal reason thus also introduced a new notion of freedom, understood not simply as an individual right against the government but as a "condition of governing well." Violations of freedom, on this view, are not primarily an "abuse of rights with regard to the law" but "above all ignorance of how to govern properly."⁶⁸ Foucault's historical study of the exercise of power in the form of government is, thus, also a genealogy of "liberalism as the general framework of biopolitics."⁶⁹

Starting with the observation of a new type of power over life whose level of application is the population and which deploys mechanisms of security, the lecture course performs Foucault's signature methodological move—what Thomas Flynn calls "nominalist reversal"⁷⁰—to reveal that the state is not the cause of particular ways of governing but a function of those governmental techniques and practices of power that are presumed to be its historical effect. As Foucault points out, "the state is not that kind of cold monster in history that has continually grown and developed as a sort of threatening organism above civil society" but "an episode in government."⁷¹ By tracing the historically specific techniques and practices of governing the population, which have as their effect the modern state, Foucault shows that, and how, biopolitics is made possible by a multiplicity of contingent events that he seeks to grasp "in their proper dispersion."⁷² He thereby constructs around the ostensibly unitary phenomenon of the modern state a "'polyhedron' of intelligibility, the number of whose faces is not given in advance and can never properly be taken as finite."⁷³

Security, Territory, Population describes some of the faces of this polyhedron. Chief among them is the emergence of the population, in the eighteenth century, as a new political subject that is "absolutely foreign to the juridical and political thought of earlier centuries."⁷⁴ Because the population is inaccessible to the mechanisms of sovereignty and discipline, a new and specific mode of exercising power is needed and found in government. That government was available as a model for political rule at the time was itself the result of chance events, including the crisis of the Christian pastorate, the formation of the Classical episteme, and a generalization of questions of government in the sixteenth century. But these older forms of thought and ways of doing things were themselves transformed in light of the specific problematics on which they were brought

⁶⁸ Ibid., 353.

⁶⁹ Unread pages of the manuscript for the lecture of 10 January 1979. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 22.

⁷⁰ Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Volume Two: A Poststructuralist Mapping of History* (2010), 43.

⁷¹ *Security, Territory, Population*, 248.

⁷² Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (1991), 81.

⁷³ Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (1991), 77.

⁷⁴ *Security, Territory, Population*, 42.

to bear. It is in the history of these transformations that Foucault finds the conditions of possibility of liberalism as an art of government that is “opposed to *raison d’État*” and knowledge of which will allow us “to grasp what biopolitics is.”⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

Three important insights can be gleaned from the foregoing discussion. First, I have argued that the 1978 course at the Collège de France, *Security, Territory, Population*, is best understood not as a radical change in direction of Foucault’s intellectual project but as a continuation-with-modification of his analytics of power. The lecture course revisits familiar material to supplement Foucault’s microphysics of power that he traced in institutions like prisons or asylums and with regard to its effects on the bodies of individuals, with a genealogy of those practices of power over the population and its biological processes that give expression to the modern state.

Second, this reworking of Foucault’s account of power is made possible by the articulation of concepts and the identification of elements that are the result of prior genealogical work but come to serve as orienting devices for further inquiry. The lecture course, therefore, 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. Historical specificity is thereby embedded at the very core of Foucauldian inquiry.

Finally, this historical specificity is what makes the genealogy of biopolitics Foucault traces in the 1978 lecture course both compelling and treacherous. It is compelling because of its empirically informed and descriptively rich excavation 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, operates through the play of different normalities, and has as its effect the modern state. But the temptation to use this account to analyze our own political conditions is a dangerous one. For even through Foucault certainly provides us with orientation and the tools to engage in a critique of the present, the present at stake is ours, not his. To theorize our present means to conduct our own genealogical studies of specific practices of power that give rise to states that may or may not resemble the particular kind of twentieth-century European, (neo)liberal, governmental state whose genealogy Foucault sought to trace. Foucault announced *Security, Territory, Population* as the beginning of a study of biopolitics, and like him, we must be willing to continuously begin anew in our attempts to make sense of our own present.

Acknowledgments

⁷⁵ *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 22.

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Author info

Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson
verlenbu@syr.edu

Associate Professor of Philosophy
Syracuse University
New York, USA

Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Syracuse University. She is the author of *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Terror, Empire* (Columbia University Press, 2018) as well as of articles on Foucault, political violence, and method in political theory.