Governmentality
Current Issues and Future Challenges

Edited by Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann and Thomas Lemke
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8 Beyond Foucault
From Biopolitics to the Government of Life

Thomas Lemke

Only when we know what is this governmental regime called liberalism was, will we be able to grasp what biopolitics is. (Foucault 2008: 22)

The concept of biopolitics has had a remarkable career. Until recently only a small number of specialists were familiar with it, but at present it is enjoying ever-greater resonance. The spectrum of its uses now extends from refugee policies to AIDS prevention and onward to questions regarding population growth.¹ The concept has become a universal cipher for encapsulating the general results of biological knowledge and bio-technical innovation; it designates a diffuse mix composed of ethical concerns, political challenges, and economic interests (see Anderson 1987; Gerhardt 2004).

That the concept has a century-old history is not so well known. It already surfaces in the first half of the twentieth century, initially in organicist concepts of the state (Kjellén 1920; Roberts 1938), and later in Nazi texts in which the regulation of life and race took a prominent role (von Kohl 1933; Reiter 1939).² In the 1960s, a new research field called “biopolitics” emerged in Anglo-American political science, its basic tenet being that political action rests on biological laws that consequently need to be taken account of by political scientists and social scientists. For this approach, the analysis of political structures and processes demands application of knowledge from the behavioral sciences, social biology, and evolutionary theory (Somit and Peterson 1998; Masters 2001; Alford and Hibbing 2008).

In face of this naturalism, Michel Foucault proposed a relational and historical concept of “biopolitics.” In his work, the term in fact denotes an explicit break with the effort to derive political processes and structures from biological determinants. To the contrary, Foucault analyzes the historical process within which “life” emerges as the “object” of political strategies. Instead of presuming originary and timeless laws, he diagnoses a historical caesura—a discontinuity of political praxis. In this respect, biopolitics signifies a specific modern form of the exercise of power. Historically and analytically, Foucault distinguished between two dimensions of this “life”-oriented power: on the one hand, the
disciplining of the individual body; on the other hand, regulation of the populace (1990a: 139; 141–145).

Foucault viewed the combination of these two dimensions as the essential premise for establishing capitalism and constituting the national state. That combinatorial process, he argued, allowed the creation of economically productive, militarily useful, and politically obedient bodies, a separation of the “birth of biopolitics” from the emergence of capitalism thus being impossible (Foucault 2000: 137). Within this biopolitical constellation, modern racism is of central significance. It establishes an analytic grid distinguishing “what must live” from “what must die,” good, higher, and ascending races from those deemed bad, inferior, and descending, thus allowing a hierarchization and fragmentation of the social sphere (2003: 254).³

Foucault’s concept of biopolitics is complex and has been assessed in highly varied ways. Very schematically, two central lines of reception can be distinguished. The first has its home in philosophy and social and political theory; it focuses on the mode of politics. How does biopolitics function and what counterforces does it mobilize? How is it to be distinguished historically and analytically from “classical” forms of political representation and articulation? The extreme poles of the relevant debate represent its most prominent contributions: the writings of Giorgio Agamben on the one side, those of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri on the other. The second line of reception has its starting point in the sociology of science and technology, the history of science and medicine, and cultural anthropology, together with feminist theory and gender studies. Its main interest is the substance of life. If as a result of biotechnical developments the living body is now understood as a readable and rewritable text, then the question of biopolitics is posed in a new way: what is the meaning of life within such a political-technical constellation?

In the first two sections of this contribution, I will trace revisions and refinements of the concept of biopolitics that have been formulated in these two lines of reception. In the third section, I suggest tying the two research perspectives closer together—an approach already embedded in Foucault’s work but not systematically developed. My main argument is that Foucault pursues the question of biopolitics further within a “grid of governmentality” (Foucault 2008: 186). Initially, his analysis of biopolitical mechanisms in Discipline and Punish and the Will to Knowledge fell short, since it concentrated on disciplinary processes and ways of regulating the populace, thus being broadly reduced to a kind of body politics. In contrast, the concept of government directs our attention to the relation between forms of self-direction and government by others, allowing an investigation of moral-political modes of existence. In total, the project outlined here is aimed at a systematic linkage between two central concepts from Foucault’s work—biopolitics and governmentality—and an analytics of biopolitics whose dimensions will be described in the last section of this article. Such an analytics will make it possible to formulate a series of questions that usually remain outside the pertinent academic and political discussions; it
also allows an exploration of the systematic ties between liberal forms of
government and biopolitical problems.

1. BARE LIFE OR LIVING MULTITUDE: WHAT IS POLITICS?

Giorgio Agamben (1998) has outlined one of the most important revisions
of the concept of biopolitics. Agamben, in fact, presumes that all Western
politics since antiquity should be characterized as biopolitics. In order to jus-
tify this thesis, he takes up ideas from Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Han-
nah Arendt, Martin Heidegger, and Georges Bataille, along with Foucault.
According to Agamben, the main difference within the realm of the political
is not that between friend and enemy (pace Schmitt) but that between “bare
life” (ζωή) and political existence (bios), natural being and a human being’s
legal existence. In this light, the inclusion into a political community seems
only possible by the simultaneous exclusion of some human beings who are
not allowed to become full legal subjects. According to Agamben, we find at
the beginning of all politics the establishment of a borderline and the inaugu-
ration of a space that is deprived of the protection of the law: “The original
juridico-political relationship is the ban” (ibid.: 189).

In this manner, for Agamben the present period is the catastrophic end-
point of a political tradition that originated in Greek antiquity and led to the
death camps. In Homo Sacer and subsequent work, Agamben declared the
camps to be the “biopolitical paradigm of the West” (1998: 181), since they
were the locus of a disappearance of the border between rule and exception.
However, his discussion of the camps is not primarily related to past horror
but to present sites marked by the state of exception: places where law and
fact, rule and exception indistinguishably intermesh. Here not legal subjects
but “bare life” can be encountered; the state of exception is permanently in
play. Alongside death camp inmates, the examples Agamben introduces are
stateless people, refugees, and comatose patients. However, Agamben is less
interested in life than in its “nakedness”; at the center of his reflections stand
not drills and discipline, life’s normalization and endowment with norms,
but rather the threat of death as the establishment and materializing of a bor-
der. For Agamben, biopolitics is thus above all “thanatopolitics” (1998: 122;

In their work, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri arrive at entirely differ-
ent conclusions. They try to give the concept of biopolitics positive mean-
ing, tying their arguments to the Italian movement for workers’ autonomy,
ideas from classical political and legal theory, poststructuralist critiques
centered on identity and the subject, and the Marxist tradition. Where
Agamben criticizes Foucault for failing to see that modern biopolitics rests
on the solid foundation of a premodern sovereign power, Hardt and Negri
criticize the French thinker for having failed to recognize the transfor-
mation of modern into postmodern biopolitics.
For Hardt and Negri, biopolitics does not involve an intermeshing of rule and exception but rather a dissolution of the boundaries between economics and politics, reproduction and production, thus marking nothing less than a new stage of capitalism. Here, in their view, the creation of “life” is no longer something both limited to the realm of reproduction and subordinated to the labor process; to the contrary, “life” now determines production itself. With biopolitics, they designate the constitution of a political regime that in the end embraces the totality of the individual’s existence, thus preparing the way for a new revolutionary subject: a creative and living entity, the “multitude.” Hence the biopolitical order that Hardt and Negri delineate possesses the material requirements for forms of associative cooperation potentially going beyond the structural constraints of capitalist production: “Empire creates a greater potential for revolution than did the modern regimes of power because it presents us, alongside the machine of command, with an alternative: the set of all the exploited and subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them” (Hardt and Negri 2000: 392).

For these two authors, “biopolitics” stands for an entire series of fractures and border displacements. It signifies the transition from modernity to postmodernity, imperialism to empire, and also marks a new relation between nature and culture (ibid: 187). It signifies a “civilization of nature,” nature here meaning everything previously external to the production process. This diagnosis is the basis for the immanent perspective defining the analysis of Hardt and Negri. Once economics and politics, societal production and ideological legitimation become more or less conflated, we no longer have an external standpoint of life or truth to be set against Empire. Empire creates the world in which it lives: “Biopower is a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it. Power can achieve an effective command over the entire life of the population only when it becomes an integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord” (ibid: 23–24).

According to Hardt and Negri all of society is subsumed under capitalism, but these authors tie this seemingly gloomy diagnosis to a revolutionary promise. If biopower represents power over life, this very life forms the terrain upon which counterforces and modes of resistance are constituted. The same competences, affects, and forms of cooperation promoted by the new order of production and rule undermine that order by barricading themselves against cooption and exploitation, while awakening the desire for autonomous and egalitarian forms of life. In this way biopower reacts to a living and creative biopolitical force external to it, which it regulates and forms without, however, being able to completely control and rule it. From this perspective, biopolitics stands opposed to biopower and points to the possibility of new associative forms emerging from the body and its own powers.
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The Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito has developed his own concept of biopolitics at a critical distance from both Agamben's project and the analysis of Hardt and Negri. *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy* (2008) is the last part of a trilogy taking up and developing ideas from the two previous books. Esposito's main thesis is that modern Western political thinking is ruled by the "paradigm of immunization" (2008: 45). Through a reconstruction of political theory since Hobbes, he argues that modern concepts of security, property, and freedom can only be properly understood within a logic of immunity: a logic characterized by an inner connection between life and politics, in which immunity preserves and develops life by limiting its expansive and productive force. At the center of political action and thinking stands the safeguarding and protection of life: an objective that in the end produces (self-)destructive effects. To the degree that the logic of immunization protects and preserves, it negates the singularity of life processes, reducing them to biological existence. The "immunitary dialectic" (2008: 56) leads, Esposito argues, from a project to preserve life, to a negative form of protecting life, and onward to its negation.

The paradigm of immunity allows an understanding of the opposing aspects and dimensions of biopolitics—promotion and development of life on the one hand, its destruction on the other, as two constitutive moments of a shared problematic. Esposito views the Nazi racial program as the most radical expression of an "immunatory" rationality in which a life-centered politics becomes inverted into its negative, a politics of death (a "thanatopolitics"). Like Foucault and Agamben, he insists that Nazism is part of a continuum of modern political thought; but unlike them he locates its specific characteristics neither in a principle of sovereignty nor in the primacy of a state of exception. Rather, Esposito (2008: 137–138) underscores the medical-therapeutic aims of Nazism, the programmatic significance it ascribes to the struggle against illness, degeneration, and death.

Esposito (2008: 3–7; see also Campbell 2008) sees this "thanatopolitics" as by no means disappearing with the defeat of Nazi Germany, but continuing to shape the present. As a counter-model, he presents an affirmative "biopolitics"; its points of reference include the idea of a non-completed, open individual and collective body that resists any efforts at unification and closure, and that of an immanent normativity of life standing opposed to the project of an external control of life processes. This vision of an affirmative biopolitics is meant to be "capable of overturning the Nazi politics of death in a politics that is no longer over life but of life" (2008: 11; italics in original). In place of a self-destructive logic of immunity, it presents a new concept of communality—a concept recognizing the individual/collective body's constitutive vulnerability, openness, and finitude as the very foundation for the community, instead of permanently struggling against such qualities as a perceived threat to it.
2. MOLECULAR POLITICS, ANTHROPOPOLITICS, THANATOPOLITICS: WHAT IS LIFE?

The second line of reception tied to Foucault’s concept of biopolitics addresses recent research in the biosciences, analyzing technological developments that allow access to “life itself” (Franklin 2000). It starts with the observation that as a result of biotechnological practices, the idea of a natural origin of all living beings is beginning to be replaced by the idea of an artificial plurality of living beings that are more technical artifacts than natural entities. Various technological innovations such as—to name only a few—the redefinition by molecular biology of life as a text, biomedical progress involving new techniques extending from brain scans to DNA analysis, and transplantation medicine and technologies of reproduction, have broken with the idea of an integral body. The body is increasingly viewed not as an organic substrate but as a kind of molecular software that can, as suggested, be both read and rewritten. Sarah Franklin and Margaret Lock succinctly describe this transformation of bios as follows: “Genealogical succession is to the new biology what a live orchestra is to digital recording” (Franklin and Lock 2003: 14).

Molecularization and digitalization mark a “recombinant biopolitics” (Dillon and Reid 2001: 44; see also Dillon and Reid 2009) operating both inside and outside the human body’s boundaries. It opens a new level of intervention within that body, at the same time allowing new combinations of heterogeneous elements into previously unknown life forms. The art of molecular engineering differs in a distinct way from traditional forms of biological and medical intervention in that it is aimed not only at modifying metabolic processes but at reprogramming them as well. No longer control of outer nature, but a transformation of inner nature stands at the center of this political epistemology of life. As a consequence biology can no longer be defined as a discovery-based science registering and documenting life processes; rather, it operates as a transformational science that creates life and alters living beings (Rheinberger 2000; Rabinow 2001; Clarke et al. 2003; Rose 2007).

This instrumentalization of life cannot be separated from its capitalization. Instead of functioning as a supplier of raw material for production, in the age of genetic diversity “nature” can be understood as a source and creator of values. The reproduction and transformation of life processes can create what Catherine Waldby (2000) has called “biovalue,” which forms the basis for developing new products and services within a capitalist economy. Biological knowledge and life forms can be patented and marketed. In that way a political economy of life emerges in which biological life-value and capitalist exploitation establish an organic connection (Andrews and Nelkin 2001; Sunder Rajan 2003; Cooper 2008).

When it comes to the Foucaultian concept of bioethics, these alterations of bios suggest three lines of criticism and suggestions for improvement.
In the first place, it is clear that the Foucaultian concept largely adheres to the idea of an integral body; Foucault’s analysis of techniques of power aimed at forming and dividing up the body itself postulates a self-contained and enclosable body. Today, biotechnologies allow a dismantling and recombination of the body that Foucault could not have foreseen. The body no longer appears as a self-evident starting point and organic substrate to which technologies attach themselves in order to form it, but as the effect of techniques of embodiment (de Lauretis 1987; Haraway 1995; Butler 1993). The new level of intervention established by the aforementioned techno-scientific advances is located beneath the classical biopolitical poles of “individual” and “population.” Anatomo-politics and population regulation are complemented by a “molecular politics” whose regard for individual persons is no longer anatomical or physiological but genetic, and which simultaneously locates them within a “gene pool” (Flower and Heath 1993; Lemke 2004).

In the second place, this expanded grip on the body has led to a new relationship between life and death. Although in his *Birth of the Clinic* (1973) Foucault treats death as an integral aspect of modern medicine, in other texts he seems to see it as the outer border or other side of biopolitics. At present living and dying are more closely and systematically interconnected than Foucault assumed. For one thing, “human material” transcends the living human being. Humans who die are often no longer “really” dead, with portions of their bodies, their cells or organs, blood, marrow, and so forth, continuing to exist in the bodies of others, whose “quality of life” is thus improved or whose life is prolonged. Life material is not subject to the same biological rhythms as the organic body—it can be stored as information in DNA databases and in blood banks or cultivated in potentially immortal stem-cell lines. And the death of one person can guarantee the life and survival of another, in a productive cycle (Iacub 2001; Franklin and Lock 2003). Furthermore, death has been both broken up and rendered flexible. The definition of “brain death” and the emergence of reanimation techniques, together with the subsequent splitting of death into various corporeal regions and points in time, have allowed a development and expansion of transplantation medicine. Not so much state sovereignty, but rather medical-administrative authorities, now make decisions about life and death: they define what (human) life is, when it begins and when it ends. In an entirely new way, thanatopolitics has become a part of biopolitics.

And finally: despite his diagnosis of the “death of man” (Foucault 1970), for Foucault biopolitics remains oriented toward human individuals and populations, which results in two problems. On the one hand, this approach fails to illuminate the ways in which ecological management and environmental discourse insert themselves into the (re)production of the human species. It seems necessary to extend the concept of biopolitics to take in the administration and control of the conditions of life in general. As Rutherford (1999: 45) has put it, “Foucault did not adequately deal with
the way in which the political and ecological problematization of populations also gave rise, in more recent times, to a similar problematization of nature and environment." On the other hand, the reconfiguration of bodies as texts tends to also dissolve the epistemological and normative borderline between humans and non-humans. If life can be reduced to genetic structures, then the differences between humans and nonhumans are gradual, not categorical. The human being aimed at by bio-medical optimization strategies, less frequently ill and living longer, is at the same time an animal—otherwise the biological discourse about "model organisms" would make no sense, since it is mice and cats, apes and other animals upon which human diseases are researched and pharmaceutical substances tried out. In this light, being human no longer presents itself as the solid result of evolutionary-natural processes, but rather as the precarious product of technology and the object of both social negotiation and patterns of cultural interpretation: biopolitics as anthropopolitics (Rabinow 1996; Haraway 1997; Calarco 2008).

3. VITAL POLITICS: THE GOVERNMENT OF LIFE

This brief overview points to the various lines of reception of Foucault’s concept of biopolitics as having been deepened and further developed in important respects. A new biopolitical level is clearly present both beyond and beneath the levels of the individual and the populace; it is grounded in an expanded knowledge of the body and biological processes. Within this altered representational regime, the body is less a physical substrate or anatomical machine than an informational network. At the same time, in analyzing biopolitical mechanisms a range of modes of subjectification need to be considered, in order to understand the impact of the control and direction of life processes on individual and collective actors, resulting in new forms of identity. Over recent years, the Foucaultian notion of biopolitics has served as a starting point for a focus on the significance of knowledge production and processes of subjectification.

Important and necessary though such an expansion of the analytical horizon is, it is important to keep in mind that for the most part the two lines of reception have developed their problems independently and hardly touch on each other. This leads not only to a danger of mutual blindness, but also to the risk of reproducing and renewing an outdated division of labor. Where one side is interested in the political sphere or macro-level, formulating questions of power and resistance, subjectification and subjugation, the other side investigates technologies on a micro-level, often at a distance or even cut off from political questions. Here the first line tends to analyze political processes without considering material technologies, and the second concentrates on technological developments while often isolating them from political strategies.
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In this light, I would now like to propose a third perspective, focusing neither on processes of subjectification nor on forms of knowledge, but rather resituating the biopolitical problematic within an analytics of government. Biopolitics is here meant to be understood as an “art of government” (Foucault 2008: 1) that takes account of the relational network of power processes, practices of knowledge, and forms of subjectification. This suggestion is tied to the project that Foucault formulated while summarizing his lecture of 1979 on “the birth of biopolitics” as follows:

The theme was to have been “biopolitics,” by which I meant the attempt, starting from the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race. . . . (Foucault 2008: 317)

There is a widespread view that in the framework of his analytics of government, Foucault did not concern himself further with the theme of biopolitics. I believe this view is mistaken: the theme was not abandoned but experienced a “theoretical shift” (Foucault 1990b: 6). Foucault places the question of biopolitics in a more general theoretical framework meant to allow a systematic linkage between processes of power, knowledge practices, and forms of subjectification comprising the relational network referred to previously.

Within this perspective biopolitics has more to do with techniques of (self-)government, going beyond practices aimed at corporeal discipline and regulating the populace. The “birth of biopolitics” is closely tied to the emergence of liberal forms of government. Foucault understands liberalism as a specific art of leading human beings which is oriented toward the population as a new political figure, and disposing over the political economy as a technique of intervention. Liberalism introduces a rationality of government that differs from both medieval concepts of rule and early modern raison d’état: the idea of a “nature” of society forming both the basis and boundaries of governmental action.

The eighteenth century emergence of political economy, and of the population, cannot be separated from the constitution of modern biology. Liberal concepts of autonomy and freedom are closely connected to biological concepts of self-preservation and self-regulation that came to prevail over the previously dominant physical-mechanistic model for investigating the body. Originating around 1800, biology was based on an organizational principle understanding the visible phenomena of life as emerging essentially at random, without a set plan. Internal organization thus replaced an external order corresponding to the plans of a higher authority beyond life, with “life” functioning as an abstract and dynamic principle equally inherent in all organisms. Categories such as self-preservation, reproduction, and development now came to characterize living bodies, placed at
a greater distance from artificial creations than had been the case before (Foucault 1971).

When in the lectures of 1978 and 1979 Foucault defines “liberalism as the general framework of biopolitics” (2008: 22), this signals a shift of accent from his previous work, resulting not least from self-critical insight: to the effect that his previous analyses of forms of biopolitical power were one-sided and unsatisfactory, since they focused mainly on processes involving population regulation and corporeal disciplining.

Foucault’s analytics of government forms a contrast to this, expanding body politics with the perspective of “vital politics.” This concept stems from Alexander Rüstow, one of the most important representatives of post-war German liberalism, whom Foucault briefly touches on in the 1979 lecture (ibid.: 148; 157). By “vital politics,” Rüstow means a form of politics “that considers all factors upon which happiness, well-being, and satisfaction in reality depend” (1955: 70). This politics is, he indicates, by no means limited to action by the state, but “is politics in the broadest possible sense . . . , all social measures and experimental arrangements” (1957: 235); it relies on social ties and spiritual cohesion and reactivates moral values and cultural traditions, its goal being to insert an “ever more dense net and weave of living ties [lebendiger Bindungen] into the entire social realm” (ibid.: 238). This is a task of integration and innovation needing to take in all societal elements and levels while simultaneously acknowledging their self-directing competencies.

Foucault’s analytics of government takes account of these vital-political ambitions of (neo-) liberal governmental practice, tying the analysis of physical-biological being to an examination of subjectification processes and moral-political modes of existence. Following a suggestion by Lars Thorup Larsen (2003), not only two subject forms of biopolitics—individual and populace—can here be distinguished, but also, taking up Agamben’s own distinction, two forms of life: zoé and bios. This analytic distinction makes it possible to scrutinize the ways the two biopolitical dimensions are intertwined. In Discipline and Punish and The Will to Knowledge, Foucault’s concept of biopolitics remains centered on individual disciplining and regulation of the populace; the analysis of subjectification processes essentially limits itself to subjugation and corporeal dressage, hence to the dimension of zoé, with techniques of self-constitution receiving little notice. With the problematic of government, the perspective broadens, with the question of moral and political existence now also emerging: the problem, then, of bios. Analysis of disciplinary and regulatory processes is now supplemented with analysis of another form of power, a form that “categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him” (Foucault 2000: 331).

Beyond technologies of bodily disciplining and the regulation of the population, attention is now also focused on the self-constitution of individual
Table 8.1 Different Biopolitical Technologies

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<th>Life form</th>
<th>Subject form</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Collective</th>
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<tr>
<td>zoé</td>
<td>Technologies of the Body</td>
<td>Technologies of the Population</td>
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<tr>
<td>(physical being)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>bios</td>
<td>Technologies of the Self</td>
<td>Technologies of the Social</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(moral and political being)</td>
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and collective subjects. Accordingly, Foucault now distinguishes between "political technologies of individuals" and "technologies of the self." The first of these leads us "to recognize ourselves as a society, as a part of a social entity, as a part of a nation or of a state" (Foucault 2000: 404). Such technologies can be designated more generally, and perhaps more precisely, as "technologies of the social," a phrase here not meant to suggest here that technologies have social applications but rather referring to practices that generate society as an imaginary totality and fictive collective body in the first place.\(^\text{15}\)

In distinction to "technologies of the social," "technologies of the self" allow individuals "to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power" (Foucault 1997: 177). In this manner four interconnected biopolitical dimensions can be analytically differentiated; they are presented in the Table 8.1.

4. GOVERNMENTALITY AND BIOPOLITICS

The linkage of these four dimensions allows to treat the problem of biopolitics in a more complex theoretical framework. For Foucault, modern biopolitics is a historical form of articulation of a much more general problem: the linkage between pastoral and political power extending back into Christian antiquity.\(^\text{16}\) With the advent of liberal government, this problem took on a specific form. For one particular question first surfaces with liberalism: how are free subjects—subjects of law—governed when they are simultaneously understood as living beings? Foucault focuses on this problem when he insists that the issue of biopolitics cannot be separated from the framework of political rationality within which they appeared and took on their intensity. This means "liberalism," since it was in relation to liberalism that they assumed the form of a challenge. How can the phenomena of "population," with its specific effects and problems,
be taken into account in a system concerned about respect for legal subjects and individual free enterprise? In the name of what and according to what rules can it be managed? (Foucault 2008: 317)

Liberal government, Foucault observes, developed a specific political knowledge and made use of disciplines like statistics, demography, epidemiology, and biology, analyzing life processes at the level of population groups in order to “govern” individuals through correcting, excluding, normalizing, disciplining, and optimizing measures. Foucault emphasizes that in the framework of the government of living beings, nature represents no autonomous realm in principle free of intervention, but itself depends on governmental action: no material substrate upon which governmental practices might be applied, but rather their constant correlative. The peculiar subject-object status of the political figure of the “population” plays an important role here. On the one hand, that figure stands for a collective reality essentially independent of political intervention and distinguished, as outlined previously, by its own dynamic and self-directing competency; on the other hand, this autonomy does not represent any absolute boundary for political intervention, but rather its privileged reference. The discovery of a population’s “nature” (for instance through birth rates, death rates, and rates of disease) is the precondition for the possibility of its deliberate direction.

But with liberal governmentality, not only does biological life emerge as an object and reference of government, but “political life” does so as well. Liberalism is tied to the constitution of a bourgeois society and a public sphere that reflects about governmental practices, inquires into their pros and cons, and criticizes their possible excesses. For this reason Foucault understands liberalism not only as a political theory or an economic doctrine, but also as a form of critical reflection on governmental practice . . . The question of liberalism, understood as a question of “too much government,” has been one of the constant dimensions of that recent European phenomenon which seems to have emerged first of all in England, namely: “political life.” It is even one of its constituent elements, if it is true that political life exists when the possible excess of governmental practice is limited by the fact that it is the object of public debate regarding its “good or bad,” its “too much or too little.” (Foucault 2008: 321–322)

Beyond Foucault, the various correctives and refinements of the concept of biopolitics allow us to sketch in an “analytics of biopolitics” taking account of the interplay between power relations, knowledge practices and forms of subjectification. In turn, we can differentiate three dimensions of this analytic perspective (see also Rabinow and Rose 2006: 197–198).
First, biopolitics requires systematic knowledge of "life" and "living beings." Systems of knowledge provide cognitive and normative maps that allow an opening of biopolitical spaces in the first place and specify objects for intervention. They render the reality of life understandable and calculable, so that it can be shaped and transformed. We thus first need to understand the regime of truth forming the backdrop of biopolitical practice (and we need to understand the selectivity inscribed in this regime): what knowledge of bodies and life processes is considered especially relevant, and which alternative interpretations of reality are demoted or marginalized? Which scientific experts and disciplines dispose over legitimate authority to tell the truth regarding life, health, the populace, and so forth? Which cognitive and intellectual instruments and which technological procedures are available for the production of truth? What proposals and definitions of problems and objectives regarding processes of life obtain social recognition?

Second, as the problem of the truth regime cannot be separated from that of power, the question arises of how power strategies mobilize knowledge about life (and how power processes produce and disseminate forms of knowledge). This perspective enables us to take into account structures of inequality, hierarchies of value and asymmetries that are (re)produced by biopolitical practices: which forms of life are considered valuable, which "unworthy of life"? Which existential plights, which forms of physical and psychological suffering receive political, medical, scientific, and social attention and are understood as intolerable, relevant to research, and in need of therapy—and which are ignored or neglected? How are forms of domination and exclusion, and experiences of racism and sexism, inscribed in the body and how do they transform it (in respect to state of health, life expectancy, physical appearance, and so forth)? The "economy" of the politics of life also comes under scrutiny: who profits from the regulation and optimization of life processes (through financial gain, political influence, scientific reputation, social prestige, and so forth) and in what form, and who bears the costs and suffers as a result (through poverty, disease, premature death, and so forth)? What forms of exploitation and commercialization of human and non-human life can we observe?

Third, an analytics of biopolitics also has to take account of the various forms of subjectification—the way subjects are brought to work on themselves guided by scientific, medical, moral, religious and other authorities and on the basis of socially accepted arrangements of bodies and sexes. Here as well, we can identify a complex of questions by way of a cross-section of the relevant themes: How are people called on, in the name of (individual and collective) life and health (one's own health and that of the family, nation, "race" and so forth), in view of defined goals (health improvement, life extension, higher quality of life, amelioration of the gene pool, population increase and so forth) to act in a certain way (in extreme cases even to die for such goals)? How are they brought to experience their lives as
“worthy” or “unworthy” of living? How are they called on as members of a “higher” or “lower” “race,” a “stronger” or “weaker” sex, an “ascendant” or “degenerate” people? How do subjects take over and modify scientific interpretations of life for their own conduct and conceive of themselves, for instance, as gene-steered organisms, neuro-biological machines, assembled bodies whose organic elements are in principle exchangeable? How do we comprehend this process as an active appropriation and precisely not as one of passive-receptive acceptance?

The reformulation of the concept of biopolitics within an analytics of government has a number of theoretical advantages. Such a perspective allows us, in the first place, to break with biologicist concepts and confront a still enduring tendency in the social sciences to treat bodies, biology, and nature as pre-social objects (Benton 1991; Dickens 2001). Bodies of human beings or the nature of the population are not external or ontological premises for (political) government; to the contrary, the art of government represents a “sudden emergence of the naturalness of the [human] species within the political artifice of a power relation” (Foucault 2007: 22).

Beyond this, such a research perspective allows us to explore the connections between physical being and moral-political existence: how do certain objects of knowledge and corporeal experiences become a moral, political, or legal problem? This is the theme of the last volumes of Foucault’s History of Sexuality, at its center stands moral problematizations of physical experiences and forms of self-constitution (Foucault 1986; 1989). Contemporary examples are the figure of the human being and the legal construct of human dignity, both of which are coming under increasing pressure as a result of biotechnical innovation (Rabinow 1999: 14–17). The problem has thus emerged, for example, of whether embryos possess human dignity and can claim human rights. Furthermore, which biological presumptions and prejudices stamp ongoing conceptions of citizenship, in that they implicitly or explicitly determine membership rules, premises of participation, and criteria for entry, in this way determining who can even become a candidate for citizen status, on the basis of what biological features—sex, ethnic origins, “racial” affiliation, and so forth (Rose and Novas 2005)?

Finally, this perspective focuses our attention on the relation between technologies and governmental practices: how do liberal forms of government make use of corporeal techniques and forms of self-guidance, how do they form interests, needs, and structures of preference? How do present technologies model individuals as active and free citizens, as members of self-managing communities and organizations, as autonomous actors who are in the position—or at least should be—to rationally calculate their own life risks? In neoliberal theories, what is the relationship between the concept of the responsible and rational subject and that of human life as human capital?

Foucault’s writing did not so much systematically pursue as offer promising suggestions for this analytic perspective. He never concretized his
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remarks on the relation between biopolitics and liberalism—something meant to stand at the center of the 1979 lecture (see 2008: 21–22; 78). Regrettably, what we have is the “intention,” as Foucault conceded self-critically in the course of the lecture (ibid.: 185–186). Filling out this program, developing it, and making it useful for contemporary theoretical debates and political struggles, is the challenge facing current research on the concept of biopolitics.

NOTES

1. See, for instance, the essays in the *Italian Encyclopaedia of Biopolitics* (Brandimarte et al. 2006).
2. A brief survey of the concept’s history can be found in Esposito 2008: 16–24.
3. For a more detailed look at Foucault’s analysis of racism see Stoler 1995; Forti 2006.
5. Such reflections can find support in Foucault’s assessment of biopolitics’ conflictual field (Foucault 1990a: 172–174; 187). For a further development of the distinction between biopolitics and biopower laid down by Foucault, see Lazzarato 2000.
7. “My term biovalue . . . specifies ways in which technics can intensify and multiply force and forms of vitality of ordering it as an economy, a calculable and hierarchical system of value. Biovalue is generated wherever the generative and transformative productivity of living entities can be instrumentalized along lines which make them useful for human projects—science, industry, medicine, agriculture or other arenas of technical culture. Currently the most productive forms of biovalue emerge from the calibration of living entities as code, enrolling them within bio-informatic economies of value which converge with capital economies” (Waldby 2000: 33; see also Waldby and Mitchell 2006).
8. For a more comprehensive discussion see Lemke (2007: 120–123).
9. See, for instance, the diagnosis of Dillon and Reid (2001: 56): “Biohistory seems to have very much extended Foucault’s concern with bodies and with the social, since the life sciences, delving deep into the structure of the soma itself, are reconstituting what it means to be embodied.” This critique points to a more basic problem. Foucault limited his critical analysis to the “dubious” human sciences and repeatedly revealed respect for the logical rigor and sharp “epistemological profile” of the natural sciences (see Foucault 2000: 111). The result was that Foucault underestimated the social power of knowledge production in the natural sciences. However, Joseph Rouse (1987; 1993) has convincingly argued that the Foucaultian perspective can also be drawn on to examine the conditions for the emergence and acceptance of such knowledge.
10. See also the observation of Donna Haraway (1991: 163): “No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper standard, the proper code, can be constructed for
processing signals in a common language... The cyborg is not subject to Foucault’s biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics, a much more potent field of operations.”

11. Gesa Lindemann (2003: 27) criticizes Foucault from the perspective of a reflexive anthropology. She argues that Foucault’s theoretical anti-humanism displays an inherent weakness: since for him the only relevant social bodies are those of human beings, he remains “naively anthropocentric.” See also Lindemann 2002, 24–25. Referring to work of Bruno Latour, Paul Rutherford (2000: 210–213) for his part argues that Foucault remained attached to the idea that human beings alone are endowed with the capacity for action, while objects are passive.

12. Compare the observation of Andrew Barry (2001: 12): “Science and technology studies have tended to be dominated by the study of cases which become the objects of theoretical arguments about the character of the scientific and technical, but whose significance for the study of politics is obscure. In this way, the connections between science, technology and politics are not interrogated but reproduced.” For a similar critique, see Gottweis (1998: 11). This critique is aimed at mainstream work; much of this work should in any case be appreciated for its rigorous inquiry into the difference between micro- and macro-levels, politics and technology. See in this respect the classical text of Callon and Latour (1981).

13. Not only Foucault’s concept of biopolitics changes after The Will to Knowledge; his view of liberalism also undergoes a shift of emphasis. Whereas in a text of 1977 he still understands political economy rather traditionally as an external limitation on power by law, in the lecture on governmentality it stands for an inner self-limitation on power (Senellart 2004).

14. Michel Pêcheux criticizes Foucault’s work from this period for not being able to “work out a coherent and consistent distinction between processes of material subjugation of human individuals and the process of domesticating animals,” and for engaging in a “hidden biologism of Bakunin’s sort” (Pêcheux 1984: 64–65; similarly McNay 1994: 100–104; Barrett 1991: 145–153; see also Lemke 1997: 112–117).

15. In this regard compare, for instance, Barbara Cruikshank’s concept of “technologies of citizenship” (1994; 1999) and Benedict Anderson’s work on nations as “imagined communities” (1983).

16. The table is a slightly altered version of one appearing in a published lecture by Lars Thorup Larsen (2003: 5). Larsen correctly indicates that an analytic rather than an ontological differentiatio is at play here: the individual and society, body and population, exist as an instrument/effect of biopolitical strategies and are not external to them.

17. “We can say that Christian pastorship has introduced a game that neither the Greeks nor the Hebrews imagined. It is a strange game whose elements are life, death, truth, obedience, individuals, self-identity—a game that seems to have nothing to do with the game of the city surviving through the sacrifice of the citizens. Our societies proved to be really demonic since they happened to combine those two games—the city-citizen game and the shepherd-flock game—in what we call the modern states” (Foucault 2000: 311).


20. With their concept of a “government of bodies” (gouvernement des corps), Didier Fassin and Dominique Memmi (2004: 22) propose a similar analytic perspective: “Multiplicity of forms of both the exercise of power and places
of its application, diversity of paths of production of subjects through multiple procedures of population regulation: these are the elements interesting us in the heritage of the later work of Michel Foucault (much more than the work generally invoked in the literature on biopower) when we speak of government of the body."

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