

The Government of Living Beings: Michel Foucault

IN THE 1970s, the French historian and philosopher Michel Foucault introduced a concept of biopolitics that broke with the naturalist and politicist interpretations that were discussed in the preceding chapters. In contrast to the former conception of biopolitics, Foucault describes biopolitics as an explicit rupture with the attempt to trace political processes and structures back to biological determinants. By contrast, he analyzes the historical process by which “life” emerges as the center of political strategies. Instead of assuming foundational and ahistorical laws of politics, he diagnoses a historical break, a discontinuity in political practice. From this perspective, biopolitics denotes a specific modern form of exercising power.

Foucault’s concept of biopolitics orients itself not only against the idea of processes of life as a foundation of politics. It also maintains a critical distance from theories that view life as the object of politics. According to Foucault, biopolitics does not supplement traditional political competencies and structures through new domains and questions. It does not produce an extension of politics but rather transforms its core, in that it reformulates concepts of political sovereignty and subjugates them to new forms of political knowledge. Biopolitics stands for a constellation in which modern human and natural sciences and the normative concepts that emerge from them structure political action and determine its goals. For this reason, biopolitics for Foucault has nothing to do with the ecological crisis or an increasing sensibility for environmental issues; nor could it be

reduced to the development of new technologies. Rather, biopolitics stands for a fundamental transformation in the order of politics:

For the first time in history . . . biological existence was reflected in political existence. . . . But what might be called a society's "threshold of modernity" has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies. For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question. (Foucault 1980, 142–143)

Foucault's use of the term "biopolitics" is not consistent and constantly shifts meaning in his texts. However, it is possible to discern three different ways in which he employs the notion in his work. First, biopolitics stands for a historical rupture in political thinking and practice that is characterized by a rearticulation of sovereign power. Second, Foucault assigns to biopolitical mechanisms a central role in the rise of modern racism. A third meaning of the concept refers to a distinctive art of government that historically emerges with liberal forms of social regulation and individual self-governance. But it is not only the semantic displacements that are confusing. Foucault not only employs the term "biopolitics"; he also sometimes uses the word "biopower," without neatly distinguishing the two notions. I briefly discuss the three dimensions of biopolitics in this chapter before addressing the role of resistance in the context of biopolitical struggles.

Making Live and Letting Die

Although the notion of biopolitics appeared for the first time in Foucault's work in a lecture he gave in 1974 (2000a, 137), it is systematically introduced only in 1976 in his lectures at the Collège de France and in the book *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (Foucault 2003 and

1980, respectively). In this work, Foucault undertakes an analytical and historical delimitation of various mechanisms of power while contrasting sovereign power with “biopower.” According to him, the former is characterized by power relations operating in the form of “deduction”: as deprivation of goods, products, and services. The unique character of this technology of power consists in the fact that it could in extreme cases also dispose of the lives of the subjects. Although this sovereign “right of life and death” only existed in a rudimentary form and with considerable qualification, it nevertheless symbolized the extreme point of a form of power that essentially operated as a right to seizure. In Foucault’s reading, this ancient right over death has undergone a profound transformation since the 17th century. More and more it is complemented by a new form of power that seeks to administer, secure, develop, and foster life:

“Deduction” has tended to be no longer the major form of power but merely one element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them. (Foucault 1980, 136)

The integration of sovereign power into biopower is by no means a transformation within politics alone. Rather, it is itself the result of some important historical transformations. Decisive for the “entry of life into history” (*ibid.*, 141) was the increase of industrial and agricultural production in the 18th century, as well as growing medical and scientific knowledge about the human body. Whereas the “pressure exerted by the biological on the historical” (*ibid.*, 142) in the form of epidemics, disease, and famine was quite high until that time, the technological, scientific, social, and medical innovations allowed now for a “relative control over life. . . . In the space for movement thus conquered, and broadening and organizing that space,

methods of power and knowledge assumed responsibility for the life processes and undertook to control and modify them” (ibid., 142).

Foucault sees the particularity of this biopower in the fact that it fosters life or disallows it to the point of death, whereas the sovereign power takes life or lets live (2003, 241). Repressive power over death is subordinated to a power over life that deals with living beings rather than with legal subjects. Foucault distinguishes “two basic forms” of this power over life: the disciplining of the individual body and the regulatory control of the population (1980, 139). The disciplinary technology to supervise and control the individual body had already emerged in the 17th century. This “anatomy-politics of the human body” (ibid.) conceives of the human body as a complex machine. Rather than repressing or concealing, it works by constituting and structuring perceptual grids and physical routines. In contrast to more traditional forms of domination such as slavery or serfdom, discipline allows for the increase of the economic productivity of the body, while at the same time weakening its forces to assure political subjection. It is exactly this coupling of economic and political imperatives that define discipline and establish its status as a technology:

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely. (Foucault 1977, 137–138)

In the second half of the 18th century another technology of power emerged, which was directed not at the bodies of individuals but at the collective body of a population. By “population” Foucault does not imagine a legal or political entity (e.g., the totality of individuals) but an independent biological corpus: a “social body” that is

characterized by its own processes and phenomena, such as birth and death rates, health status, life span, and the production of wealth and its circulation. The totality of the concrete processes of life in a population is the target of a “technology of security” (2003, 249). This technology aims at the mass phenomena characteristic of a population and its conditions of variation in order to prevent or compensate for dangers and risks that result from the existence of a population as a biological entity. The instruments applied here are regulation and control, rather than discipline and supervision. They define a “technology which aims to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers” (*ibid.*, 249).

Disciplinary technology and security technology differ not only in their objectives and instruments and the date of their historical appearance but also in where they are situated institutionally. Disciplines developed inside of institutions, such as the army, prisons, schools, and hospitals, whereas the state organized and centralized the regulation of the population from the 18th century on. The collection of demographic data was important in this regard, as were the tabulation of resources and statistical censuses related to life expectancy and the frequency of illness. Two series, therefore, may be discerned: “the body–organism–discipline–institution series, and the population–biological processes–regulatory mechanisms–State” (*ibid.*, 250).

The difference between the two components of biopolitics should, however, be acknowledged with caution. Foucault stresses that discipline and control form “two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations” (1980, 139). They are not independent entities but define each other. Accordingly, discipline is not a form of individualization that is applied to already existing individuals, but rather it presupposes a multiplicity.

Similarly, population constitutes the combination and aggregation of individualized patterns of existence to a new political form. It

follows that “individual” and “mass” are not extremes but rather two sides of a global political technology that simultaneously aims at the control of the human as individual body and at the human as species (see Foucault 2003, 242–243). Moreover, the distinction between the two political technologies cannot be maintained for historical reasons. For example, the police in the 18th century operated as a disciplinary apparatus and as a state apparatus. State regulation in the 19th century relied on a range of institutions in civic society, such as insurance, medical-hygienic institutions, mutual aid associations, philanthropic societies, and so on. In the course of the 19th century it is possible to observe alliances between the two types of power that Foucault describes as “apparatuses” (*dispositifs*).

According to Foucault, the “apparatus of sexuality”—whose investigation stands at the center of *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*—occupies a prominent position in this setting. Foucault is interested in sexuality because of its position “at the pivot of the two axes” between both forms of power (1980, 145). Sexuality represents a bodily behavior that gives rise to normative expectations and is open to measures of surveillance and discipline. At the same time, it is also important for reproductive purposes and as such part of the biological processes of a population (cf. Foucault 2003, 251–252). Thus, sexuality assumes a privileged position since its effects are situated on the microlevel of the body and on the macrolevel of a population. On the one hand, it is taken to be the “stamp of individuality”: “behind” the visible behavior, “underneath” the words spoken, and “in” the dreams one seeks hidden desires and sexual motives. On the other hand, sexuality has become “the theme of political operations, economic interventions . . . , and ideological campaigns for raising standards of morality and responsibility: it was put forward as the index of a society’s strength, revealing of both its political energy and its biological vigor” (1980, 146).

In this context, the concept of the norm plays a key role. The ancient “power over life and death” operated on the basis of the binary

legal code, whereas biopolitics marks a movement in which the “right” is more and more displaced by the “norm.” The absolute right of the sovereign tends to be replaced by a relative logic of calculating, measuring, and comparing. A society defined by natural law is superseded by a “normalizing society”:

It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize, rather than display itself in its murderous splendor; it does not have to draw the line that separates the enemy of the sovereign from his loyal subjects. It effects distributions around the norm. (1980, 144)

However, Foucault’s thesis that modern politics tends to become biopolitics does not imply that sovereignty and the “power over death” play no role any more. On the contrary, the sovereign “right of death” has not disappeared but is subordinated to a power that seeks to maintain, develop, and manage life. As a consequence, the power over death is freed from all existing boundaries, since it is supposed to serve the interest of life. What is at stake is no longer the juridical existence of a sovereign but rather the biological survival of a population. The paradox of biopolitics is that to the same degree to which the security and the amelioration of life became an issue for political authorities, life is threatened by hitherto unimaginable technical and political means of destruction:

Wars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century, and . . . never before did the regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations. . . . Entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed. (1980, 136–137)

Foucault sees the reason for this in modern racism, which ensures the “death-function in the economy of biopower” (2003, 258).

Racism and Power of Death

Whereas the difference between sovereign power and biopower is central to *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Foucault chooses another starting point in his 1976 lectures at the Collège de France. Biopolitics here stands not so much for the “biological threshold of modernity” (1980, 143) as for the “break between what must live and what must die” (2003, 254). Foucault’s working thesis is that the transformation of sovereign power into biopower leads to a shift from a political-military discourse into a racist-biological one. The political-military discourse was present in the 17th and 18th centuries. It strove to be a “challenge to royal power” (*ibid.*, 58), emerging in the Puritan rebellion of prerevolutionary England and a bit later in France with the aristocratic opposition to King Louis XIV. Very early in this process the expression “race” emerged, which was not yet linked to a biological signification. Rather, it initially described a specific historical-political division. Fundamental was the idea that society is divided into two hostile camps and two antagonistic social groups that coexist on a territory without mixing and that clearly distinguish themselves from one another through, for example, geographical origin, language, or religion. This “counterdiscourse” principally contested the legitimacy of sovereign power and the postulated universality of laws, which it unmasked as the specific norms and forms of tyranny.

In the 19th century, according to Foucault, this historical-critical discourse experienced “two transcriptions” (*ibid.*, 60). The discourse of “race war” experienced first an “openly biological transcription” that, even before Darwin, drew on elements of materialist anatomy and physiology (*ibid.*). This historical-biological race theory conceives of societal conflicts as “struggles for existence” and analyzes them in the light of an evolutionary schema. In a second transformation, “race war” is interpreted as class struggle and investigated

according to the principle of dialectics. At the beginning of the 19th century, a revolutionary discourse emerged in which the problem of politically determined “race” was increasingly replaced by the thematic of social class (*ibid.*, 61, 78–80).

Foucault argues that the two “reformulations” of the political problematic of the “race war” at the end of the 19th century result in a biological-social discourse. This “racism” (only in the 19th century does this term acquire its current meaning) draws on elements of the biological version in order to formulate an answer to the social revolutionary challenge. In place of the historical-political thematic of war, with its slaughters, victories, and defeats, enters the evolutionary-biological model of the struggle for life. According to Foucault, this “dynamic racism” (1980, 125) is of “vital importance” (2003, 256) because it furnishes a technology that secures the function of killing under the conditions of biopower: “How can a power such as this kill, if it is true that its basic function is to improve life, to prolong its duration, to improve its chances, to avoid accidents, and to compensate for failings? . . . It is . . . at this point that racism intervenes” (*ibid.*, 254).

Racism fulfills two important functions within an economy of biopower. First, it creates fissures in the social domain that allow for the division of what is imagined in principle to be a homogeneous biological whole (for example, a population or the entire human species). In this manner, a differentiation into good and bad, higher and lower, ascending or descending “races” is made possible and a dividing line established “between what must live and what must die” (*ibid.*, 254).¹ Indeed, “to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum” presupposes its creation (*ibid.* 255). In contrast to the traditional theme of race war, which is marked by the idea of a binary society divided into two opposing races, in the 19th century there emerged the idea of a society “that is, in contrast, biologically monist” (*ibid.*, 80). The idea of a plurality of races shifts to one of a single race that is no longer threatened from without but from

within. The result is a “racism that society will direct against itself, against its own elements, and its own products. This is the internal racism of permanent purification, and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization” (ibid., 62). From this perspective, homogenization and hierarchization do not oppose one another but rather represent complementary strategies.

The second function of racism goes even further. It does not limit itself to establishing a dividing line between “healthy” and “sick,” “worthy of living” and “not worthy of living.” Rather, it searches for “the establishment of a positive relation of this type: ‘The more you kill, the more deaths you will cause’ or ‘The very fact that you let more die will allow you to live more’” (ibid., 255). Racism facilitates, therefore, a dynamic relation between the life of one person and the death of another. It not only allows for a hierarchization of “those who are worthy of living” but also situates the health of one person in a direct relationship with the disappearance of another. It furnishes the ideological foundation for identifying, excluding, combating, and even murdering others, all in the name of improving life: “The fact that the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier” (ibid., 255).

The idea of society as a biological whole assumes the provision of a central authority that governs and controls it, watches over its purity, and is strong enough to confront “enemies” within its borders and beyond: the modern state. Foucault argues that, from the end of the 19th century, at the latest, racism guided the rationality of state actions; it finds form in its political instruments and concrete policies as “State racism” (ibid., 261). While the historico-political discourse of race was still directed against the state and its apparatuses (which it denounces as the instruments of domination of one group over another) and against its laws (whose partisanship it unmasks), then the discourse of race ultimately places a weapon in the hands of the state:

the State is no longer an instrument that one race uses against another: the state is, and must be, the protector of the integrity, the superiority, and the purity of the race. The idea of racial purity, with all its monistic, Statist, and biological implications: that is what replaces the idea of race struggle. I think that racism is born at the point when the theme of racial purity replaces that of race struggle. (2003, 81)

Foucault points out two further transformations of racist discourse in the 20th century: Nazi Germany and the state socialism of the Soviet Union. National Socialism harked back to motifs of the old race war in order to launch imperialist expansion outward and to attack its internal enemies. It is characterized by an “oneiric exaltation of a superior blood [that] implied both the systematic genocide of others and the risk of exposing oneself to a total sacrifice” (1980, 150). Soviet racism, however, lacked this theatrical moment. It instead deployed the discrete means of a medical police force. The utopia of a classless society was to be realized in state socialism through the project of cleansing a society in which all those who diverged from the dominant ideology were treated as either “sick” or “crazy.” In this variant of state racism, class enemies became biologically dangerous and had to be removed from the social body (2003, 82–83).

Foucault’s analysis of racism has been rightly criticized as being limited and selective. Although the problem of colonialism is mentioned cursorily in his discussion, it is not handled in a systematic manner. Foucault neither recognizes the inner interrelationship of nation, citizenship, and racism, nor is he interested in the sexual component of the race discourse.² Despite these lacunae and deficits, it is clear that Foucault’s genealogy of modern racism contains a range of analytical assets. First, he conceives of racism neither as an ideological construct nor as an exceptional situation nor as a response to social crises. According to Foucault, racism is an expression of a schism within society that is provoked by the biopolitical idea of an ongoing

and always incomplete cleansing of the social body. Racism is not defined by individual action. Rather, it structures social fields of action, guides political practices, and is realized through state apparatuses.

Furthermore, Foucault challenges the traditional political demarcation between conservative and critical positions. The old notion of race war was a discourse that directed itself against established sovereign power and its self-representation and principles of legitimation. Through the “transcriptions” Foucault identifies (*ibid.*, 60), the political project of liberation turns into one of racist concern with biological purity; the prophetic-revolutionary promise becomes medical-hygienic conformity with the norm; from the struggle against society and its constraints, there follows the imperative to “defend society” against biological dangers; a discourse against power is transformed into a discourse of power: “Racism is, quite literally, revolutionary discourse in an inverted form” (*ibid.*, 81). Foucault’s analysis draws attention to “tactical polyvalence” (1980, 100) and the inner capacity for transformation that race discourse contains. In this way it becomes possible to account for some contemporary neoracist strategies that do not so much stress biological difference but rather assert the allegedly fundamental cultural differences between ethnic groups, peoples, or social groups.

Political Economy and Liberal Government

Foucault’s 1978 and 1979 lectures at the Collège de France place the theme of biopolitics in a more complex theoretical framework. In the course of the lectures he examines the “genesis of a political knowledge” of guiding humans beings from antiquity via the early modern notion of state reason and “police science” (*Polizeywissenschaft*) to liberal and neoliberal theories (2007, 363). Central to these is the concept of government. Foucault proposes a “very broad meaning” of the term, taking up the diversity of meanings that it carried well into the 18th century (2000b, 341). Although the word has a purely political meaning today, Foucault shows that up until well into the

18th century the problem of government was placed in a more general context. Government was a term discussed not only in political tracts but also in philosophical, religious, medical, and pedagogic texts. In addition to management by the state or administration, government also addressed problems of self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul, and other questions.³

Within this analytics of government, biopolitics takes on a decisive meaning. The “birth of biopolitics” (the title of the 1979 lecture series) is closely linked to the emergence of liberal forms of government. Foucault conceives of liberalism not as an economic theory or a political ideology but as a specific art of governing human beings. Liberalism introduces a rationality of government that differs both from medieval concepts of domination and from early modern state reason: the idea of a nature of society that constitutes the basis and the border of governmental practice.

This concept of nature is not a carryover of tradition or a premodern relic but rather a marker of a significant historical rupture in the history of political thought. In the Middle Ages, a good government was part of a natural order willed by God. State reason breaks with this idea of nature, which limited political action and embedded it in a cosmological continuum. Instead, state reason proposes the artificiality of a “leviathan”—which provokes the charge of atheism. With the Physiocrats and political economy, nature reappears as a point of reference for political action. However, this is a different nature that has nothing to do with a divine order of creation or cosmological principles. At the center of liberal reflection is a hitherto unknown nature, the historical result of radically transformed relations of living and production: the “second nature” of the evolving civil society (see Foucault 2007).

Political economy, which emerged as a distinctive form of knowledge in the 18th century, replaced the moralistic and rigid principles of mercantilist and cameralist economic regulation with the idea of

spontaneous self-regulation of the market on the basis of “natural” prices. Authors such as Adam Smith, David Hume, and Adam Ferguson assumed that there exists a nature that is peculiar to governmental practices and that governments have to respect this nature in their operations. Thus, governmental practices should be in line with the laws of a nature that they themselves have constituted. For this reason, the principle of government shifts from external congruence to internal regulation. The coordinates of governmental action are no longer legitimacy or illegitimacy but success or failure; reflection focuses not on the abuse or arrogance of power but rather on ignorance concerning its use.

Thus, for the first time political economy introduces into the art of government the question of truth and the principle of self-limitation. As a consequence, it is no longer important to know whether the prince governs according to divine, natural, or moral laws; rather, it is necessary to investigate the “natural order of things” that defines both the foundations and the limits of governmental action. The new art of government, which became apparent in the middle of the 18th century, no longer seeks to maximize the powers of the state. Instead, it operates through an “economic government” that analyzes governmental action to find out whether it is necessary and useful or superfluous or even harmful. The liberal art of government takes society rather than true state as its starting point and asks, “Why must one govern? That is to say: What makes government necessary, and what ends must it pursue with regard to society in order to justify its own existence?” (2008, 319).

A reduction of state power in no way follows from this historical shift, however. Paradoxically, the liberal recourse to nature makes it possible to leave nature behind or, more precisely, to leave behind a certain concept of nature that conceives of it as eternal, holy, or unchangeable. For liberals, nature is not an autonomous domain in which intervention is impossible or forbidden as a matter of principle. Nature is not a material substratum to which governmental

practices are applied but rather their permanent correlate. It is true that there is a “natural” limit to state intervention, as it has to take into account the nature of the social facts. However, this dividing line is not a negative borderline, since it is precisely the “nature” of the population that opens up a series of hitherto unknown possibilities of intervention. These do not necessarily take the form of direct interdictions or regulations: “laissez-faire,” inciting, and stimulating become more important than dominating, prescribing, and decreeing (2007, 70–76; 2008, 267–316).

In this context, Foucault gives a new meaning to the concept of technologies of security, which he used in earlier works. He regards security mechanisms as counterparts to liberal freedom and as the condition for its existence. Security mechanisms are meant to secure and protect the permanently endangered naturalness of the population, as well as its own forms of free and spontaneous self-regulation. Foucault distinguishes analytically between legal regulations, disciplinary mechanisms, and technologies of security. Legal normativity operates by laws that codify norms, whereas discipline installs hierarchical differentiations that establish a division between those considered normal and abnormal, suitable and capable, and the others. It functions by designing an optimal model and its operationalization, that is, by employing techniques and procedures to adjust and adapt individuals to this standard.

The technologies of security represent the very opposite of the disciplinary system: whereas the latter assumes a prescriptive norm, the former take the empirical norm as a starting point, which serves as a regulative norm and allows for further differentiations and variations. Rather than adjusting reality to a predefined “should-be” value, the technologies of security take reality as the norm: as a statistical distribution of events, as average rate of diseases, births and deaths, and so on. They do not draw an absolute borderline between the permitted and the prohibited; rather, they specify an optimal middle within a spectrum of variations (2007, 55–63).

The formation of political economy and population as new political figures in the 18th century cannot be separated from the emergence of modern biology. Liberal concepts of autonomy and freedom are closely connected to biological notions of self-regulation and self-preservation that prevailed against the hitherto dominant physical-mechanistic paradigm of investigating bodies. Biology, which emerged about 1800 as the science of life, assumes a basic principle of organization that accounts for the contingency of life without any foundational or fixed program. The idea of an external order that corresponds to the plans of a higher authority beyond life is displaced by the concept of an inner organization, whereby life functions as a dynamic and abstract principle common to all organisms. From this point on, such categories as self-preservation, reproduction, and development (cf. Foucault 1970) serve to characterize the nature of living bodies, which now more clearly than ever before are distinguishable from artificial entities.

In the 1978 and 1979 lectures, Foucault conceives of “liberalism as the general framework of biopolitics” (2008, 22). This account of liberalism signals a shift of emphasis in relation to his previous work. The theoretical displacement results from the self-critical insight that his earlier analysis of biopolitics was one-dimensional and reductive, in the sense that it primarily focused on the biological and physical life of a population and on the politics of the body. Introducing the notion of government helps to broaden the theoretical horizon, as it links the interest in a “political anatomy of the human body” with the investigation of subjectivation processes and moral-political forms of existence. From this perspective, biopolitics represents a particular and dynamic constellation that characterizes liberal government. With liberalism, but not before, the question arises of how subjects are to be governed if they are both legal persons and living beings (see *ibid.* 2008, 317). Foucault focuses on this problem when he insists that biopolitical problems 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? (2008, 317)

The reformulation of the concept of biopolitics within an analytics of government has a number of theoretical advantages. First, such a research perspective allows for the exploration of the connections between physical being and moral-political existence: how do certain objects of knowledge and experiences become a moral, political, or legal problem? This is the theme of the last volume of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, at whose center stand moral problematizations of physical experiences and forms of self-constitution (1988, 1990). 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. The problem has thus emerged, for example, of whether embryos possess human dignity and can claim human rights. Furthermore, on what “natural” assumptions do the guarantees of political and social rights depend? What is the relationship between different forms of socialization and biological traits? Such a perspective focuses our attention on the relationship 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 this analytic perspective as offer promising suggestions for its development. He never made his remarks on the relation between biopolitics and liberalism concrete—a project that was meant to stand at the center of the 1979 lecture (see 2008, 21–22, 78). Regrettably, what we are left with is the “intention,” as Foucault conceded self-critically in the course of the lecture (*ibid.*, 185–186).

Resistance and the Practices of Freedom

Foucault's interest in liberal government also leads him to a modified appraisal of resistance and practices of freedom that he now conceives of as an “organic” element of biopolitical strategies. According to him, processes of power that seek to regulate and control life provoke forms of opposition, which formulate claims and demand recognition in the name of the body and of life. The expansion and intensification of control over life makes it at the same time the target of social struggles:

[A]gainst this power . . . the forces that resisted relied for support on the very thing it invested, that is, on life and man as a living being. . . . [W]hat was demanded and what served as an objective was life, understood as the basic needs, man's concrete essence, the realization of his potential, a plenitude of the possible. Whether it was Utopia that was wanted is of little importance; what we have seen has been a very real process of struggle; life as a political struggle was in a sense taken at face value and turned back against the system that was bent on controlling it. (1980, 144–145)

The disciplining of bodies and the regulation of the population caused new political struggles that did not invoke old and forgotten rights but claimed new categories of rights, such as the right to life, a

body, health, sexuality, and the satisfaction of basic needs. Foucault's historical thesis is that biopolitical conflicts have become increasingly important since World War II and especially since the 1960s. Alongside the struggles against political, social, or religious forms of domination and economic exploitation, a new field of conflicts emerged: struggles against forms of subjectivation (see 2000b, 331–332). It is possible to detect a “developing crisis of government” (2000c, 295), which manifests itself in numerous social oppositions between men and women, conflicts on the definition of health and disease, reason and madness, in the rise of ecological movements, peace movements, and sexual minorities. Taken together these developments signal that traditional forms of subjectivation and concepts of the body are losing their binding force. These struggles are characterized by the fact that they oppose a “government of individualization” (2000b, 330). They call into question the adaptation of individuals to allegedly universally valid and scientifically grounded social norms that regulate models of the body, relations of the sexes, and forms of life.

In Foucault's last works, he analyzes ancient self-practices in the context of his book project on the “history of sexuality.” Even if the notion of biopolitics no longer occupies a strategic role in his writings of that time, he continues to be interested in forms of resistance against a governmental technology that has human life as its object. Against this “naturalization” of power, with its reference to the apparently self-evident and universal normative claims of biological life, Foucault proposed to understand human life rather as a “work of art.” With his analysis of the ancient “aesthetics of existence,” he sought to reactivate a new “art of living” that could move beyond the truth claims of both the life sciences and the human sciences (cf. Foucault 1988, 1990).

Foucault's concept of biopolitics was, after his death in 1984, received in many different ways. Two diametrically opposed interpretations have become increasingly influential in recent years. Both draw attention to lacunae in and problems with Foucault's framing of

biopolitics and aim to develop the concept further. However, the diagnoses of the problems are as diverse as the suggested solutions. On the one hand are the writings of Giorgio Agamben, and on the other are the works of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, both of which will be introduced in the following chapters.