

A NEW ARCHITECTURE OF POWER, AN ANTICIPATION OF ETHICS

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What I am going to try to do today will be both schematic and specific. It will be schematic in that I am highlighting a key shift in Foucault's understanding of power—a shift that, I think, actually facilitates the turn to “ethics” in his subsequent work. It will be specific in that I will focus on one lecture where I think this shift is quite explicitly articulated—the third lecture of the 1978 Collège de France course, *Security, Territory, Population*.¹ (Part of what I find so exciting about these lectures is that they document Foucault in the process of discovering this new insight, not just articulating it.)

Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power—which he had begun to articulate in his 1974 Collège de France course,² and brought to fruition in *Discipline and Punish*³ and volume one of *The History of Sexuality*⁴—is without a doubt a keystone of Foucault's philosophical and political significance. But even as he was completing its elaboration, he was already beginning to articulate yet another form of modern power, which he variously termed “biopower” or “governmentality” and here describes under the rubric of “apparatuses of security.” He came to articulate this new form through a recognition of the limitations, indeed errors, in his initial analysis of disciplinary power. One of the errors, if not the most important one in Foucault's first sustained analysis was the view that all forms of power could be understood in terms of, or reduced to, micro-powers (like discipline). “Biopower” or “governmentality” represents—as he is realizing in the 1978 course—a macro-power, a form of power whose locus is not the individual but the population, and a form of power that cannot be reduced to or wholly explained in terms of disciplinary micro-techniques. His recognition of this new macro-form of power and of its irreducibility thus complements (rather than replaces) the original analyses of micro-forms. As a result, I think Foucault's map or blueprint of the power relations that permeate society is broadened and diversified—and thus, I want to (but will have time to-

day to do little more than) suggest, opens up more interplay between forces and relations, more kinds of and spaces and angles for resistance, and indeed, a richer understanding of the constitution of individual subjectivities. In a word, this enriched and multiplied understanding of power relations broadens the space for freedom, and thus opens up new avenues for his subsequent researches, which he pursued in the Collège de France courses of the 1980s, his many interviews and essays, and the later volumes of the *History of Sexuality*.

The lecture of 25 January 1978—the third lecture of this course—is devoted to two principal tasks. First, Foucault corrects and clarifies his own understanding of norms by introducing a distinction between what he terms “normation” and “normalization”—a distinction which corresponds to micro- and macro-forms, though the micro-form, what he now terms “normation,” is what he had earlier (in *Discipline and Punish*) called “normalization.” The second task is to begin to excavate the significance of “population”—a concept that is centrally organizing for his understanding of these macro-forms of power. The purpose behind both of these tasks is, he notes at the very beginning of the lecture, “to emphasize the opposition, or at any rate the distinction, between security [the macro-form] and discipline” (55). (We can hear in this softening, from “opposition” to “distinction,” the movement toward complementing rather than replacing the original analysis of disciplinary power.)

So what is this distinction between “normation” (Foucault's own neologism, which he himself describes as a “barbaric word” [57]) and normalization “strictly speaking”? Discipline “normalizes” (in the loose sense) in a five-step process. First, it analyzes and isolates discrete “individuals, places, times, movements, actions, and operations” (56). Next, these discrete analytical units (individuals, behaviors, etc.) are classified “according to definite objectives” (57). Then optimal sequences, links, and coordinations are estab-

lished between them—in other words, the individuals are sorted and hierarchized in light of their classifications. Fourth, “discipline fixes the processes of progressive training and permanent control” (57) in light of the given objectives. Finally, “on the basis of this, it establishes the division between those considered unsuitable or incapable and the others. That is to say, on this basis it divides the normal from the abnormal” (57). This analysis is itself very schematic, but Foucault has already done the detail-work: recall Part III of *Discipline and Punish*, and you will find a rich empirical analysis of this process in armies, in prisons, and in schools. But, as Foucault now observes,

Disciplinary normalization consists first of all in positing a model, an optimal model that is constructed in terms of a certain result [step two of the five he has just delineated], and the operation of disciplinary normalization consists in trying to get people, movements, and actions to conform to this model, the normal being precisely that which can conform to this norm. (57)

The force of this insight is that disciplinary power presupposes something beyond its own techniques, something which gives content to its distinctions—something that Foucault here refers to as a “model.” This model determines the “definite objectives” as well as the optimal sequences and hierarchies. But the disciplinary micro-power itself does not and cannot determine what that model is; it merely operates with the values (or variables, if you’d like to think about this mathematically) that are provided by that model. “In other words,” Foucault notes, “it is not the normal and the abnormal that is fundamental and primary in disciplinary normalization, it is the norm” (57). The norm, then, is the model that is presupposed by disciplinary normalization, and so:

Due to the primacy of the norm in relation to the normal, to the fact that disciplinary normalization goes from the norm to the final division between the normal and the abnormal, I would rather say that what is involved in disciplinary techniques is a normation rather than normalization. (57)

How, then, are these norms—norms that are given externally and prior to the operation of

disciplinary apparatuses—determined? The identification and emergence of norms is the product of a macro-relation, and Foucault finds this macro-relation at work in the emerging medical practices of vaccination and inoculation. This macro-process involves several elements. First, there is the “case,”

which is not the individual case but a way of individualizing the collective phenomenon of the disease, or of collectivizing the phenomena, integrating individual phenomena within a collective field, but in the form of quantification and of the rational and identifiable. (60)

A case can be identified only if individuals are considered not as discrete individuals, but as tokens of a type, within a larger field. Along with “cases” come the elements of “risk” and “danger”: variations in individual circumstances (all children in France, or those in towns compared those in the country, or adults compared to children, etc.) will account for a greater or lesser risk of contracting, for example, smallpox. The quantitative calculation of these risks

shows straightaway that risks are not the same for all individuals, all ages, or in every condition, place or milieu. There are therefore differential risks that reveal, as it were, zones of higher risk and, on the other hand, zones of less or lower risk. This means that one can thus identify what is dangerous. (61)

We are not speaking of discrete individuals but of groups, patterns, populations, when we speak of these zones of higher or lower risk. This macro-apparatus “is not the division between those who are sick and those who are not” (62) which would be the disciplinary technique. Rather,

It takes all who are sick and all who are not as a whole, that is to say, in short, the population, and it identifies . . . the normal expectation in the population of being affected by the disease and of death linked to the disease. . . . Thus we get the idea of a “normal” morbidity or mortality. (62)

It then subdivides the population as a whole “to disengage different normalities in relation to each other” (63). “It is at this level of the interplay of differential normalities [all estab-

lished in terms of populations, not individuals] . . . that . . . the medicine of prevention will act” (63). This analysis at the level of populations gives us

a plotting of the normal and the abnormal, of different curves of normality, and the operation of normalization consists in establishing an interplay between these different distributions of normality and [in] acting to bring the most unfavorable in line with the more favorable. . . . These distributions will serve as the norm. (63)

Norms emerge, then, through macro-analyses, macro-relations of power and knowledge that cannot be explained in disciplinary terms. Foucault is unambiguous on this point: “The government of populations is, I think, completely different from the exercise of sovereignty over the fine grain of individual behaviors. It seems to me that we have two completely different systems of power” (66).

(Of course, while he was unambiguous in the assertion that these are two “completely different” systems of power, he did speak of an “exercise of sovereignty” when he should have said “of discipline.” That he is speaking of discipline is clear not only from the phrasing here of “the fine grain of individual behaviors,” but because he is referring to the Panopticon: “a power that takes the form of an exhaustive surveillance of individuals” and is the paradigmatic architecture of disciplinary power.)

Foucault has now grasped that the macro-power relations that determine norms are not reducible to disciplinary micro-techniques. This macro-process of determining norms is what Foucault now terms “normalization in the strict sense” (63). Lest my quick presentation of this model sound like a too simplistic framework, however, we should observe an important point: these two processes (disciplinary normation and macro-normalization) are not isolated phenomena and can reciprocally influence each other. How the macro-norms motivate micro-discipline is, I hope, already clear. But the influence can flow in the opposite direction, too—constituting a sort of feedback loop. Micro-practices can, over time, produce new norms, or at least produce individuals who, when considered as part of a collective whole, shift the values of the norm in new directions. Norms inform and frame disci-

pline’s classification of the normal and abnormal, but the new, altered individuals produced by these disciplinary practices can also shift the values of the norms. (This is, in effect, a process of evolution.)

And so, if his earlier analyses showed that an individual is the locus of, and in part constituted by, disciplinary micro-forms of power, then we can now understand a population as the analogous object of the normalizing (in the strict sense) macro-forms of power. For mechanisms of security, like preventative medicine, the “pertinent level of government is not the actual totality of the subjects in every single detail but the population with its specific phenomena and processes” (66). Populations come to be understood as “natural,” and as a “set of processes to be managed” “not from the standpoint of the juridical-political notion of the subject, but as a sort of technical-political object of management and government” (70). This “natural phenomenon” is marked by several characteristics: it “is not the simple sum of individuals inhabiting a territory” (70); it “is not a primary datum; it is dependent upon a series of variables” (70) such as climate, commerce, etc.; and thus, “the relation between the population and sovereign cannot simply be one of obedience or the refusal of obedience, or obedience or revolt” (71). Nevertheless, a population “is constantly accessible to agents and techniques of transformation, on condition that these agents and techniques are at once enlightened, reflected, analytical, calculated, and calculating” (71). A population thus constitutes

a set of elements that, on one side, are immersed within the general regime of living beings and that, on another side, offer a surface on which authoritarian, but reflected and calculated transformations can get a hold.

We have here a whole field of new realities in the sense that they are the pertinent elements for mechanisms of power. (75)

We can hear in this evocation of “the general regime of living beings” the perspective that leads Foucault to term this new macro-form of power “biopower,” or, as he calls it in the 1979 course, “biopolitics.”³ We can hear, too, in the description of population as an object of man-

agement and rational, calculated government the origins of his term “governmentality.”

The discovery or recognition of these macro-forms of power, and the central importance of this notion of population as the object of these macro-forms, is a shift of profound significance in Foucault’s understanding of power relations. (Hence, perhaps, the proliferation of terms for this new macro-form of power.) I don’t have time to explore the point here, but I’d like to offer an illustration of the significance of this recognition for Foucault’s thinking: Foucault’s essay entitled “The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century” was published twice—first in 1976 and then, in significantly altered form, in 1978 (*Dits et Ecrits* numbers 168 and 257, respectively).⁶ While the second half of this essay is virtually unaltered in the second version, the first half has been entirely rewritten. The deleted text of the 1976 version was organized in terms of “nosopolitics” (hospital-politics, in a very painful neologism), but in the 1978 version this convoluted presentation is entirely replaced by a much clearer discussion of populations. The concepts of populations and macro-power have clarified for Foucault himself what was missing in his original analyses strictly in terms of disciplinary power.

I have said hardly anything at all about the macro-techniques that constitute “biopower,” or the techniques of populations—I warned you that this presentation would be very schematic. However, I would like to make a few brief observations about these macro-techniques. Structurally or theoretically (both are problematical terms), the macro-forms of biopower and disciplinary micro-power are, as Foucault understands them, quite similar: they are both relational; neither is understood as a property to be possessed; they are both productive, not prohibitive in function; they both constitute and are constituted by knowledges; and both in their very relational logic necessarily presuppose a possibility for resistance—indeed, freedoms. It is in light of these profound commonalities that I think we can best understand biopower as a complement to, an enrichment of, Foucault’s analyses of discipline, and not simply a “new analysis of power.”

Let me close with a few suggestions about how this re-elaborated analysis of modern power opens new possibilities for Foucault’s

ethical thinking. Foucault closes this third lecture of the 1978 Collège de France course noting that

Hence the theme of man, and the “human sciences” that analyze him as a living being, working individual, and speaking subject, should be understood on the basis of the emergence of population as the correlate of power and the object of knowledge. (79)

This “theme of man” is, of course, a famous trope that runs throughout Foucault’s work: In 1966 he closed *The Order of Things* with the quasi-hopeful/quasi-despairing claim that “one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea”;⁷ *Discipline and Punish* opened with the claim that “the man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself.”⁸

Discipline and Punish, which grasped disciplinary power in its details, mistakenly asserts that all power relations are reducible to micro-relations. And I think this mistake is the source of its bleak portrayal of a “carceral society”: “This process that constitutes delinquency as an object of knowledge is one with the political operation that dissociates illegalities and isolates delinquency from them. The prison is the hinge of these two mechanisms.”⁹

In his analyses here, Foucault has conflated disciplinary micro-processes (the former process) with macro-processes (the latter political operation, which we can now understand in the terms he has introduced in 1978). If there is no escape from the ever-tightening net of discipline, if we are the effects of “a subjection much more profound” than ourselves, then resistance may be ultimately futile. But if these distinct forms of power are not “one with” each other, but rather sometimes collaborative and sometimes opposed forces, then for those who find themselves enmeshed in these power relations (in other words, all of us), the possibilities for freedom have been greatly enlarged and multiplied. The power relations in which our subjectivities are constituted are not monolithic. The field has opened up. The game board is the same, but instead of playing only with checkers, we now have chess pieces. A framework is opening in which Foucault (and

we) can now reexamine our subjectivities—not merely as passive products of “subjectivation” but also as active, self-interpreting (to borrow a phrase from Charles Taylor) agents,

engaged in what Foucault will call “practices of liberty.”¹⁰

ENDNOTES

1. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). All in-text citations are to this text unless otherwise indicated.
2. Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973–1974*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006).
3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage 1979).
4. History of Sexuality Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980).
5. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).
6. The 1976 version (DE168) is available in English as Michel Foucault, “The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century,” trans. Colin Gordon, in C. Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 166–82; the 1978 version (DE257) as Michel Foucault, “The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century,” trans. Richard A. Lynch, forthcoming in E. Mendieta and J. Paris, eds., *Biopolitics and Racism: Foucauldian Genealogies* (Albany: SUNY Press).
7. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1973), 387.
8. *Discipline and Punish*, 30.
9. *Ibid.*, 277.
10. See, for one example, Michel Foucault, “The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” trans. P. Aranov and D. McGrawth, in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. P. Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 281–301.

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