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What is This?

Topologies of Power

Foucault's Analysis of Political Government beyond 'Governmentality'

Stephen J. Collier

Abstract

The publication of Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in the late 1970s has provided new insight into crucial developments in his late work, including the return to an analysis of the state and the introduction of biopolitics as a central theme. According to one dominant interpretation, these shifts did not entail a fundamental methodological break; the approach Foucault developed in his work on knowledge/power was simply applied to new objects. The present article argues that this reading – which is colored by the overwhelming privilege afforded to *Discipline and Punish* in secondary literature – obscures an important modification in Foucault's method and diagnostic style that occurred between the introduction of biopolitics in 1976 (in *Society Must Be Defended*) and the lectures of 1978 (*Security, Territory, Population*) and 1979 (*Birth of Biopolitics*). Foucault's initial analysis of biopolitics was couched in surprisingly epochal and totalizing claims about the characteristic forms of power in modernity. The later lectures, by contrast, suggest what I propose to call a 'topological' analysis that examines the 'patterns of correlation' in which heterogeneous elements – techniques, material forms, institutional structures and technologies of power – are configured, as well as the redeployments through which these patterns are transformed. I also indicate how attention to the topological dimension of Foucault's analysis might change our understanding of key themes in his late work: biopolitics, the analysis of thinking, and the concept of governmentality.

Key words
biopolitics ■ Foucault ■ governmentality ■ neoliberalism

THE PUBLICATION of Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France has provided new insight into one of the key developments in his late work – the much-discussed return to the state. If in his investigations of discipline Foucault famously set aside the question of sovereign power, then beginning in 1976, as Colin Gordon (1991) notes, Foucault developed a multi-dimensional inquiry into problems of 'political sovereignty over an entire society'. Crucially, this development was linked to the introduction of biopolitics as a central category of analysis in the introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality* and in the lectures 'Society Must Be Defended' (both 1976). Today, presented with a more complete picture of his extraordinary work during this period, scholars are challenged to revisit key concepts developed in the 1976, 1978 and 1979 lectures – such as the much discussed 'governmentality' – and to rethink how Foucault's inquiries on political government fit into the complex shifts in his approach to power after *Discipline and Punish*.

According to one dominant interpretation, with the introduction of biopolitics in 1976, Foucault simply turned his existing tools for the study of power relations to a new object: the state. In this view, the lectures of 1978 (*Security, Territory, Population*) and 1979 (*Birth of Biopolitics*) served to extend this project by providing a genealogy of biopolitics and an analysis of political government using the tools of the prior 'knowledge-power' framework. But this reading – which, I contend, is colored by the overwhelming privilege afforded to *Discipline and Punish* in secondary literature on Foucault – obscures an important modification in Foucault's method and diagnostic style. This modification takes place not with the introduction of biopolitics in 1976 but with his elaboration of the theme in the lectures of 1978 and 1979. Foucault's initial analysis of biopolitics was couched in surprisingly epochal and totalizing claims about the characteristic forms of power in modernity.[1] The later lectures, by contrast, suggest what I propose to call a 'topological' analysis of power that examines how existing techniques and technologies of power are re-deployed and recombined in diverse assemblies of biopolitical government.

The present article examines these shifts in Foucault's approach to power in the late 1970s and situates them in relation to other significant developments in his late work. The first half of the article presents a detailed textual analysis that traces specific themes from *Society Must Be Defended* to the lectures of 1978–9, demonstrating their subtle but fundamental modulation. I will show that Foucault's initial treatment of the state and political government in 1976 is marked by a diagnostic style that emphasized the systematicity, functional coherence and totalizing reach of forms of power. This analysis shared a great deal with the approach developed in *Discipline and Punish*, a study whose claims were, in a certain way, epochal in both their temporal form (since the distinction between sovereignty and discipline or normalization was also a periodizing marker) and diagnostic reach (a single form of power defined a 'disciplinary society' or a 'normalizing society').

By contrast, the 1978 and 1979 lectures employ a 'topological' approach that provides a much more supple analysis of the configurations in which forms of power take shape and function. Here I have in mind a rough analogy to topology as a branch of mathematics concerned not exclusively with the geometrical properties of objects but with how spaces are organized, with the connectivity properties that arise from certain arrangements of elements, and with their transformations.[2] Similarly, Foucault's work of the late 1970s provides a rich vocabulary for examining the 'patterns of correlation' in which heterogeneous elements – techniques, material forms, institutional structures and technologies of power – are configured, as well as the 'redeployments' and 'recombinations' through which these patterns are transformed.[3] He thereby moves away from an earlier tendency to formulate global diagnoses of power relations in a given age as stemming from a single logic (of sovereignty, discipline or normalization). The result is not an infinite multiplication of contingent forms. Instead, a topological analysis focuses on the broad configurational principles through which new formations of government are assembled, without implying that they arise from some inner necessity or coherence.

The second half of the article shows how attention to the topological dimension of Foucault's analysis might change our understanding of key themes in his late work. I focus in particular on three interrelated problems. First, I address Foucault's analysis of biopolitics as it was revised from 1976 to 1978–9. Focusing on Foucault's observations about the Physiocrats, I will show that the 1976 statements on biopolitics – which are generally accepted as definitive elaborations of the theme, and which suggest a totalizing logic of biopolitical government as an extension of control over biological life – appear, in light of the later work, as preliminary and confused. The confusion is sorted out, I suggest, by the 1978–9 lectures, which treat biopolitics not as a logic of government but as a problem space in which diverse topologies of power may be observed. Second, I examine how Foucault's evolving approach to the study of power relates to his changing conception of *thinking*. If, as Paul Rabinow (2003) has noted, Foucault's early work understands thinking as 'an anonymous, discursive thing', then he later analyzes thinking as a situated practice of critical reflection that establishes a certain distance from existing forms of acting and understanding and also works to remediate and recombine these forms.[4] I will show that this modified conception of thinking is intimately related to Foucault's topological analysis, thus marking a critical distance from *Discipline and Punish*. Third, and in conclusion, I address 'governmentality', the most widely discussed concept from Foucault's lectures of 1978–9. In light of the argument advanced in this article, I will show that this concept belongs fundamentally to the period of *Discipline and Punish*. Though it plays an important role in the 1978 and 1979 lectures it should by no means be interpreted as a master category or theme. What is more, the framework of governmentality presents certain methodological difficulties in the study of contemporary power relations that, I suggest, might be resolved using the tools of a topological analysis.

From Discipline to Governmentality: The Standard Story

Foucault's best-known positions on power were laid out in *Discipline and Punish* (hereafter, *DP*) and the work around it. There, Foucault took on an existing, dominant approach to studying power relations that began from the fact of the state and sovereignty, and asked how power flowed out – and down – through the instrument of law. Against this dominant approach, Foucault called for 'a political philosophy that isn't erected around the problem of sovereignty, nor therefore around the problems of law and prohibition' (1980b).[5] His famous answer to this challenge was a 'micro-physics' of power relations that he developed in his work on discipline, which he regarded – as of *DP* – as the characteristic form of power in modernity. In contrast to sovereign power, discipline does not flow from a central point but circulates through the capillaries of collective life. It is not repressive but productive and intensificatory. It is not wielded over and against knowledge but through knowledge, shaping the conditions of possibility for certain ways of thinking and acting.

In his important article summarizing Foucault's writing on the theme of governmentality, Colin Gordon has suggested that the shifts in Foucault's work after *DP* should be read as a response to criticisms of his micro-physics of power. 'One objection frequently raised by the Marxist left', Gordon wrote, was that Foucault's 'new attentiveness to the specifics of power relations and the detailed texture of particular techniques and practices failed to address or shed light on the global issues of politics, namely the relations between society and the state' (Gordon, 1991: 4). On Gordon's account, something like a response – though one that could not satisfy 'the Marxist left' – is found in the new theme of biopolitics discussed in the introductory volume of *The History of Sexuality*, first issued in October 1976 (Fontana and Bertani, 2003). There, Foucault proposed a distinction between a 'micro-politics of the body' – analyzed through the disciplines – and what he called the 'biopolitics of population'.

For Gordon and many other commentators, this distinction added to the 'micro-physics' proposed in the work on discipline a 'macro' physics of power relations.[6] And it was precisely this 'macro' thread that, Gordon argues, Foucault took up in the 1978 and 1979 lectures, *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Gordon's summary of this movement in Foucault's work deserves quotation in full:

> Foucault had already begun to develop his view of the links between the microphysics and the macrophysics of power in the final chapter of *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1 (1976). Here he had introduced the term 'biopower' to designate forms of power exercised over persons specifically in so far as they are thought of as living beings: a politics concerned with subjects as members of a population, in which issues of individual sexual and reproductive conduct interconnect with issues of national policy and power. Foucault reintroduced this theme of biopower or biopolitics in his 1978 lectures, in a way linking it intimately with his approach to the theme of government. (1991: 4)

Gordon puts his finger on significant connections between the emerging problematics of biopolitics and governmentality, and on their relation to criticisms concerning the political implications of Foucault's approach. But how exactly should we read this shift? One answer, given by Gordon and other commentators such as Michel Sellenart (2007) and Alessandro Fontana and Mauro Bertani (2003), is that with the introduction of bio-politics Foucault applied the tools he had used to study disciplinary power – specifically the category of knowledge-power – to the state. In Gordon's view, Foucault's work on governmentality and liberalism showed that:

> The same style of analysis . . . that had been used to study techniques and practices addressed to individual human subjects within particular, local institutions could also be addressed to techniques and practices for govern-ing populations of subjects at the level of a political sovereignty over an entire society. (Gordon, 1991: 4)7

On this reading, if there is a shift in object, there is basic continuity in method: the tools of analysis found in the work on discipline are repurposed to provide an analysis of 'macro-political' relationships that Marxists found wanting in Foucault's work of the mid-1970s.

Certainly there is something to this. Continuities between the earlier and later work are undeniable, perhaps most notably in the concept of 'governmentality', which, as I will argue, shares much with the earlier 'micro-physics' of power relations. But something is missing from this story, namely, a shift not in object – the disciplines versus the state – but in Foucault's analysis of how technologies of power are configured in assem-blies of government. This shift takes place not with the introduction of biopolitics in 1976, but between this initial introduction and its elaboration two years later when Foucault resumed his lectures in early 1978. I will show – following Didier Eribon (1991) – that in important ways the *History of Sexuality* and *Society Must Be Defended* were situated in the problematic of *DP*. But in the later lectures, Foucault's toolkit has been reformulated in significant ways. It is worth, then, considering the initial discussion of biopolitics in 1976 so that its relation to the later work may be brought to light.

The Normalizing Society: *Society Must Be Defended*

Here I will draw not on *The History of Sexuality* – the widely reviewed *locus* for Foucault's analysis of biopolitics – but on *Society Must Be Defended* (hereafter, *SMD*), the 1976 lectures at the Collège de France. The key discussion is found in the final lecture, which begins with a claim made famous in *History of Sexuality*. 'It seems to me', Foucault argued, 'that one of the basic phenomena of the nineteenth century was what might be called power's hold over life . . . that there was at least a certain tendency that leads to what might be called State control of the biological' (2003: 240). After noting that, following his prior approach, he will trace this 'State

control of the biological' 'not at the level of political theory, but rather at the level of the mechanisms, techniques, and technologies of power' (2003: 241), Foucault introduces the distinction between the two registers of what Gordon glosses (somewhat imprecisely, it seems to me) as the 'micro' and 'macro' levels of 'power's hold over life'.[8] On the one hand, Foucault argues, 'we saw the emergence of techniques of power that were essentially centered on the body, on the individual body'. Here he refers to the disciplines, and to what in *History of Sexuality* he calls a 'micro-politics of the body'. On the other hand, a second pole of biopolitics relates 'to man-as-species', to human beings insofar as they form a 'global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness, and so on'. In *SMD* he names this new technology of power a '"biopolitics" of the human race' (2003: 242–3). In *History of Sexuality* he calls it a biopolitics of population.

Foucault then lays out – in a manner that is schematic and without specific historical reference beyond scattered gestures to the 17th and 18th century – some key features of this biopolitics of population as it is found in areas such as urban planning and the management of disease. Its objects are the phenomena of 'species life' ('the birth rate, the mortality rate, longevity, and so on'), but also a 'whole series of related economic and political problems' that were, Foucault says, biopolitics' 'first objects of knowledge and the targets it seeks to control' (2003: 243).[9] In contrast to the objects taken up in the enclosures of disciplinary power, these phenomena are 'aleatory' and 'unpredictable'. They can be known through techniques such as 'forecasts, statistical estimates, and overall measures' that take into account both their uncertainty and their patterns over a population, rather than their reality at the level of individuals (Foucault, 2003: 246). The aim of this biopolitics of population, then, was 'to intervene at the level of . . . generality' of these phenomena through a logic that is *regulatory* rather than *disciplinary*. Thus, '[t]he mortality rate has to be modified or lowered; life expectancy has to be increased; the birth rate has to be stimulated'. Such interventions share with disciplinary power the aim to 'maximize and extract forces'. But they do not work through minute controls of the body. Instead, they aim to 'establish an equilibrium, maintain an average, establish a sort of homeostasis, and compensate for variations within this general population' to 'optimize a state of life' (Foucault, 2003: 246).[10]

These passages, or their rough equivalent in *History of Sexuality*, have inspired many readers of Foucault's work. Indeed, for one major interpretive tendency these are the crucial texts on biopolitics. But I would submit – though I will only be able to justify the claim later on – that this is a confused initial statement of themes that Foucault later addressed with greater clarity and nuance. Here it bears following the argument to its end, for it indicates Foucault's conception, at this moment, of how disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms are articulated in broader configurations or architectures of power.

Foucault's discussion next proceeds to a schematic account of bio-politics' emergence at the two registers of the individual and the popula-tion. Invoking analyses of the *Annales* School that provided an implicit background for many of his early studies, Foucault argues that the 'birth' of biopolitics can be understood in relation to long-term demographic and economic transformations that posed fundamental challenges to sovereign power.[11] He observes that:

> . . . [i]t is as though power, which used to have sovereignty as its modality or organizing schema, found itself unable to govern the economic and political body of a society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization. So much so that far too many things were escaping the old mechanisms of the power of sovereignty, both at the top and at the bottom, both at the level of detail and at the mass level. (Foucault, 2003: 249)

The birth of biopolitics took shape, thus, as a double adjustment. 'A first adjustment', the introduction of the micro-powers, 'was made to take care of the details'. This was, Foucault posits, the 'more convenient thing' to adjust because the disciplines could emerge in the 'restricted framework of institutions such as schools, hospitals, barracks, workshops'. In these 'circumscribed spaces' the disciplines did not disrupt the formation of sover-eign power. The second adjustment – more difficult because it 'implied complex systems of coordination and centralization' – took place in the late 18th century, with the emergence of regulatory power aimed at 'phenomena of population' (Foucault, 2003: 250).

What is important for the present analysis is that when Foucault examines how disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms are configured in more general architectures of power he offers a surprisingly epochal, func-tionalist, and even totalizing analysis. Though the forms of power operating at the level of the individual and the population were distinct, Foucault argues, they were intimately related. The regulatory power of biopolitics 'does not exclude disciplinary technology', he notes, 'but it does dovetail into it, integrate it, modify it to some extent, and above all, use it by sort of infiltrating it, embedding itself in existing disciplinary techniques' (Foucault, 2003: 242). The character of this integration, infiltration and embedding does not receive much elaboration. But it is illustrated by refer-ence to sites where an interface between disciplinary and regulatory power can be observed – sites that are, Foucault indicates, exemplary of a bio-political, normalizing society. One illustration is the artificial towns of the 19th century, which combined disciplinary mechanisms (found in the grid pattern of the working-class housing estate) with regulatory mechanisms (housing markets and insurance).[12] A second example refers to sexuality, a topic that seems to be coming to the center of Foucault's concern in 1976 but that, notably, fades from view when Foucault returns to biopolitics in 1978. Foucault argues that sexuality is a privileged target in the 19th century because it 'exists at the point where body and population meet. And so it is a matter for discipline, but also for regulation' (2003: 252).

These privileged sites of conjunction between regulatory and discipli-nary power exemplify the mechanisms of what Foucault calls a *normalizing society*. The normalizing society, Foucault notes, is not a 'generalized disci-plinary society whose . . . institutions have swarmed and finally taken over everything'. In this sense, at least, Foucault modifies the analysis of *DP*, which described the 'swarming of disciplinary mechanisms' (1977: 211, 215). But he continues to posit a tight functional logic that links what in *DP* he called the 'interstitial' and the 'meta' operations of power, and posits a secular development through which they attain increasingly global reach. Thus, Foucault argues in *SMD*: '[t]he normalizing society is a society in which the norm of discipline and the norm of regulation intersect along an orthogonal articulation'. And he adds:

> To say that power took possession of life in the nineteenth century is to say that it has, thanks to the play of technologies of discipline on the one hand and technologies of regulation on the other, succeeded in covering the whole surface that lies between the organic and the biological, between body and population. (Foucault, 2003: 253)[13]

In sum, the two poles of disciplinary and regulatory power operate accord-ing to different logics, but they are fundamentally isomorphic and function-ally complementary. They are two dimensions of a general process of normalization that operates to extract, mobilize, optimize, control and possess biological life.

The point that I want to emphasize here is that, despite Foucault's turn in 1976 from the 'micro-politics of the body' to the 'biopolitics of popula-tion', and his apparent return to the previously bracketed questions of the state and sovereignty, in important ways this analysis belongs, conceptually and methodologically, to the period of *DP*, and, indeed, to long-standing concerns that can be traced to Foucault's earliest work. Most basically, in *SMD* (as in *History of Sexuality*) an epochal framing found in much of Foucault's corpus up to this point is preserved. The key temporal markers may have shifted, and Foucault's story is more nuanced, but are we not, with the birth of biopolitics as portrayed in 1976, still dealing with a shift from a 'classical age' of sovereignty to a 'modern age' of normalization?

Also preserved is a quasi-functionalism that pops up repeatedly from *Madness and Civilization* (1961) through *DP*. This claim may seem implau-sible given Foucault's explicit rejection of functionalism in, for example, his critique of the Marxist history of the prison. But a certain Althusserian 'last instance' slips in precisely when Foucault refers to what in this case is appropriately called a 'macro-political' background, a kind of structural context in relation to which changes in the micro-physics of power can be understood. An existing form of power (classical, sovereigntist) runs into limits or contradictions in the face of demographic change, the expansion of markets, urbanization, indeed the entire emerging phenomenon of industrial capitalism. New forms of power – discipline, regulatory power,

normalization – provide a functional 'resolution' to these prior tensions, one that meets the demands of an emerging capitalist society to economize the organization of populations, and to insert them into processes of production.[14] In *DP*, thus, Foucault wrote that it would not have been possible '[t]o solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them'. And 'conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital' (1977: 220).[15] 'Each', Foucault concludes, 'makes the other *possible* and *necessary*; each provides a model for the other' (italics added). We are thus on familiar territory when Foucault argues in *History of Sexuality* that 'bio-power was, without question, an indispensable element in the development of capitalism', which 'would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes' (Foucault, 1980a: 141).

Security, Territory, Population: Analytical Decomposition

Let us now turn to the scene where, 21 months after the last lecture of *SMD*, these themes re-emerge, in Foucault's 1978 lectures at the Collège de France, collected in *Security, Territory, Population* (hereafter *STP*). It is not hard to understand why Foucault's interpreters have found continuity between these two points. The key figures of regulatory power that were introduced in 1976 (the aleatory, the uncertain, the series) and the key examples (the town, illness) are revisited in the first three lectures of 1978. There are a couple of notable modifications. Foucault adds a very significant analysis of famine, scarcity and grain. And where, in *SMD*, he vaguely situated the birth of biopolitics in broad developments of the 18th century, in *STP* he associates the new figurations of illness, scarcity and the town with specific texts, and therefore with historically situated individuals and problems: Vigne de Vigny's plan for the city of Nantes, formulated in 1755, that aimed to manage the pressures of population growth and expanded trade; Emmanuel Etienne Duvillard's 1806 study that employed population statistics to establish the distribution of smallpox risk; and Louis-Paul Abeille's proposals for regulating the grain trade, written in 1763.[16] Nonetheless, it seems that we are continuing down the path laid out in 1976.

In fact, however, a number of important shifts have taken place, though they are initially evident in subtle distinctions. Most obviously, the form of power that, as Foucault claimed in *SMD*, operates on the register of population has been renamed. What was previously called 'regulatory power' he now calls 'security'. But more important than the change in nomenclature is a significant modification of his analysis. Regulatory power, as we have seen, was associated with an extension of *control* over new domains: the population, productive processes, biological life. In 1976, this process – never analyzed in detail – is described in terms of the state's maximization, optimization, extraction, *possession* of the biological. But when Foucault returns to key elements of regulatory power, now renamed 'security', this

emphasis on control and possession is gone. Here, the new case of scarcity and the grain trade proves crucial. Foucault's analysis revolves around the physiocrat Abeille, who posits that scarcity in grain must be managed not through tight sovereign or disciplinary controls but through modulated interventions into the field of autonomous and mutually corrective decisions by growers, buyers, consumers and traders. In this context, the figure of 'population' emerges in a very different light from that found at the end of *SMD*. It is a field that precisely *does not admit to control*, that cannot be 'possessed' by the state, and that must be left alone to its own mechanisms and processes. In this respect the prior analysis is reversed: population is 'discovered' not as a target of state control but as a new 'principle of limitation' on state activity.[17] If, in *SMD*, discipline and regulatory power are isomorphic and functionally interrelated, then in *STP* they are heterogeneous and in many ways opposed principles.

This significant modification in Foucault's analysis of regulatory power-cum-security points to a more general *methodological* shift. If previously Foucault saw regulatory power and discipline as complementary parts of a coherent logic of power that operated on different registers, then in the later work he posits no necessary link between them. For example, in 1976, sexuality and the artificial town are cited as points of contact between the two 'axes' of discipline and regulatory power. But when Foucault returns to the town two years later he examines three entirely distinct formations: the town of sovereignty, the town of discipline and the town of security. Similarly, when Foucault returns to a discussion of 'normalization' it is no longer to indicate how regulatory power and disciplinary power together form a normalizing society, but to simply indicate how 'each deals differently with what we call normalization' (Foucault, 2007: 56). The same pattern is found in Foucault's discussions of disease, famine and criminality. In sum, if *SMD* posited a rigid architectonic of biopolitics, in which its elements, though distinct, were bound together as if through a kind of inner logic, then here we have a kind of analytical decomposition, in which different figurations of the town, of normalization, of criminality, are abstracted, initially, from any specific articulation in broader configurations of power.

Patterns of Correlation and Recombinations

Despite these differences, it may seem that we are on familiar ground. Perhaps Foucault has simply made adjustments that can nonetheless be understood as extensions of his prior argument. He has replaced 'regulatory power' with 'security', and he has drawn a clearer distinction between security and discipline, thus modifying his prior schema. In *DP* Foucault analyzed a shift from sovereignty to discipline; in *SMD*, from sovereignty to normalization, where normalization = discipline + regulatory power. Now we have a new series: sovereignty-discipline-security.

Foucault entertains precisely this possibility in the very first lecture of *STP*, noting that with the addition of 'security' to the analyses of discipline and sovereignty, he has apparently provided 'the bare bones . . . of a

kind of historical schema' (Foucault, 2007: 6). But he pushes immediately against this interpretation in a passage that is fundamental to understanding the topological analysis that, I contend, characterizes his work of this period.

Foucault argues that to describe the series sovereignty-discipline-security as a historical schema 'misses the most important thing' (Foucault, 2007: 6). But he does not immediately tell us what this most important thing is. Rather, he turns to examples that illustrate the varied relationships among these elements. Focusing initially on the problem of criminality, Foucault notes that disciplinary mechanisms are hardly 'modern' forms at all, but are 'archaic'; they were already present 'within the juridico-legal code', and thus functioned as key mechanisms of sovereign power.[18] European Absolutism, thus, is understood in terms of a disciplinary-sovereigntist configuration in which heterogeneous technologies of power are combined. Foucault makes a similar point with respect to security, the term that replaces 'regulatory' power in *STP*. Security did not displace sovereignty, but entailed the 'reactivation and transformation' of elements of sovereign power (Foucault, 2007: 9). The 'security of populations' was articulated precisely in the idiom of juridico-legal power through new figures such as the social contract or the rights of man; and with the rise of biopolitics, the problems of sovereignty (concerning, for example, the legitimacy of sovereign power) are posed, Foucault writes, 'more acutely than ever'. Thus, if security emerges as a key technology of power in the 19th century, sovereignty (and, for that matter, discipline[19]) continues to play a central role.

These examples are notable first of all for the fact that they scramble the periodizing structure of Foucault's prior work. They break down Foucault's sometimes epochal claims concerning a shift from a society of sovereignty to a society of discipline (in *DP*) or normalization (in *SMD*); and they cut off any suggestion that the rise of security should be read in similarly epochal terms. As Foucault (2007: 8) argues:

> There is not a series of successive elements, the appearance of the new causing the earlier ones to disappear. There is not the legal age, the disciplinary age, and then the age of security. Mechanisms of security do not replace disciplinary mechanisms, which would have replaced juridico-legal mechanisms.

Rather – and here Foucault gets to that 'most important thing' he noted a few moments earlier – 'you have a series of complex edifices in which . . . what above all changes is the dominant characteristic, or more exactly, the *system of correlation* between juridico-legal mechanisms, disciplinary mechanisms, and mechanisms of security' (2007: 8, italics added).

I want to pause at this point to underline the movement in this crucial passage. We have a double claim. The first is negative: we are not dealing with a 'series of successive elements', each of which supplants the former. As is true at various moments in the 1978 and 1979 lectures, one feels that

in advancing this argument Foucault is marking a certain distance from his prior work. He had previously tended to associate a single form of power with an 'age': sovereignty with the classical age; discipline and then, later, normalization, with the modern age. Here he refuses this kind of account that is epochal in both its temporal structure and its diagnostic reach. The second claim is positive: What we *are* dealing with – what *is* the 'most important thing' – are patterns of correlation among different forms of power, or, to use a term that appears frequently in *STP*, among different 'technologies of power'.[20] One technology of power may provide guiding norms and an orienting *telos*. But it does not saturate all power relations. Rather, it suggests a configurational principle that determines how heterogeneous elements – techniques, institutional arrangements, material forms *and* other technologies of power – are taken up and recombined. This configuration of elements, and the principle through which they are related to each other, is what Foucault calls a 'system of correlation'. It would be preferable, perhaps, to call it a topology of power.[21]

In insisting that these passages mark a significant shift in Foucault's approach, I do not mean to caricature his earlier work. He never painted a picture of new epochs that were *sui generis*, made up, as it were, of totally new material without prior determination or figuration. He was always concerned with the processes through which existing elements were taken up and redeployed in response to new situations and problems. But the register at which these recombinatorial processes are analyzed shifts, as Foucault indicates in another telling passage that, significantly, follows immediately after the one we have just considered. In it, he draws a distinction between two kinds of history. One, the 'history of techniques', asks how techniques – about techniques of confinement, for example[22] – are taken up and redeployed in different technologies of power. Foucault's illustrations suggest that he is referring, at least in part, to his own previous work. The other kind of history is what Foucault calls 'the history of technologies', which he describes as the:

> . . . much more general, but . . . much more fuzzy history of the correlations and systems of the dominant feature which determine that, in a given society and for a given sector – for things do not necessarily develop in step in different sectors, at a given moment, in a given society, in a given country – a technology of security, for example, will be set up, taking up again and sometimes even multiplying juridical and disciplinary elements and redeploying them within its specific tactic. (2007: 8–9)[23]

In this history of technologies, I submit, the topological dimension of analysis comes to the center of attention. Foucault is no longer focused primarily on a given technology of power and its associated techniques, and only subsequently, secondarily, and somewhat offhandedly, examining how it fits into broader architectures of power. Instead, the 'history of technologies' is centrally concerned with how heterogeneous techniques,

technologies, material elements, and institutional forms are taken up and assembled.

To summarize, and to anticipate themes that I address in the next two sections, this topological analysis diverges from Foucault's prior approach in at least two critical ways. First, as is clear in the passage just cited, Foucault signals explicitly that he will step back from epochal and totalizing diagnoses that sometimes characterized the earlier work; we are not concerned with a single logic of biopolitics (normalization) that links diverse elements as if through a kind of inner functional coherence. Instead, he draws much clearer distinctions among the different registers of techniques, technologies of power and systems of correlation, and he provides a vocabulary for describing how, 'in different sectors, at a given moment, in a given society, in a given country', they are linked in a topological space. They are brought into a relationship, but remain heterogeneous.[24] The second point concerns the specific motion of recombinatorial processes. Previously, Foucault analyzed shifts in power relations in terms of vaguely defined and anonymous functional imperatives ('the capitalist economy gave rise to . . . disciplinary power') or in terms of broad shifts in discursivities. But increasingly he will examine how existing elements are taken up and recombined. As we will see, he places particular emphasis on the work of actors – *thinkers* – who constitute existing ways of thinking and acting as problems, and seek to reform and remediate them.

Biopolitics: The Case of Physiocracy

The remaining sections of this article develop some extensions of these claims about Foucault's shifting analysis of power, specifically as they concern crucial and widely discussed themes in his late work: biopolitics; the analysis of thinking; and governmentality. In the process, we will also see how Foucault deploys a topological approach in relation to some of the empirical topics that occupied him in the 1978–9 lectures such as ordo-liberalism, American neoliberalism and, presently, physiocracy.

The present section addresses a theme that lies at the very heart of Foucault's changing approach to the study of power in the late 1970s: biopolitics.[25] It does so by considering Foucault's analysis of the Physiocrats as it evolved from 1976 to 1978–9. In fact, the Physiocrats are not explicitly mentioned in the key sections of *SMD* in 1976, in which Foucault first introduces biopolitics. But we can understand in retrospect (that is, in light of the later lectures) that Foucault had them in mind in his analysis of regulatory power, on the basis of which he developed his initial diagnosis of biopolitics.[26] And this early diagnosis, I contend, differs markedly from that which emerges in 1978–9. In 1976, the Physiocrats were understood to define the matrix of an emerging biopolitics, characterized by the extension of state control over the biological. In 1978 and 1979, by contrast, physiocracy is not taken to hold any underlying truth of biopolitics. Rather, physiocracy is understood as one specific and contingent formation of biopolitical government, suggesting that biopolitics should not be understood as a logic of power but as a problem-space.

We have seen that the Physiocrats, and in particular Louis-Paul Abeille and his analysis of grain, occupy a prominent position at the beginning of the 1978 lectures. Abeille argued that, in a society undergoing rapid urbanization and demographic transformation, sovereign controls exacerbated the problems (of scarcity and famine) that they purported to solve.[27] Physiocracy was thus initially articulated in response to problems that could not be managed in a frame of sovereignty. This argument is, of course, familiar. In *SMD* Foucault argued that technologies of sovereignty were 'unable to govern the economic and political body of a society that was undergoing both a demographic explosion and industrialization'. As in the later lectures, Foucault argued that a new biopolitics took shape in relation to these problems. Though the Physiocrats are not named, it is clear that Foucault has them in mind as critical figures situated on the threshold of a biopolitical age.

But there are significant distinctions between the earlier and later accounts. Previously, the birth of biopolitics was understood as a response to a vague functional imperative, set against the anonymous processes of the *longue durée*. In *STP*, by contrast, the implications of demographic change and industrialization are not background 'contexts' against which technologies of power change. Rather, they are an explicit concern of Physiocrats like Abeille, who criticize the rigid controls imposed by sovereigntist government in light of new demographic and economic conditions. Thus, in the first instance, physiocracy is an irruptive movement of critical reflection that separates itself from the dominant forms of sovereign government as theorized in mercantilism. I return to this point, which relates to the crucial role of *thought* in Foucault's topological analysis.

There is another crucial modification in the analysis from 1976 to 1978. In *SMD*, Foucault saw in the 18th century the emergence of a general logic of biopolitical government that was characterized by the spread of disciplinary and regulatory controls over the entire domain of the biological. By contrast, in the 1978 and 1979 lectures, equipped with much suppler analytical tools, Foucault tells a more nuanced story based on a distinction between the *technology* of power found in physiocracy and the *topology* of power in which it was articulated.

The physiocratic program, Foucault notes, rests on a principle of *laissez faire* whose central proposition is that the market in grain must, through the autonomous actions of growers, sellers, and purchasers, be allowed to find its own price, its own pattern of production, distribution and consumption. And it is in this physiocratic program that Foucault finds perhaps the most crucial articulation of the technology of power – security – through which the figure of population is constituted as a target of governmental reflection and intervention. It initially seems that, as in the 1976 lectures, Foucault places in the Physiocrats' hands the new technology of power that will be paradigmatic for an emerging biopolitics, particularly as it is subsequently found in liberal thought, which quickly moves to the center of attention in 1978 and 1979. Indeed, at the level of the *technology of power*, a near identity is posited between liberalism and physiocracy. Foucault notes that:

> The game of liberalism – not interfering, allowing free movement, letting
> things follow their course; *laisser faire passer et aller* – basically and funda-
> mentally means acting so that reality develops, goes its way, and follows its
> own course according to the laws, principles, and mechanisms of reality itself.
> (2007: 48)

But when Foucault returns to the Physiocrats in *The Birth of Biopolitics* we
find that, in fact, physiocratic thought is not the pre-figuration of liberalism
and it does not provide the matrix of a global logic of biopolitics. Rather, it
is seen in what Foucault calls its 'very interesting and very paradoxical'
singularity.[28] The Physiocrats, he argues, presented a 'strict critique of all
the administrative rules and regulations through which the sovereign's
power was exercised on the economy'. Their doctrine of *laissez faire*
proclaimed that the sovereign should be compelled 'by reason, knowledge,
and truth to accept the principle of freedom of economic agents' (Foucault,
2008: 284–5). But at the same time – and this is crucial – the Physiocrats
advanced this principle in the *name* of sovereignty, of its aggrandizement
and preservation. The 'interesting and paradoxical' character of physiocratic
programming lies, thus, in the fact that a technology of security, which
proposes a new principle of *limitation* on state intervention, is mobilized in
the name of a sovereignty that is more absolute than ever. 'You can see',
Foucault concludes:

> . . . that the principle of laissez-faire in the Physiocrats . . . can coincide with
> the existence of a sovereign who is all the more despotic and unrestrained by
> traditions, customs, rules, and fundamental laws as his only law is that of
> *evidence*, of a well-formed, well-constructed knowledge. (2008: 285)

In this light, Foucault notes, we can understand how Adam Smith defined
his invisible hand *against* the physiocratic *laissez-faire* defined by *economic*
freedom in a framework of *political* totalization. The political logic of
physiocracy was critiqued; the technology of power redeployed.

The physiocratic case is only one among many that could have been
invoked to illustrate the topological and recombinatorial approach in the
1978 and 1979 lectures. But the Physiocrats have a special place in
Foucault's analysis of biopolitics. As such, they will allow me to justify my
earlier claim that Foucault's initial account of biopolitics in *SMD* was
preliminary and, perhaps, confused. In *SMD*, we have seen, Foucault moved
from an analysis of developments in the 18th century to a global diagnosis
of biopolitics as a logic of power in which population was constituted as a
target of control, instrumental intervention and optimization. But perhaps –
though clearly this point would have to be studied further – this initial diag-
nosis of biopolitics stemmed from the peculiarities of the 18th-century cases
that, as we can understand only retrospectively, were the basis of Foucault's
analysis in 1976. Perhaps Foucault, without quite knowing it at the time,
was providing us with an analysis not of biopolitics in general but rather of

a singular pattern of correlation that combined an emerging technology of security with a form of sovereign power that was 'ever more despotic and unrestrained by traditions, customs, rules, and fundamental laws' (Foucault, 2008: 285). Perhaps it is because Foucault initially read biopolitics through the lens of these 'very interesting and very paradoxical' cases – and, we might add, linked them all too casually to 20th-century totalitarianisms – that he at first associates biopolitics with the control and *possession* of the biological. And perhaps, finally, in light of the later lectures, we can establish that this initial diagnosis in *SMD* was a *mis*diagnosis. Foucault mistakes a specific feature of physiocratic thought to be a general characteristic of biopolitics.

This argument – which, again, I put forward tentatively – would have crucial implications for scholarship that has taken *SMD* and the *History of Sexuality* to be *loci classici* for Foucault's thought on biopolitics. But here I want to emphasize the methodological structure of the very different story in the 1978 and 1979 lectures. In 1976, I have suggested, Foucault was still working within the methodological and conceptual apparatus of *DP*, still working through its axial distinction between the classical age and the modern age, and through its quasi-functionalist theses concerning the architecture of power. In this context, Foucault seems to force new figures – the population, the aleatory, the series – into a grid of normalization and control. Things look very different in the later lectures. The elements under observation are freed from this rigid architecture and are understood as they take shape in diverse configurations that arise in relation to historically situated problems. In the key analyses of the 1978 and 1979 lectures – of the British liberals, the ordoliberals, and the American 'neo'liberals – we are no longer dealing with epochal transformations that take shape with impersonal inevitability. The temporality speeds up; the shifts are short term and sectoral rather than global. And we are no longer dealing with global logics of the classical age or of biopolitics, whose hidden *nomos* should be sought in this or that 'limit' experience (of colonialism, of the camps). Indeed, in these lectures biopolitics is not a governmental logic at all. Rather, it is a problem space to be analyzed by tracing the recombinatorial processes through which techniques and technologies are reworked and redeployed.[29]

Thinking about Thinking: The Dynamics of Problematization

The physiocratic example points us to a second extension of Foucault's topological analysis – the relationship of Foucault's changing analysis of power to the significant modification in the analysis of *thinking* that can be observed in Foucault's late work. It is well known that Foucault's analysis of power was always wrapped up in his analysis of thought. The concept of knowledge-power made this relationship terminologically explicit, but it had always been crucial to his work. In this section I will show that the 1978–9 lectures place new emphasis on thinking as an active response to historically situated problems and as a key driver in shaping new topologies of power.

From his earliest work, Foucault had analyzed thinking in terms of its conditions of possibility. Concepts like systems of thought, the *episteme*, or discursivities emphasized immanence (there was no 'outside') and coherence (since precisely the systematicity of thinking was the object of analysis). In a certain sense, this earlier conception of thinking retained a residue of structuralism. Foucault was concerned to displace the primacy given to the subject and to agency. Consequently, as Rabinow (2003) points out, he analyzed thinking as 'an anonymous, discursive thing', and, in some ways, as a passive thing. The work on knowledge-power added another dimension to this long-standing conception of thinking. But the emphases on immanence, on coherence, and most centrally on discursive conditions of possibility, are retained.

This approach to thinking about thinking, I contend, can shed light on some of the tendencies I have been analyzing in Foucault's approach to power through 1976. Concepts like the *episteme* or knowledge-power sometimes seemed to suggest totalizing and epochal analyses precisely *because* they defined the conditions of possibility for certain modes of understanding and acting. After all, if these concepts refer to the conditions of possibility for thought, how could one think their outside? What would be the status of a broader configuration of power into which a knowledge-power form was articulated? Such questions were of secondary importance in Foucault's earlier work, and, we have seen, he addressed them either by generalizing the analysis of a knowledge-power form (the disciplinary society, the normalizing society) or by asserting vague functional relationships to broader forces without bringing these into the field of empirical analysis. My suggestion here is not that Foucault abandoned old tools for thinking about thinking, but that he repurposed them, as it were, and made them function in a different way. I will address this point by drawing a final contrast between Foucault's earlier and later work that will tie these observations about Foucault's approach to thinking back to the recombinatorial and topological analysis addressed in this article.

Foucault's empirical studies through the 1970s were most closely identified with his analyses of *exemplars* that drew striking contrasts between different discursive regimes or knowledge-power forms. Perhaps the most familiar is found in the opening sections of *DP*, in the contrast between the exacting punishment taken upon the body of the condemned and the prison schedule. These exemplars mark a distinction – in *DP*, between the retributive and restorative logic of sovereignty and the corrective and normalizing logic of discipline – precisely in those conditions of possibility that make certain ways of understanding and acting possible. They provide, in Ian Hacking's (2002: 84) nice description, a 'before and after' picture, 'whose quotations or descriptions permanently fix in the mind of the reader the fact that some upheaval has occurred', a momentous shift in *episteme* or knowledge-power regime. But upheaval per se is not the object of analysis. Rather, again, our attention is focused on the coherence and systematicity of a discursivity that, as it were, the exemplar exemplifies.

Foucault does not abandon this very effective analytical device. In *STP*, thus, we have the plague town versus Vigne de Vigny's plan for Nantes; the disciplinary logic of quarantine versus Duvillard's study of smallpox risk; indeed the entire analysis of security is developed through exemplars that, on one level, recall the earlier work. But, as we have already seen, the analytical function of these exemplars changes. They no longer mark epochs; they do not designate a 'historical series'; *pace* Hacking, they are resolutely *not* 'before and after' pictures. Rather, Foucault's question was how these figures of sovereignty, discipline and security are combined in 'complex edifices', 'systems of correlation' or, as I propose to call them, topologies of power.

There is another crucial modification: alongside these 'repurposed' exemplars we find very different kinds of thinkers from those who populated Foucault's earlier work. The key figures in the 1978 and 1979 lectures – the Physiocrats, the British liberals, the ordoliberals, the American neo-liberals – do not stand before or after some great upheaval; their thought does *not* find its 'conditions of possibility' in a stable regime of knowledge-power. Rather, they are situated precisely *amid* upheaval, in sites of problematization in which existing forms have lost their coherence and their purchase in addressing present problems, and in which new forms of under-standing and acting have to be invented.[30] Thus, we have seen that Foucault does not treat physiocracy as exemplary of a technology of power or a new governmentality that characterized an emerging biopolitics. Instead, the Physiocrats maneuver between a persistent sovereignty and a technology of power based on a figure of population that cannot be subject to sovereign law. They are actively engaged in *recombining elements* of sovereign power and security, and adapting them to the problems of population growth, expanded trade and urbanization in the 18th century. Similarly, the ordo-liberals, criticizing the hypertrophic growth of states that took place from the 1930s through the Second World War, seek to wrap principles of classic liberalism around the norms of social equity to address the crisis of state legitimacy in post-Nazi Germany. The American neoliberals, responding in part to the growth of the 'social state', redeployed 'typical analyses of the market economy' in order to 'test governmental action, gauge its validity, and to object to activities of the public authorities on the grounds of their abuses, excesses, futility, and wasteful expenditure' (Foucault, 2008: 240).[31]

Seen in this light, it becomes apparent that the emerging emphasis on a topological and recombinatorial analysis in the 1978 and 1979 lectures can be linked to what Rabinow (2003: 45) calls a 'simple but momentous shift' in Foucault's approach to thinking, whose beginnings can be traced to the same period.[32] Increasingly Foucault understood thinking not as an 'anonymous, discursive thing' but as a 'dynamic and heterogeneous process' of critical reflection and intervention. In this view, thinking is not bound by a knowledge-power regime; it should not be analyzed, as Foucault argued in a late interview, as a 'formal system that has reference only to itself' (Foucault, 1984: 388).[33] Rather, it is an activity that involves 'a degree of

constraint as well as a degree of freedom', that makes possible a certain critical distance from existing ways of understanding and acting. In sum, the space of problematization is a topological space, and thinking is a driver of recombinatorial processes.[34]

On Governmentality

In concluding this article I want to address a concept that has been peripheral to my story thus far, but that has been central to discussions of Foucault's project in the 1978 and 1979 lectures: governmentality. Governmentality has been the topic of a large and fecund literature whose basic orientations converge with the argument I have been developing in this article on some points, while diverging sharply on others.[35] On the one hand, this literature has contributed to a differentiated picture of biopolitical government that is entirely consistent with the topological approach that, I have argued, characterizes Foucault's work of 1978 and 1979. On the other hand, some prominent analysts of governmentality have been crucial in developing the widely accepted thesis that the 1978 and 1979 lectures stand in fundamental *continuity* with Foucault's earlier approach to power – a thesis that this article aims to refute since if there is one central contention of the argument thus far, it is that the analysis of knowledge-power developed in *Discipline and Punish* has distorted our understanding of his work on political government in 1978 and 1979. In this section I will argue that these apparently contradictory positions point to a basic tension in the governmentality literature, and I will suggest how a topological analysis might help resolve it.

What does the concept of governmentality refer to? The scholarship on governmentality has defined the term in a way that resonates deeply with Foucault's discussion of knowledge/power, as a political rationality that shapes the 'conditions of possibility' for thinking and acting in a certain way. Thus, Gordon writes that governmentality is a form of 'thinking about the nature of the practice of government . . . capable of *making some form of that activity thinkable and practicable* both to its practitioners and to those upon whom it is practiced' (1991: 3; italics added). Thomas Lemke (2001: 191) – who notes that govern-mentality refers to a *mentalité* of governing – writes that governmentality or political rationality '*constitutes the intellectual processing* of the reality which political technologies can tackle' (italics added). And Rose et al. note that governmentality shows how problems such as the moral order or the economy are '*made thinkable and practicable* [as] knowable and administrable domain[s]' (2006: 86; italics added). Given these definitions it is not hard to understand the claim in this literature that Foucault's work on political government involved the application of the knowledge/power framework to new objects. But this continuity thesis depends on the presumption that governmentality *is* the master category of the 1978 and 1979 lectures. It breaks down if we consider other concepts, terms and analytical strategies that Foucault employed in these lectures.

I will illustrate this point by referring to the important discussion of neoliberalism developed over the last 15 years by Nikolas Rose and his colleagues.[36] Rose's analysis, articulated in a series of articles and books, does not concern a generalized neoliberal governmentality, as he has repeatedly argued. Instead, it examines what he calls 'advanced liberal' government, which was articulated at a particular moment (Britain and the US in the 1960s and 1970s), in response to concrete problems (perceived crises of economic and social regulation). Advanced liberalism, in Rose's view, is one in a succession of 'formations' of liberal government that have emerged over the past 200 years.[37] It is not a total or static governmental system. Instead, as Rose notes, elements of advanced liberal government have been taken up in various contexts in which its political meaning is not pre-given. In all these senses, Rose's analysis has topological dimensions.

That said, what Rose has provided first of all, very self-consciously, and to great effect, is a general analysis of what he calls a 'diagram' of power, or what I have called, adopting Foucault's terminology from 1978 and 1979, a 'technology of power'.[38] This diagram is, indeed, a tool for understanding how certain problems were made 'thinkable and practicable as knowable and administrable domains'. It is associated, as Foucault wrote of discipline, 'neither with an institution nor with an apparatus' but with 'a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets' (Foucault, 1977: 215). As I will suggest in a moment, the identification of the 'advanced liberal' diagram of power was an invaluable step in orienting the study of contemporary political rationality to a certain kind of problem-making, and also to a characteristic set of techniques and styles of reasoning. But the concept has not always been taken up with much analytical precision. Scholars have found key mechanisms of advanced liberal government – of calculative choice or 'government at a distance', for example – in a wide range of contexts, and then proceeded to make broad claims about 'neoliberalism'.[39] In a recent article with Pat O'Malley and Mariana Valverde, Rose criticized precisely this tendency in much scholarship to 'identify any program with neoliberal elements as essentially neoliberal, [and to] proceed as if this subsumption of the particular under a more general category provides a sufficient account of its nature or explanation of its existence'. Neoliberalism is thus implicitly taken as a 'more or less constant master category that can be used both to understand and to explain all manner of political programs across a wide variety of settings' (Rose et al., 2006: 97–8).

This misdirected synecdoche that Rose et al. identify echoes a tendency that we found in Foucault's work on knowledge-power, which was empirically focused on the 'history of techniques' and technical practices but at times slipped, almost offhandedly, into global diagnoses of power relations. Similarly, in much contemporary work, advanced liberal government is initially identified through its 'parts' – techniques of calculative choice or of responsibilization. These parts, once observed, are then taken as indications that we are dealing with a neoliberal 'whole' – a total logic

of power relations in society (though with certain 'local' specifications and modifications). 'Advanced liberalism', in this application, loses its analytical value in the first instance because it is reduced to certain technical elements, and in the second because it refers to something so global that it does not admit to empirical observation.[40]

The claim I would like to advance here is that this persistent tendency in Foucauldian work about neoliberalism is partly attributable to the concept of governmentality itself. In its emphasis on the conditions of possibility of certain modes of understanding and acting, the concept of governmentality – like earlier concepts such as knowledge-power or the *episteme* – is prone to reification, as though it were a coherent regime that dominated an epoch.[41] It is not a helpful tool for analyzing a topological field comprised of heterogeneous techniques, procedures and institutional arrangements that *cannot* be made intelligible through reference to common conditions of possibility.

I want to be clear that my claim is resolutely not that the empirical work that forms the core of the governmentality scholarship treats political reason as a static system; that it ignores recombinatorial processes or paints a totalizing picture of biopolitics. Indeed, leading scholars in this sub-field have been careful and explicit on these points.[42] Rather, to repeat, it is that: first, the concept of governmentality has *itself* provoked (mis)applications of this work that commit the synechdocal error of confusing the 'parts' (techniques and so on) with some mysterious neoliberal 'whole'; second, the problems of misinterpretation have been multiplied by an overvaluation of the concept of governmentality, which has obscured much of what is novel and important in Foucault's 1978–9 lectures, specifically his shift to a more dynamic topological analysis of power relations.

One response to this problem, suggested by Rose et al., is to broaden the reference frame of 'governmentality', to emphasize how projects of political rationalization: 'are constantly undergoing modification in the face of some newly identified problem or solution, while retaining certain styles of thought and technological preferences' (2006: 98). In this light 'governmentality' should be understood as a very flexible category that encompasses: 'different styles of thought, their conditions of formation, the principles and knowledges that they borrow from and generate, the practices that they consist of, how they are carried out, their contestations and alliances with other arts of governing' (Rose et al., 2006: 84).[43] I am cautious about this direction of response. The issue is not fidelity to Foucault, who was inconsistent in his use of the term. Rather, it is that an insistence on flexibility may ward off rigidification at the price of diacritical value. If one pitfall is an 'inflationary' use of governmentality, in which the term refers to something so global that it does not admit to observation, then another is that the term becomes so flexible that it loses its ability to distinguish among phenomena that are obviously different.[44] Indeed, the specificity of neoliberalism is often buried in this insistence on flexibility and modifiability, which, in any case, only begs the question: what precisely is being retained

and what modulated in the 'constant' modifications of governmental forms? *How* are styles of reasoning, techniques, material elements and institutions put together, and what precisely in complex ensembles of government can be assigned the designation 'neoliberal'?

A more promising direction, in my view, would begin by rethinking the place of 'governmentality' in Foucault's evolving analysis of power from 1975–6 to 1978–9. Although it bears a certain affinity to earlier terms, we should read it in relation to the broader range of concepts introduced in the later lectures. Most notable in the latter group are those terms that comprise Foucault's rich conceptual vocabulary for topological analysis: redeployment, recombination, problematization, pattern of correlation, among others. In a strict sense, governmentality designates the genus – diagrams of political rationality, 'govern-mentalities' – of which specific political rationalities, such as advanced liberalism, are species. The concept is most valuable in understanding the conditions of possibility of certain ways of understanding and acting; for drawing insightful distinctions among diagrams of power; for understanding what is general to diverse governmental forms in disparate sites.[45] A topological analysis, by contrast, brings to light a heterogeneous space, constituted through multiple determinations, and not reducible to a given form of knowledge-power. It is better suited to analyzing the dynamic process through which existing elements, such as techniques, schemas of analysis, and material forms, are taken up and redeployed, and through which new combinations of elements are shaped. Both approaches should be understood nominalistically; neither afforded primacy. Rather, each has its role as a certain moment of inquiry, with definite strengths and attendant weaknesses.[46]

Returning to neoliberalism, we can say that the identification of advanced liberalism as a diagram of power or a form of govern-mentality was invaluable in making visible what is general about a new class of governmental forms across a range of cases. A topological analysis is now required to show how styles of analysis, techniques or forms of reasoning associated with 'advanced liberal' government are being recombined with other forms, and to diagnose the governmental ensembles that emerge from these recombinations.[47] For example, we now have a significant body of work that examines how techniques associated with advanced liberalism, initially formulated in conservative or libertarian efforts to roll back government, have been taken up in authoritarian contexts or by left-leaning democratic governments. Here we have a topological transformation that nearly reverses the one that Foucault traced from the Physiocrats to the British liberals. The British liberals rejected the physiocratic principle of sovereignty and combined the elements of 'security' with a new liberal programming that aimed to reduce the state. Today, by contrast, we find cases in which techniques of advanced liberal government that were invented to reduce an excessive and inefficient governmentality are redeployed either to strengthen the state (as, for example, in post-Soviet Russia, where neoliberal reforms of social welfare have actually intensified during

the period of Putin's rule[48]) or in projects of social welfare that are mobilized, in part, as explicit responses to 'neoliberalism' (as, I would argue, is the case with programs like the *Bolsa Familia* in Lula da Silva's Brazil).[49] We can trace certain techniques and technical mechanisms from one context to the other. Indeed, such tracing is an essential contribution to rendering these new topologies of power intelligible. But there is no reason to assume that the resulting governmental ensembles can be read as playing out some internal logic of neoliberalism.[50] Nor can we assume that those engaged in taking up and redeploying these techniques from one context to another are 'liberal' in any meaningful sense. Indeed, using terms like 'advanced liberalism' or 'neoliberalism' to describe these new topologies of power – or the elements that comprise them – may serve primarily to confuse matters.

An unexpected consequence of a shift from governmentality to a topological analysis is that it might clear a space for a renewed attention to neoliberalism itself, which, ironically, has been obscured by the focus on governmentality. After all, what, on Foucault's account, is neoliberalism? It is not a form of knowledge-power or a kind of governmentality that establishes the 'conditions of possibility' for thinking and acting in a certain way. It is not a diagram of power or a congeries of technical elements. Instead it is a form of thinking, a kind of reflection that aims to critique and remediate existing *mentalités* and practices of government that have become uncertain or problematic. This is made abundantly clear by Foucault's analysis in the 1978–9 lectures, which focused overwhelmingly on specific thinkers as they responded to historically situated problems. In this light, it is striking that, on the one hand, very little 'Foucauldian' scholarship on neoliberalism has made *thinking* – as understood by the late Foucault – an object of analysis, and that, on the other hand, the *range* of neoliberal thinkers examined in this scholarship has been absurdly narrow.[51] The fact is not surprising. Since 'Foucauldian' work on neoliberalism has been dominated by a concept of governmentality that focuses on 'conditions of possibility', thought, per se, appears as a passive thing and thus perhaps not a particularly interesting thing. But in the frame of a topological analysis it is precisely the specific activity of thought that would have to be examined to understand the processes of recombination and reproblematization through which contemporary government – beyond 'advanced liberalism' – is being refigured.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Rabinow (2003: 46–7) also argues that Foucault's earlier work is cast in sometimes-epochal terms.

2. The field of topology has been taken up explicitly in the scholarship of Annemarie Mol and John Law (1994) and in the work of Michel Serres. My

understanding of Serres' work on the topic has benefited from articles by Paul A. Harris (1997) and Steven Conner (2004).

3. Thus, Foucault provides, as Paul Harris (1997: 44) has written of the field of topology, a 'supple and quite abstract vocabulary of relations and transformation'.

4. The term 'remediation' is borrowed from Paul Rabinow and Gaymon Bennett (2007).

5. Mariana Valverde (2008) has recently argued that this stark contrast between sovereign power and discipline is specific to *Discipline and Punish*. I am inclined to argue that it was in fact broader, reflecting a basically epochal story that runs through much of Foucault's work through the mid 1970s. But Valverde's basic argument – that in the late 1970s Foucault was more generally interested in the diverse configurations of sovereign power, including those that involved combinations with discipline – is consonant with my own.

6. For example, Pasquale Pasquino writes:

> If a close analysis of the disciplines opposed the Marxist thesis of economic exploitation as a principle for understanding the mechanisms of power, this analysis by itself was not enough and required the investigation of global problems of the regulation and ordering of society as well as the modalities of conceptualizing this problem. (1993: 79)

Trombadori writes:

> It is just on this issue . . . that a lack of movement from the 'microphysics' to the 'physics' of power would be revealed, a movement that would be capable of extending the Foucauldian archaeological gaze from the local level to a more general level of relations of domination. In reflecting on the category of 'governmentality', and in reconsidering the systems and apparatuses of power that presided during the origins of the modern states, Foucault has attempted to respond to criticisms of this kind. (1991: 21)

7. Similarly, Sellenart argues that:

> . . . [t]he shift from 'power' to 'government' carried out in the 1978 lectures does not result from the methodological framework being called into question, but from its extension to a new object, the state, which did not have a place in the analysis of the disciplines. (2007: 382)

8. The term 'micro-physics' invites contrast with a 'macro' pole of analysis. I am not aware that Foucault ever used the latter term, although he does use the term 'meta' in *DP* to refer to a disciplinary power that is not confined to the circumscribed spaces of institutions. In *Birth of Biopolitics* he explicitly criticizes an analysis that contrasts 'micro' and 'macro' registers, suggesting that, contrary to Trombadori's suggestion, he may not have been so eager to 'respond to criticisms' of the Marxists after all. Foucault wrote:

> What I wanted to do – and this was what was at stake in the analysis – was to see the extent to which we could accept that the analysis of micro-powers, or of procedures of governmentality, is not confined by definition to a precise

domain determined by a sector of the scale but should be considered simply as a point of view, a method of decipherment which may be valid for the whole scale, whatever its size. In other words, the analysis of micro-powers is not a question of scale, and it is not a question of a sector, it is a question of a point of view. (2008: 186)

This problematic of scale points to intriguing connections between Foucault's work and the writing of Michel Callon and Bruno Latour from the same period (Callon and Latour, 1981).

9. As this passage indicates, in Foucault's usage 'biopolitics' referred to state involvement in problems of 'social' life and not only 'biological' life.

10. In this passage Foucault makes his only mention in *SMD* of *security*, the term that replaces 'regulatory power' in *STP*. He clearly refers to the security of sovereign power – that is, to domestic order and peace – rather than to the security of populations discussed in *STP*.

11. This point about the *Annales* School is made by Paul Rabinow (1984).

12. Foucault (2003: 251) writes that a 'sort of spontaneous policing or control was carried out by the spatial layout of the town itself'.

13. As Fontana and Bertani write:

> These two powers therefore do not, as has sometimes been said, constitute two separate 'theories' within Foucault's thought. One does not preclude the other; one is not independent of the other. One does not derive from the other; they are, rather, knowledge/power's two conjoint modes of functioning, though it is true that they do have their own specific foci, points of application, finalities, and *enjeux*: the training of bodies on the one hand, and the regulation of the population on the other. (2003: 279)

14. My reading here diverges, again, from Valverde, who sees the epochal and quasi-functionalist statements in Foucault's work to be idiosyncratic. In contrast, I would argue that if we focus on Foucault's analysis of the broader configurations of power in which the micro-powers were articulated, a consistent epochal and quasi-functionalist argument can be traced from *Madness and Civilization* to *Discipline and Punish*.

15. Valverde (2008) writes that: 'Discipline was clearly linked by Foucault to the rise of the industrial proletariat and bourgeois society's need for working bodies with standardized capacities; but the *Discipline and Punish* story carefully avoided making capital the motor force of history.' Passages such as the one just cited suggest that Foucault was not always entirely careful in this respect.

16. These shifts are also noted in Sellenart (2007).

17. Some authors have taken Foucault to argue that liberalism and neoliberalism only established a logic of control at another, more insidious level. Foucault's comments in *Birth of Biopolitics* show that this reading is mistaken. Foucault argues that:

> When you talk about contemporary neo-liberalism . . . you generally get three types of response. The first is that from the economic point of view neo-liberalism is no more than the reactivation of old, secondhand economic

theories. The second is that from the sociological point of view it is just a way of establishing strictly market relations in society. [T]he third response is that from a political point of view, neo-liberalism is no more than a cover for a generalized administrative intervention by the state which is all the more profound for being insidious and hidden beneath the appearances of a neo-liberalism. You can see that these three types of response ultimately make neoliberalism out to be nothing at all, or anyway, nothing but always the same thing, and always the same thing but worse. . . . Now what I would like to show you is precisely that neoliberalism is really something else. (2008: 130)

18. This point is not new. Foucault noted in *SMD* and in *History of Sexuality* that discipline emerged in the 'circumscribed spaces' of sovereign power, such as the army, the school, and the prison. But in the earlier lectures this configuration was, as we have seen, understood as a kind of intermediate form; a first step in bio-politics' emergence 'on the level of detail', to be followed by a complementary movement on the 'meta' level. In *STP*, by contrast, this combination of discipline and sovereignty is no longer treated as a kind of transitional form but as a basic characteristic of the stable and enduring governmental edifice of European Absolutisms, in which heterogeneous technologies of power were combined. I have analyzed a variant of this 'disciplinary-sovereigntist' formation in the Russian case (Collier, forthcoming).

19. Foucault observes that, with the establishment of security mechanisms, we find a 'considerable activation and propagation of the disciplinary corpus' (2007: 7).

20. The shift from 'knowledge-power' to 'technology of power' deserves more reflection. It will be recalled that in *DP* Foucault contrasted sovereign power to knowledge-power; knowledge-power referred specifically to modern forms of power. 'Technology of power', by contrast, is a more general analytical category. Thus, in *STP*, sovereignty seems to be identified as a technology of power – that is, as itself a form of knowledge-power, with its associated techniques, rationalities and knowledge forms – alongside discipline, security and so on.

21. Terms like 'patterns of correlation', 'configuration' or simply 'topology' seem preferable to 'system' because they emphasize a definite principle of relationality among heterogeneous elements without suggesting any global logic of the whole that they form.

22. A concern with the redeployment of techniques of confinement can be traced from *Birth of the Clinic* to *Discipline and Punish*, and is repeated in *STP*.

23. For a discussion of the distinction between 'techniques' and 'technologies' see Collier and Lakoff (2005).

24. This logic of contingent relationality is connected to what Foucault, in *Birth of Biopolitics*, calls a 'strategic' logic. Foucault writes of a strategic logic as a 'form of coherence' and notes that:

A logic of strategy does not stress contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their resolution in a unity. The function of strategic logic is to establish the possible connections between disparate terms which remain disparate. The logic of strategy is the logic of connections between the hetero-geneous and not the logic of the homogenization of the contradictory. (2008: 42)

25. An anonymous reviewer of this article pointed out that the introduction of a 'topological' analysis followed once Foucault's attention shifted away from the 'geometrical space of the institutions'. This claim seems to me precisely right, and I am grateful for the clarity of this formulation of the argument I am trying to develop. The only point I would add, and the point I am trying to develop in this section, is that when Foucault *initially* turned to biopolitics in 1976 he retained much of his prior conception of power, and that the subsequent modulation of that conception has been largely neglected.

26. I am aware of only one explicit reference to the Physiocrats in *SMD*.

27. I refer to physiocracy broadly because the critique of controls on the grain trade was not limited to Abeille. Stephen Holmes (1995) has provided a parallel analysis of other figures.

28. In speaking of 'singularity' Foucault did not mean to suggest an infinite particularization of forms of biopolitical government but rather a distinctive combination of elements. For a discussion of the term see Rabinow (2003).

29. A related point about biopolitics has recently been made by Rabinow and Rose (2003).

30. Rabinow (2003: 19) writes that:

> The domain of problematization is constituted by and through economic conditions, scientific knowledges, political actors, and other related vectors. What is distinctive is Foucault's identification of the problematic situation, the situation of the process of a specific type of problem making, as simultaneously the object, the site, and ultimately the substance of thinking.

For another analysis of inquiry focused on 'sites of problematization', see Collier and Lakoff (2005).

31. It is important to specify that the distinguishing feature of the American neoliberal approach was not the criticism of an excessive government per se (this had been true of classical liberalism), but the fact that government was *itself* constituted as the object of critique and programming (Collier, forthcoming).

32. For example, in the 1978 lecture 'What is Critique' (Foucault, 1997). Arguably, it is the new attention to *thinking* – rather than the focus on neoliberalism as a new form of subjectivation – that provides the critical point of connection between the work of 1978 and 1979 on government and Foucault's later work on ethics.

33. The passage continues:

> Actually, for a domain of action, a behavior, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it. (Foucault, 1984: 388)

34. Conner makes a related point in his discussion of the role of thinking in Michel Serres' topological analysis. Writing about Serres' analogy that the shaping of topological space is like the kneading of dough, he notes that Serres':

> . . . image of history not as an inert or given shape, exposed and disposed to the investigating eye, but a dynamism, folding over automorphically on itself,

> makes the dough, as it had been for Bachelard, an image of the activity of thought or knowledge, as well as of the nature of its object. . . . It is an image of time gathering into history, but also the image of the way in which time is thought, in time. It is as though history gains its shape from the ways in which it reads itself or gathers itself up, as we say, reflexively, as well as the ways in which its time happens to fall out. History is the shape that time can take and the shape that historical reflexion (doubling back, doubling over) will make of it. (Conner, 2004: 105)

35. Two overlapping axes of this literature might be distinguished. One is comprised of secondary interpretive analyses, including several that I draw on in the present article, such as those by Thomas Lemke (2001), Marianna Valverde (2007, 2008), Colin Gordon (1991) and Michel Sellenart (2007). The other has been devoted to extending that work through empirical analysis, and is too large to outline, but has been reviewed by, among others, Sellenart (2007), Wendy Larner (2000) and Nikolas Rose et al. (2006).

36. The crucial writings can be found in *Powers of Freedom* (Rose, 1999) and the recent collection of essays, *Governing the Present* (Miller and Rose, 2008). Other key texts in this scholarship are found in the collection *Foucault and Political Reason* (Barry et al., 1996).

37. Foucault repeatedly refers to 'formations' of liberal government in *Birth of Biopolitics* (2008).

38. This point is made with particular clarity in *Powers of Freedom* (Rose, 1999).

39. Sellenart (2007) has recently called attention to this tendency.

40. This argument resonates with Bruno Latour's critique of many key concepts of 'social theory', articulated most recently in *Reassembling the Social* (Latour, 2005). Similar critiques of the study of neoliberalism have been advanced by Boas and Gans-Morse (2009) and Ganev (2005).

41. I have benefited from discussions with Onur Ozgode on this point.

42. Along with Rose's *Powers of Freedom* (1999), Pat O'Malley's *Risk, Uncertainty and Government* (2004) is exemplary in this respect.

43. Arguing along similar lines, Valverde (2008) has insisted that the 'governmentality' framework is intended to provide insight into 'actual practices of government' as opposed to resting on 'generalized notions' that have 'heuristic utility but are inherently oversimplifying'. The emphasis on 'actual practices' does not seem to me any more clarifying or satisfactory than an emphasis on the flexibility of governmentality as a framework without the elaboration of an analytical vocabulary for studying concrete assemblies of government.

44. Foucault criticizes 'inflationary' critiques in an important methodological reflection in *Birth of Biopolitics* (2008: 186–90).

45. In this sense, I would argue that they function like what Weber (1949) called ideal types. For reasons that are not clear to me Rose et al. (2006) specifically reject this association.

46. In the case of 'knowledge-power' these weaknesses would include a tendency to 'inflationary' analyses that take a diagram of power to provide a total diagnosis of power relations in an age, and a tendency to what Rose et al. (2006) call 'rigidification'. A potential pitfall of topological analysis might be a tendency to slip into

an excessive emphasis on the contingency of specific formations at the expense of developing broader conceptual tools. I have elaborated the latter point in a critique of actor-network theory (Collier, 2009). My suggestion, however, is that topological analysis should be able to retain focus on the configurational principles through which diverse elements are linked up.

47. Along with the governmentality literature, another very substantial effort to grapple with the changing forms of neoliberalism can be found among critical geographers (Brenner, 2004; Peck and Tickell, 2002).

48. See Collier (forthcoming) and Ferguson (forthcoming).

49. The Brazil reforms are only one example of the widespread dispersion of programs involving the monetization and targeting of benefits that have been analyzed across a range of contexts. Among others see my *Post-Soviet Social* (Collier, forthcoming) and Antina Von Schnitzler's work on utility reform in South Africa (2009). For another example of such a 'recombinatorial' analysis in a very different domain (catastrophe modeling) see my 'Enacting Catastrophe' (Collier, 2008).

50. My point here is very much in agreement with Rose, but diverges from the position taken by, for example, Mitchell Dean (2002).

51. For example, endless attention has been paid to Gary Becker as exemplary of 'neoliberalism', as in a recent article by Michel Feher (2009). As I hope to show in a future article, this focus on those 'neoliberals' that Foucault analyzed has distorted Foucauldian analyses of neoliberalism.

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