Nothing is Political, Everything Can Be Politicized: On the Concept of the Political in Michel Foucault and Carl Schmitt[*]

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I.

In a 1979 memo about governmentality, Michel Foucault establishes that the analysis of governmentality as a "singular universality" implies that everything is political.[1] Foucault explains his conclusion by "de-constructing" the phrase "everything is political." This leads to the set of questions that he introduces when he talks about the terms biopolitics and biopower, whose meaning provides a new perspective regarding the history and development that shaped modern forms of government. I will characterize these problems in detail before I return back to the aforementioned passage.

These problems pertain to the question of the status of the political raised by the term "biopolitics," which leads us to the center of the question posed in the passage. Foucault coined the term "biopolitics" in the 1970s in order to describe a technology of power developed in the eighteenth century that "constitutes masses"; that is, it does not address individuals but rather directs itself toward a collection of living beings. Biopolitics is,

* Translated from the German by Jennifer Bierich and David Pan.

1. This refers to a manuscript without a title, a bundle of eleven numbered pages. The lines quoted here were transcribed and reproduced in the "Situierung der Vorlesungen" by the publisher of the lectures from 1978–79, Michel Sennelart. According to Sennelart, the manuscript is difficult to understand, and therefore he only published this section. Michael Sennelart, "Situierung der Vorlesungen," in Michel Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik: Vorlesung am Collège de France 1978–1979*, vol. 2 of *Geschichte der Gouvernementalität* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), pp. 486f.

Telos 142 (Spring 2008): 135–61.
www.telospress.com

as Foucault defined it in a summary of lectures from 1979, in the second part of the *History of Governmentality*, with the subtitle "The Birth of Biopolitics," "the way that one has tried since the eighteenth century to rationalize the problems that were posed to governmental practice by the totality of living beings constituted as a population; health, hygiene, birth-rate, lifespan, races."[2] In summary, biopolitics is the entirety of disciplinary techniques and regulatory methods that optimize the population while at the same time constituting it as a new reality.[3] And what is biopower? Foucault describes biopower as the technology that, on the one hand, refers to the discipline of the body while, on the other hand, refers to the rule over this new entirety of the population constituted by specific mechanisms of regulation and knowledge. In this context, Foucault discusses a technology of power directed at "bodily capabilities" and the "processes of life."[4] If biopolitics and biopower are based on technical and system-theoretical terms, such as rationalization, regulation, discipline, governance, standardization, apparatus, and homeostasis, then the question arises of how biopower and biopolitics are to be differentiated from one another,[5] and, more importantly, if it is appropriate in this context to use the notion of politics at all, at least when one links the concept of politics to questions of decision-making, will, self-determination, and public interest,[6] as well

2. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose, eds., *The Essential Foucault: Selections from the Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984* (New York: The New Press, 2003), p. 202.

3. Cf. Michel Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung: Vorlesung am Collège de France 1977-1978*, vol. 1 of *Geschichte der Gouvernementalität* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), p. 43. A population originates where the milieu becomes a determinant of nature.

4. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 139.

5. Petra Gehrig refers to biopolitics as a concept that is "more phenomenological," "narrower," and "less well-differentiated" than the idea of biopower." Petra Gehrig, *Was ist Biomacht: Vom zweifelhaften Mehrwert des Lebens* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2004), p. 14. As a result, she prefers the term biopower as the more analytic category. Martin Stingelin points out that Foucault himself did not properly distinguish between the terms and suggests that biopolitics should be reserved for the "power of resistance and the freedom of the individual" to "resist the demands of the power-knowledge complex through a self-determination that is different from the one that is being imposed." Martin Stingelin, "Einleitung: Biopolitik und Rassismus," in *Biopolitik und Rassismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Dems, 2003), pp. 7–25; here, pp. 15f.

6. Foucault analyzes the concept of interest as a form of the public will within the context of the development of the *homo oeconomicus*. It is important that the subject of public interest, as he writes, has to do with the subject of a "more or less purified interest

as to the question of agents and the sovereign. What Foucault seems to present with his analysis of biopower as the technology of power accruing to the modern state is, to put it bluntly, nothing less than the meaning of the political, encompassed by the concepts of the will, the sovereign, and the decision. This is, at first, all the more jarring because the concept of the political, in interplay with notions of public sphere and critique, presents a historical accompaniment to the history of the modern state.

Now this crisis of the political in Foucault's analysis of biopower is connected to the crisis into which the emergence of biopower has displaced the sovereign and the entire area of the legal. The well-known thesis, according to which sovereign power has been displaced by biopower,[7] constitutes only one side of the story. The flip side consists of a fundamental change in the relationship of history to life that accompanies the implementation of biopower. Modern man is, as Foucault writes, no longer a "living animal" that is capable of a political existence, but rather an "'animal' whose life as a living being is at stake in its politics."[8] What does this mean? It means that the development of knowledge about life, the improvement of agricultural techniques, the observations and measurements of the living, and the use of statistics and probability have led to the result that life has become manipulable and that the optimization of this manipulability of life has become the object of politics. As Foucault thoroughly discussed in his lectures on the history of governmentality, politics has been transformed into political economy. The blurring of the division between the space of economy—as the space where reproduction was managed—and the space of politics, as it existed in the ancient *polis*, is both the expression and the flip side of the process in which the life of the human, understood in a universal and abstract way as a living being, has become the object of politics.

that has become calculating and rationalized." Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 375. For Foucault the concept of the "public interest" is to be understood within the context of utilitarianism and the idea of the calculability of desired goods and therefore belongs to the biopolitical apparatus. The action of the subject of interests—as opposed to the action of the legal subject—does not occur within the dialectic of renunciation, transcendence, and an arbitrary commitment to the contract, but rather under the sign of an intensification of interest.

7. This process has to do with the transformation of the legal mechanism and the mechanism for discipline. As Foucault stresses, the three regimes of power do not supersede each other in stages, but rather presuppose each other and are interwoven with each other. Cf. Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung*, p. 26.

8. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:143.

"The introduction of the economy into the execution of politics is," in Foucault's words, "the primary mission of governance."[9] To govern the state, is, in other words, to apply economics on "the level of the state as whole" and therefore to the inhabitants, the resources, and the conduct of all and of every single individual. In doing so, one can note that economy shall be understood here as a scientific discipline. According to Foucault, it is "an atheistic discipline," "a discipline without God," and a "discipline without totality." Economy becomes the starting point for both the rationalization of governmental practices—and thus of politics itself—and the deterioration of sovereign power: "economics is a discipline that not only manifests the uselessness but also the impossibility of a sovereign perspective, the perspective of the sovereign on the totality of the state that is governed."[10]

At the beginning of the first volume of his lectures on the history of governmentality, Foucault describes his project as the investigation of the "rationalization of governmental practices in the exercise of political sovereignty."[11] Governmentality describes, accordingly, a governmental practice that is situated between the poles of rationalization and political sovereignty, and in a certain way links the two. Yet, a balance between both poles does not exist. The result is that the rationalization of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty transforms the latter from within—structurally—and empties it out. The rationalization of governmental practice began in the second half of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the course of a process in which the security apparatus transformed a multiplicity of individuals into a population. In contrast to sovereignty, which capitalizes on a territory, and in contrast to discipline, which architectonically sketches out a space and poses the problem of the functional and hierarchical ordering of elements in this space, security, as Foucault characterizes this new discursive formation, attempts to deploy a series of events and possible elements as a "milieu."[12] In this milieu, the series of events must be regulated within a multivalent and malleable framework. The secured space refers to a "series of possible events,"[13] and thus to the "temporal and aleatory."[14]

9. Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung*, p. 144.
10. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 387.
11. Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung*, p. 14.
12. Ibid., p. 40.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.

It is not difficult to recognize in the background the thoughts on probability developed by mathematicians and philosophers, such as Blaise Pascal (1623–62), Pierre Fermat (1607–65), and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716). Now, however, the future series of events, whose possibility has become calculable, must be inscribed into a space in order for them to be able to be regulated. This inscription occurs, as Foucault makes clear, by making the "milieu" into a determinant of nature that connects the "nature" of physics[15] and later the "nature" of biology with the "nature of the human,"[16] and consequently with the population. The concepts of life and the living being, as becomes clear, are connected, from the moment that economy determines politics, with the technical discursive apparatus of the natural sciences.[17] The tensions that result also determine the concept of biopolitics.

The modern State, as Foucault further emphasizes, is no leviathan, nor is it a monster or a mortal God. It is much more like a body without a head, and functions, as such, more like an organism conceived as a living system that must survive by means of its feedback mechanisms. So it is not astonishing that Foucault characterizes the concept of governmentality, with which he designates this new form of governmental action linked to the modern State, using the metaphor of a ship as a combination of maneuver and communication: "What does it mean to pilot a ship [*gouverner*]? It certainly means to lead the sailors, but it also means to take over responsibility for the ship and its cargo; to pilot a ship also means to take heed of the winds, the cliffs, the storms, and the changing weather. It is this construction of a relationship between the sailors and the ship that must be saved and the cargo that must be brought into harbor and their relationships to all those events, such as the winds, the cliffs, and bad weather, that characterize the piloting of a ship."[18]

The art of governing linked to biopolitics stands in a hidden relation, as is clear here even in the choice of metaphors,[19] to that "experimental

15. Lamarck first introduced the concept of milieu into biology. However, the term was also used in Newtonian physics, to which Foucault alludes. In this context it means, "that which is necessary to report on the distance effect of one body on another body" (Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung*, p. 40). Thus, the milieu is the carrier and the circulatory element of an effect.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 146.

19. The term governmentality is related here to the English word "governor," which can also be used in the sense of centrifugal governor.

epistemology"[20] that Norbert Wiener calls cybernetics:[21] the science of the communication, control, and regulation processes in machines and animals.[22] Biopolitics shares with cybernetics not just the universalization of the statistical point of view,[23] but also the point of view of a consistent immanence. "I searched," as Wiener recalls the naming of cybernetics, "first for a Greek word that meant 'messenger', but knew only *angelos*. In English it specifically refers to an 'angel,' or a messenger of God, and was therefore dismissed. Then I looked for a specific word from the domain of control and regulation. The only word that occurred to me was the Greek word for pilot, which was *kybernetes*. From this I created the word 'cybernetic.' Later I learned that an equivalent had been used since the begin of the nineteenth century by the French physicist Ampère in a sociological context; but I did not know this at the time."[24]

As the theorist of science Donna Haraway stresses, the cybernetic mechanization that changed the world so radically in the second half of the twentieth century represents, after the Copernican revolution, Darwin's theory of evolution, and Freud's psychoanalysis, the fourth major slight to mankind's narcissism.[25] Admittedly this is again only one side of the story. The other side, which history itself has sufficiently demonstrated, is that cybernetics is fully compatible with a forced anthropocentrism. Haraway, in referring to sociobiology, which investigates the social behavior of apes as emblematic for the functioning of human societies as command-control communication systems, even talks about a hyperhumanism.[26]

20. Cf. Heinz Foerster, "Circular Causality: The Beginnings of an Epistemology of Responsibility," in Claus Pias, ed., *Cybernetics—Kybernetik: The Macy-Conferences 1946–1953* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2003), 1:14.

21. She likewise bases governmentality on the universal point of view of statistics. Cf. Norbert Wiener, *Mathematik—mein Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1962), p. 267.

22. Ibid., p. 220.

23. As Wiener describes in his autobiography, "the statistical point of view, as it clearly manifested itself in my early research," not only forced him toward "a new perspective on order and regularity" but will influence, by way of cybernetics, "already existing sciences" and "the philosophy of science itself," especially in the areas of "scientific methods of epistemology." Ibid., p. 267. Cf. Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky, *Praktiken der Illusion. Kant, Nietzsche, Cohen, Benjamin bis Donna J. Haraway* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2007), pp. 71ff.

24. Wiener, *Mathematik—mein Leben*, p. 63.

25. Joseph Schneider, *Donna Haraway: Live Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2005), pp. 114–57; here, pp. 139f.

26. Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 110.

What distinguishes this cybernetic hyperhumanism is the combination of control and communication, of systematic and hierarchical thought, of functional regulation and representational rule. These associations, as is clear even in the literal sense of the word, also apply to the concept of governmentality. Thus, the French word *gouverneur* is related to the English word *governor*, which can mean regent or president but also, in a technical sense, centrifugal governor. One uses the word centrifugal governor to designate the technical apparatus that holds the speed of steam engines in a constant state by means of a negative feedback mechanism. This ambiguity of the word *governor*, which links president and centrifugal governor, reflects a fundamental ambiguity that results from the overlap between balance and control, technical functionality and hierarchy, communication and the politics of representation that is linked to the regime of sovereignty. This ambiguity determines both the ruling practices of governmentality and biopolitics simultaneously; it results in a structural instability in the regime of governmentality. In other words, one cannot dismiss the possibility that the regime of governmentality and biopower can lead to excessive control, to a torpid hierarchy, and to a deadly "excess of rule."[27] Foucault cites, as extreme instances, the war regime of Nazism[28] but also the "state socialism" that he calls "a dirigist economics and planned economy that arose out of the period of 1914–18 and its general mobilization of resources and people."[29]

One can assume that Foucault was aware of the origins of the term "biopolitics" in National Socialist vocabulary, a link that Jörg Marx meticulously traces in his essay "'The Will for a Child' and the Controversy about the Physiological Infertility of Woman."[30] While Marx, like many others, pleads for a separation of politics from nature and politics from biology, and insists on the right of each individual over his or her own body and life, Foucault warns against the belief that one could undermine the regime of biopower by appealing to the life and the rights of humans as

27. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 441.

28. Cf. the lecture on March 17, 1976, where Foucault explicitly and thoroughly deals with National Socialism and state-imposed racism. Michel Foucault, *In Verteidigung der Gesellschaft: Vorlesungen am College de France (1975–76)* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), pp. 276–93.

29. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 441.

30. Jörg Marx, "'Der Wille zum Kind' und der Streit um die physiologische Unfruchtbarkeit der Frau: Die Geburt der modernen Reproduktionsmedizin im Kriegsjahr 1942," in *Biopolitik und Rassismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 112–59.

living beings. For this life, as well as the human as living thing, can only "assume office" through biopower itself.[31] Even when one takes the installation of life as political theme "at its word," as Foucault says, and uses it against the system that has taken control over life, one is still engaging in biopolitics. As he summarizes, life, rather than law, in the course of the nineteenth century, became the object of political struggles, even when they are articulated in terms of legal demands.[32] As opposed to humans and human rights, Foucault talks about legal subjects[33] and the rights of the governed.

He himself became actively involved in support of these rights in numerous struggles since May 1968, in different locations around the world and in a variety of media forums. Along the way he consistently avoided speaking in the name of some person or thing, such as, for example, human rights. Against the representative intellectual, who seeks to form the political consciousness of others, and against the sovereign of whatever provenance, Foucault sets up the "specific intellectual"[34] who should exercise the truth. For Foucault, the task of this intellectual is, first, "to develop analyses within her field of expertise, reexamine ostensible certainties and postulates, and reevaluate rules and institutions," and, second, "to participate in the cultivation of a political will."[35] The intellectual, as Foucault remarked in a 1973 talk with a Renault employee in the newspaper *Libération*, is linked to the information apparatus, not to the production apparatus: he can write in newspapers, speak on the radio, and make himself generally understood. Furthermore, he is tied to the "old apparatus of information"[36] and possesses knowledge conveyed by reading books.

Foucault sought to apply this knowledge in his political struggles in order to create public spheres for those people who were excluded from

31. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1:143.

32. Ibid.

33. On the concept of the legal subject with respect to the state and in contrast to the subject of interests, cf. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, pp. 375ff.

34. Michel Foucault, "Die politische Funktion des Intellektuellen," in *Dits et Ecrits*, vol. 3, *1976–1979*, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), pp. 145–52.

35. Michel Foucault, "Interview mit François Ewald," in Mona Winter and Wolfgang Zängl, *Michel Foucault: Eine Geschichte der Wahrheit* (Munich: Raben, 1987), p. 58.

36. Michel Foucault, *Libération*, May 26, 1973. Cited in Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault: Eine Bibliographie*, trans. Hans-Horst Henschen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), p. 361.

the information apparatus. In 1971, Foucault formed the working group for information about prisons (Groupe d'information sur les prisons, or GIP) and supported the establishment of the press agency, Agence de Presse Libération, that played a decisive role in the launch of the newspaper *Libération*.[37] The GIP set itself the task of collecting and disseminating information. As Foucault stressed: "Information must circulate so that individual experience can become collective knowledge. And this means political knowledge."[38] The desired information does not refer to theories, but rather to the factual living circumstances of those who are excluded from the apparatus of information. This information led, in the case of the prisoners supported by the GIP, to the recognition that their "complete lack of rights"[39] was the biggest problem that they faced. "The justice system," as Foucault summarizes, "sends a person to prison, and this person has no chance to defend his rights against this system."[40] This lack of rights corresponds to the exclusion from the public sphere, and for this reason it is important to create a public domain for those who have no rights.

Foucault's political opposition is directed against excessive state control, against the excesses of the government, and against the politics of representation—even within one's own ranks. His political struggle is a struggle for the public word. As he said in his well-known interview with Gilles Deleuze: "When discourses such as those of prisoners and prison doctors become struggles, they become so because they, at least for a moment, appropriate the power to speak about the prison."[41]

Foucault is insistent that it is not an issue of opposing one theory in the name of another theory,[42] yet this demand was itself a conclusion that he drew from his analyses of power and the history of struggles for power.

37. Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, p. 356.

38. Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits*, 2:216.

39. Ibid., 2:219.

40. Ibid.

41. Michel Foucault, "Interview mit Gilles Deleuze," in *Von der Subversion des Wissens* (Munich: Hanser, 1974), p. 130.

42. Foucault aims the criticism of combating one theory in the name of another at the endless debates of left-wing movements in France in the 1970s. Foucault distanced himself from this form of a politics of truth in his first lecture on the history of governmentality on January 11, 1978, with this provocative formulation: "In this regard I would suggest one single imperative to be used categorically and absolutely: never do politics" (Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 17). Against this "politics of truth," he set up his own political engagement as a personal, physical, and real engagement that casts the issues in concrete, precisely defined terms within a particular situation.

His political struggles, in particular his consistent avoidance of both a representative speaking for others and a formation of parties, but also the meaning that he imputes to the public word and to the circulation of information about the "actual life circumstances" of those that have no rights, are the result of his methodological nominalism. Though Foucault did not develop his own theory of the public sphere, his public engagement corresponds to a description of the functions that belong to the public sphere in the regime of governmentality.

In his 1978 lectures entitled, "Security, Territory, Population," Foucault links the origins of the public sphere at the end of the sixteenth century to the population and to the modern state. Referring to the former, he writes that the public sphere is the population "seen from the perspective of its opinions, of its manner of doing things, of its conduct, its customs, its fears, its prejudices, [etc.]"[43] and concludes from this that "[t]he population is therefore everything that extends from biological rootedness through the species to the open space offered by the public sphere."[44] The population, considered in terms of its status as human species and as public sphere, should be understood as a new reality to the extent that both "are for the mechanisms of power the relevant elements and the relevant space within which and with respect to which action can take place."[45] Government action can accordingly relate to the population in different ways. For the relationship between the public sphere and the modern state, it is decisive that Foucault links the constitution of the antithesis between the public and the private sphere with the "problematization of the conduct of conduct and the specification of the different forms of conducting the conduct."[46] The public sphere is not only one of the spaces through which government action is directed toward the populace. It is, at the same time, the space within which individuals constitute themselves as legal entities and in turn criticize the government.

Foucault links the formation of the public sphere with the dissolution of pastoral power, which, in contrast to governmentality, follows a theological model and the example of God, and legitimates itself through this theological model. Governmentality does not differentiate itself from pastoral power by modeling itself on something else; rather, it distinguishes

43. Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung*, p. 115.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., p. 335.

itself, after the "degovernmentalization of the cosmos," by the fact that it must manage without a model and without divine authority.[47] In place of such a model, the *res publica* is constituted, according to Foucault, as the place for the public problematization of questions of governmental and the conduct of conduct. Religious heretics, the dissidents of the Middle Ages, were replaced in the transition to the seventeenth century by people who were called "les politiques," or the politicians. They were, as Foucault writes, "tied to a certain type of thinking…, to a certain way of imagining what a government must do and upon which forms of rationality it can be based."[48] Politically it was a particular mode of interrogating and problematizing the government. "In contrast to the juridical-theological problem of the foundations of sovereignty," as Foucault states, "the politicians are the ones who attempt to think through for themselves the form of rationality of government.[49] It is this question of governance that constitutes the *res publica*, namely, as a public form of reflection on the art of governance. It is finally through this *res publica* that, according to Foucault, the state enters into the field of human practices and thought.[50] From its origin, the modern state, as Foucault's genealogy suggests, must be understood as a questionable governmental practice. Inscribed within this practice is not only the *res publica* as the public problematization of the art of governance, but also the question of whether and to what extent the limitation of government is also a part of the art of government. In this sense, the sentence referring to the transition from politics to political economy needs a correction. For the limitations on governmental action do not arise just from economics but also, insofar as liberalism can be analyzed as the principle of governmentality, from the public sphere: "the birth of economists, the birth of publicists are," according to one conclusion of the genealogy of governmentality, "the two correlative elements of the field of reality" of government.[51]

II.

How can one interpret Foucault's deconstruction of the sentence "everything is political" in light of this "crisis" of the political in the context of biopower and biopolitics? To begin with, let us follow Foucault's train of

47. Ibid., p. 343.
48. Ibid., p. 357.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 359.
51. Ibid., p. 114.

thought. He begins by ascertaining that the term "traditionally"[52] draws upon two meanings. The first comes from the state and indicates that the political is defined by the entire sphere of intervention of the state. To say that everything is political would mean, accordingly, that the state is everywhere, directly or indirectly. In order to develop the second meaning, Foucault refers to Carl Schmitt's definition of the political and adds the following as a supplement: "The political is defined by the omnipresence of the struggle between two enemies . . . this additional definition is that of K. Schmidt."[53]

Carl Schmitt elaborated this definition of the political in *The Concept of the Political* (1932), and then again in *Theory of the Partisan* (1963), which added a further differentiation of the concept of the enemy. Schmitt's goal was first to establish the political as an independent sphere—and therefore to revoke or reverse the mixing of the political with the economic. To that end, he delimits it from the already existing spheres of the aesthetic, the moral, and the economic in order to establish the architecture of the political according to their example. How do these domains distinguish themselves? According to Schmitt, they arise out of their own specific "final distinctions."[54] In the next step, he declares these final distinctions to be in turn criteria.[55] The aesthetic arises, according to Schmitt, out of the opposition between beautiful and ugly, the moral out of the opposition between good and bad, and the economic out of the opposition between harmful and useful, or profitable and unprofitable. By analogy to the simple criteria of the aesthetic, moral, and economic, Schmitt locates the criterion for the political in the distinction between friend and enemy. It is crucial for an understanding of the central function played by this distinction for the concept of the political that it be understood as the *final* distinction: as the *ultimate* difference. Its true content is nothing less than the act of positing, the fact of distinction itself. The distinction between friend and enemy denotes, according to Schmitt, "the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation."[56]

The determination that a "final distinction" could be a "simple criterion" turns out from this perspective to be a move that is itself already

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 26.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

political. Schmitt's political criterion, the distinction between friend and enemy, wants to be understood as a political concept, and in Schmitt's terms this means as a polemical concept. Schmitt's concept of the political consequently reveals itself to be a self-referential concept, whose goal is the establishment of order, which is to say the "possibility of unambiguous, clear distinctions" between "inside and outside, war and peace."[57] Schmitt sees this order as ideally embodied in the continental plurality of states, together with the state unity pertaining to it, within which the modern state emerged after the Treaty of Westphalia. The reinstatement of the political is, for Schmitt, synonymous with the restoration of the unity of the state and the continental plurality of states.

This becomes clear with the differentiation of forms of antagonism that Schmitt undertakes in *Theory of the Partisan*. Schmitt introduces here the difference between the conventional, the real, and the absolute enemy.[58] Schmitt understands the conventional enemy as the enemy state that is fought "regularly" by another state, which is to say, according to the rules of war, with an army in a declared war. The *real* enemy is the enemy of the partisan. Though the partisan does not use a regular army and does not represent a regular state, he fights, as Schmitt explains, on the side of "[t]he old European continental states," now on the defensive, whose regularity had turned to "convention and play . . . . Old regularity no longer was any match for the new, revolutionary, Napoleonic regularity."[59] The partisan had, according to Schmitt, thereby renewed the seriousness of war.[60] It is not coincidental here that he is using the example of the Spanish guerillas against the invasion by the French army. Schmitt's partisan proves to be a supporter of Metternich. As such, he fought on the side of the Restoration for the territorial order of the sovereign against Napoleon's imperialism and against the disintegration of the old, territorial order, in short, against the French Revolution. This makes him for Schmitt into a true hero. "The partisan, who defended the national soil against the foreign invader, became the hero, who actually [*wirklich*] fought against a real [*wirklichen*] enemy."[61] By using the term "real" (*wirklich*) twice in this

57. Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen: Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien* (Berlin: Duncker & Humboldt, 1963), p. 11.

58. Ibid., p. 17.

59. Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2007), pp. 88–89.

60. Ibid., p. 88.

61. Ibid., p. 89.

sentence, Schmitt emphasizes the intensity that he attributes to the friend/enemy distinction and thus to the political. According to Schmitt's logic, the "final distinction" of the political is at the same time the most real, because it demonstrates the decision to differentiate. One can define it as a performative speech act, as a recursion, or, like Schmitt, as a decision. Because Schmitt associates the leap into real, concrete life with the exclusion of ambiguity, doubt, and division, the friend/enemy distinction, in this thinking formed by both Kierkegaard's existentialism and life philosophy, is not only unequivocal but also existential. This becomes clear in that well-known dictum according to which the enemy, as Schmitt formulates it in the same passage, is "the shape of our own question."[62] This dictum is preceded by his rhetorical question, "Is it not a sign of inner conflict to have more than one real enemy?"[63] This means, conversely—and this is Schmitt's main point—that to have one real enemy is the sign of inner unity, which is in turn the precondition for inner security. "The enemy," Schmitt continues, "is on the same level as am I. For this reason, I must fight him to the same extent and within the same bounds as he fights me, in order to be consistent with the definition of the real enemy by which he defines me."[64]

For Schmitt, the *absolute* enemy is, in contrast to the real enemy, an enemy without a fixed form. The absolute enemy is not the equal enemy who is defeated in combat. Rather, he is the morally condemned enemy and is declared to be the enemy of humanity and must therefore be destroyed.[65] The absolute enemy in 1963 is, according to Schmitt, an accompaniment and an expression of the disorder of the technical atomic age and the atomic threat. The expression of this disorder is the Cold War and its potential for annihilation. The making absolute of the enemy seems for Schmitt to be "immanent to the existing reality of the nuclear age."[66] Schmitt's distinction between the conventional, the real, and the

62. Ibid., p. 85, translation altered.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. As Raphael Gross emphasizes, Schmitt differentiates already in *The Concept of the Political* between the enemy in the sense of the stranger and the enemy in the sense of the other, who later on becomes the absolute enemy as the enemy of the political. This enemy in the sense of the other was embodied for Schmitt in the 1930s by the Jews; they became the domestic enemy. Cf. Raphael Gross, *Carl Schmitt und die Juden: Eine deutsche Rechtslehre* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2000), pp. 310ff.

66. Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*, p. 93, translation altered.

absolute enemy has acquired a new—and uncanny—timeliness against the backdrop of U.S. foreign policy and its aim for a new world order, particularly, however, after the war in Iraq and George W. Bush's crusade against the axis of evil. To take one example, the political scientist Chantal Mouffe has borrowed Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction and his defense of the model of the old continental states in order to apply them to the war against international terrorism.[67] From her point of view, the imperialistic foreign policy of the United States appears as the reflex of an inadequate differentiation between the political and the moral, and international terrorism, together with its accompanying rhetoric of evil, appears as the product of that foreign policy, or rather as the shape of its own question. With reference to the Schmittian differentiation of enemies and his model of the plurality of states, she subsumes terrorism under the category of the absolute enemy and interprets international war against this enemy as an unlimited war, that is, as a war without a fixed form that, as Schmitt explains, is directed towards the annihilation of an opponent who has been designated as the enemy of mankind.

Even if it seems plausible to apply the Schmittian distinction of enemies to current affairs, one should not forget the other side of Schmitt's classical model of the plurality of states: it reduces domestic policy to the formula "peace, security, and order."[68] The restoration of the exalted time of the old continental states does not just occur under the sign of a return to the plurality of states and to limited war, but also under the sign of a return to the unlimited work of the police. The old European continental states declared by Schmitt to be the classical model did not exist, as the limited perspective of the theoretician of the state suggests, before or beyond the rationalization of governmental practice and the economization of politics. Rather, they originated, as Foucault extensively shows, in the course of this rationalization of governmental practice in the development of the security apparatus and the police. "The limitation of the international goals of governance according to reasons of state, this limitation on international relations corresponds," as Foucault comments, "to a boundlessness in the deployment of the police state."[69] Schmitt himself writes: "Within such a state there was indeed only police and no more politics, unless one were to

67. Chantal Mouffe, "Schmitt's Vision of a Multipolar World," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104 (2005): 245–51.

68. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, p. 10.

69. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 21.

designate as politics such things as court intrigues, rivalries, frondes, and attempts at rebellion on the part of malcontents, in short, 'disturbances.'" Arguing here against such an expansion of the concept of politics, he states: "It must be remembered that both words, politics and police, are derived from the same Greek word, *polis*. Politics in the large sense, high politics, was at that time only foreign affairs, which a sovereign state, facing other sovereign states that it recognizes as such, carries out on the basis of this recognition to the extent that it makes decisions concerning mutual friendship, antagonism, or neutrality."[70]

Schmitt's concept of the political refers solely, as becomes obvious, to that political action that he calls "high politics," or foreign affairs. He has as little to say about an analysis of the political dimension of the police at the origins of the modern state as about the analysis of the significance of economic relations for the origins of a plurality of states. Only under the condition of these omissions can he link the model of the plurality of states with the restitution of sovereignty in such a way that he is able to declare, in the first sentence of *Political Theology* (1922), that "Sovereign is he who decides on the exception"[71] and, at the same time, can characterize the ideal state as "a political entity that maintains a peaceful cohesiveness within and a cohesiveness of sovereignty without in the confrontation with other sovereigns."[72] Schmitt's concept of the political is not only based on an ideal model of the plurality of states, but also on a simplified and mythologized model of the state and of sovereignty.

In this way, Schmitt sidesteps the very dimension of the political that Foucault discerns as a politicization of life in the context of biopolitics and biopower and in the interplay of reasons of state with the police. The politicization of life, and with it the transformation of numerous individuals into a population, is the task that falls to the police as it is constituted in the seventeenth century. Foucault demonstrates this, more clearly than in his 1978 lectures, in a lecture entitled "*Omnes et Singulatim*: Toward a Critique of Political Reason," given at Stanford University in October 1979.[73] Here, Foucault develops the thesis that the police—whose function is described in contemporary texts as the surveillance of religion, health,

70. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, pp. 10–11.

71. Carl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität* (Berlin: Duncker and Humboldt, 1990), p. 11.

72. Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen*, p. 11.

73. In the following, I refer to the French translation that appeared in *le débat* 41 (1986): 5–36.

the welfare of the population, trade, the workforce, and the poor—transformed the Christian pastoral power that had developed in late antiquity out of a Christian adaptation and a Hebrew concept of God as a shepherd that cares for his people like a shepherd cares for his herd. As Foucault describes it, this model of government became, in the course of its adaptation through Christianity in late antiquity, the basis of pastoral power. In contrast to the situation with pastoral power, the individualization by the police was not carried out under the sign of the pastor who provided for the Christian salvation of each individual member of his flock, but, rather, under the sign of the optimization of life. In this way, the police did not focus on religion in terms of the question of Christian salvation or truth, but instead in terms of guaranteeing the quality of moral life. With health and provisioning, its main concern was insuring survival, and with transportation, commerce, and the poor, it improved the quality of life overall. As Foucault summarizes, the task of the police was to secure the survival of the population in general and to improve life. Just like the pastoral power, the police government did not aim its efforts at legal subjects but rather at "living individuals." This government subordinated these individuals to the regime of governmentality in order to strengthen the nascent state. As the German term *Polizeiwissenschaft* (police science) makes clear, the work of the police stood in connection with science and statistics. In order to maintain the equilibrium between states, each state, as Foucault explains, had to secure its own powers as well the powers of the other states. To that end, a "principle for the decipherment of the constituting powers of a state"[74] had to be developed. This principle is statistics, which was understood in the literal sense as the theory of data about the state or theory of the state (*Staatslehre*). Statistics, according to Foucault, became "a necessity as a result of the police, but was also made possible by the police."[75] The police represent, Foucault argues, a "circle" that "begins with the state as a rational and calculated power of intervention over individuals and then returns to the state as a totality of growing or increasing powers."[76] The answer that Foucault gives to the question of the trajectory of this circle describes precisely the connection between biopower and biopolitics: "through the life of individuals, which now becomes valuable as mere life for the state."[77]

74. Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung*, p. 454.
75. Ibid., p. 455.
76. Ibid., p. 470.
77. Ibid.

What Schmitt suppresses (or, as the case may be, sidesteps) with his one-sided determination of the political through foreign policy is the interdependence of the reason of state with the continental equilibrium between states and the police. He misses the fact that the state is predicated upon the transformation of sovereign power into biopower and the interdependence of various governmental rationalities. This becomes clear when one compares his concept of the old continental states with Foucault's short summary of the results of his genealogy of the modern state system after the end of the Thirty Years' War and the 1648 Peace of Westphalia:

> Thus, apart from the theories that formulated and justified it, *raison d'État* takes shape in two great assemblages of political knowledge and technology: a military-diplomatic technology that consists in securing and developing the state's forces through a system of alliances and the organization of an armed apparatus; the pursuit of a European equilibrium, one of the guiding principles of the treaties of Westphalia, was a consequence of this political technology. The other assemblage is that of "police," in the sense this word had at that time, that is to say, the set of means for bringing about the internal growth of the state's forces. At the point where these two great technologies meet we should place commerce and monetary circulation, their common instrument: it was expected that from enrichment through commerce one would have the possibility of increasing the population, manpower, production, and export, and of equipping oneself with strong and large armies.[78]

While Schmitt speaks of sovereigns who face sovereigns, Foucault uses the concept of a competition between states.[79] That which Schmitt imagines as an inner unity and peace is for Foucault the effect of a historically new security apparatus that appears with the rationalization of governmental practice. While Schmitt ultimately bases his concept of the political on foreign affairs and the politics of representation, Foucault seeks the political in the resistance against governmentality.

He summarizes the two meanings of the phrase "everything is political" in the following sentence: "Stated succinctly, two formulations: everything is political through the nature of things; everything is political

78. Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977–78*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 365.

79. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 21.

through the existence of enemies,"[80] and concludes by saying, "what is at issue is to say: nothing is political, everything can be politicized, everything can become political. Politics is nothing more or less than that which arises out of the resistance to governmentality, the first uprising, the first confrontation."[81]

III.

Foucault's concept of the political is, however, also political. Yet, it is not self-referential in the same way as Schmitt's concept of the political. It does not align itself with reference to a situation of decision, nor does it depend on a mythical notion of the state or the sovereign. The transformation into the political begins in Foucault rather with the analysis of that form of "singular universality" in which governmentality implies that everything is political. A singular universality, as Foucault writes, has "in the end an eventful reality."[82] Governmentality is, as Foucault defines it in his *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, "the strategic field of moving, changing, and reversible power relationships."[83] Governmentality does not designate here a structure, nor a "relationship between… variables," but in effect a "singular universality," whose variables—as Michael Sennelart elaborates in his excellent contextualization of the 1978–79 lectures—"respond to the circumstances through their aleatory interaction."[84] From this perspective, the state appears neither as a unity nor as sovereign, but rather as the "mobile effect of a system of many governmentalities"[85]

This deconstructive interpretation of governmentality corresponds to the method chosen by Foucault. He develops it out of the decision to speak of governmental practice and, at the same time, "to leave aside a certain number of concepts—such as, for instance, sovereign, sovereignty, people, subjects, state, middle-class society—treating them as primary, primitive, or given objects."[86] Instead of beginning with these "universals" used by sociological and historical analysis as well as political philosophy,

80. Ibid., p. 486.

81. Ibid.

82. Foucault, *Sicherheit, Territorium, Bevölkerung*, p. 67.

83. Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutik des Subjekts: Vorlesung am Collège de France 1981–1982* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), p. 314.

84. Sennelart, "Situierung der Vorlesungen," in Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 484.

85. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, pp. 115 and 17.

86. Ibid., p. 15.

Foucault wants to do the opposite: "to start with practice, as it presents itself, but also as it reflects upon and rationalizes itself, in order to see from there how particular things, about whose status one would naturally ask questions, can really constitute themselves: state and society, sovereign and subjects."[87]

Foucault also uses the concept of the real, he is also critical of rationalization, and he also wants more reality. In contrast to Schmitt, however, he does not begin with an ideal or a "classical model" of the state, nor with universals, but rather he consistently bases his analysis on "concrete practices" in order, as he formulates, to integrate "universals into the pattern of these practices."[88] Thus, instead of trying to subsume practices under a universal schema or pattern, Foucault tries to integrate universals, such as state, population, sovereign, etc., into the pattern of concrete practices. This consistent, specifically Foucauldian nominalism allows the deconstruction of the formulation "everything is political" to deconstruct at the same time the mythical discourse of the state and to transform finally the scientific analysis into something political.

While Schmitt also turns against the hypostatization of concepts, he is no nominalist. A consistent nominalism would threaten or destroy "good jurisprudence" and could have at most a certain latitude in civil traffic law, as he writes in his essay "On the Three Types of Juristic Thought." "Genuine juristic thought," he surmises, "at least in public law, is conceptually realistic."[89] This conceptual realism does not only lead to the commitment to Roman Catholicism as the political form that "has succeeded in constituting a sustaining configuration of historical and social reality that, despite its formal character, retains its concrete existence at once vital and yet rational to the *n*th degree,"[90] but also to the affirmation of representation as a process in which form is the origin of true substance, or the concrete. This means, for the question of the relationship between state and sovereignty, that the sovereign state requires for its concrete manifestation a personification—and thus the figure of the legislator. The legislator represents, in a strong sense of the word representation, "the decision inherent to law," which, "normatively speaking, is born out of

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Carl Schmitt, *On the Three Types of Juristic Thought*, trans. Joseph W. Bendersky (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2004), p. 44.

90. Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1996), p. 8.

nothing."[91] The extent to which this decision born out of nothing, which is by definition a decision between friend and enemy, interferes with the Schmittian reading of Roman Catholicism becomes clear in the following sentence, which precedes the above quoted commitment to Roman Catholicism as a political form: "From the standpoint of the political idea of Catholicism, the essence of the Roman-Catholic *complexio oppositorum* lies in a specific, formal superiority over the matter of human life such as no other imperium has ever known. It has succeeded in constituting a sustaining configuration of historical and social reality that, despite its formal character, retains its concrete existence at once vital and yet rational to the *n*th degree."[92] The figure of the sovereign, and thus the figure of the legislator, achieves for Schmitt a victory over formless matter, which reveals itself to be the true, original enemy.[93]

As will become clear in the following, it is precisely this extremely ambiguous idea of the decision that demonstrates the decisive difference between Schmitt's concept of the political, based on the figure of the legislator, and Foucault's concept of politicization.

The real is not located for Foucault in a decision for differentiation, which must from his nominalist point of view appear to remain abstract, nor in a distinction between two ideal spheres, such as the political and the economic, but rather in the tension between the universal and the historical, between the general and the singular, or, as he writes in his 1978 homage to the historian of science Georges Canguilhem, between the *concept of life* and the *living*. "Phenomenology sought the original meaning of every act of cognition in 'experience.' But is it not rather to be found in the living being itself?" The knower is in this phenomenological scene the biologist, who attempts to ascertain "what it is that turns something in life into a specific object of cognition and, at the same time, what can lead to the circumstance that, amongst living things, because of the fact that they are living things, there can be entities who can attain understanding and in the end can understand life itself."[94] Foucault expands the replacement

91. Schmitt, *On the Three Types of Juristic Thought*, p. 23.

92. Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, p. 8.

93. This corresponds to the meaning that original sin takes in Schmitt's concept of the political. See Gross, *Carl Schmitt und die Juden*, pp. 314ff.

94. Michel Foucault, "Das Leben: die Erfahrung und die Wissenschaft," in *Der Tod des Menschen im Denken des Lebens: Georges Canguilhem über Michel Foucault, Michel Foucault über Georges Canguilhem*, ed. Marcelo Marques (Tübingen: Ed. Diskord, 1988), p. 67.

of "experience" with "the living" to a Nietzschean affirmation of the thinking of evolution as the thinking of a radical historicity of life. What links evolution with the historicity of thinking is, as Foucault describes in numerous texts, the meaning that accrues to chance, and thus to error, in the thinking of evolution. "For at the most fundamental level of life, the play of coding and decoding makes room for a randomness which, before leading to sickness, deficiency, or deformation, is something like a disturbance in the information system, something like an 'oversight.' In the end life is, and therein lies its radical character, that which can err."[95] And the circumstance that living things exist that can recognize life and thereby recognize life as that which can err would itself be the consequence of an error, of chance.

Foucault's methodological approach, as the concepts of variation, series, randomness, population, etc. make clear, borrows theoretically informed concepts from synthetic evolutionary biology in order to then turn them critically (for example in his 1976 review in *Le Monde* of Jacques Ruffié's *De la Biologie à la Culture*) against both humanistic, anthropocentric political theories and the critiques of racism based upon them that condemn racism categorically while tolerating it practically. In the face of an evolutionary-biological definition of the concept of race that leads to a deconstruction of the belief in the existence of race, Foucault, in this review, with the significant title "Bio-history and Bio-politics," commits himself in support of a process of "racialization" that he describes as follows: "One must imagine a humanity in which races do not stand next to each other but which rather consists of population 'clouds,' which are interwoven with each other and blend a genetic field that becomes more valuable the more accentuated its polymorphism becomes."[96] The historicity of this synthetic theory of evolution results from the fact that populations are not defined by prototypes but through the collection of variations that ceaselessly develop and dissolve. Foucault draws from this the conclusion: "It is history that delineates these collections before it allows them to disappear; one cannot look there for crude and final biological facts which would impose themselves from the core of nature outside of history."[97] He presents thereby a "bio-history" in which biology does

95. Ibid., p. 69.

96. Michel Foucault, "Will Klaus Croissant be Extradited?" in Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits*, 3:128.

97. Ibid.

not determine history but rather history determines biology. And from this he develops a biopolitics that tries to retrieve the political from out of this radical historicity.

Let us return then to his history of governmentality and ask, first, whom he is addressing with his continual hints and references to a currently prevailing and recurring phobia of the state, from which he is at pains to distance himself with his de-mythification of the state. The answer leads us to Foucault's apology for liberalism and to his affinity with neo-liberal ideas, which is no less radical than what is implied by his proximity, described above, to the thinking of evolution and the commitment to a thinking of radical historicity.

The references to a currently prevailing phobia of the state are an allusion to the ideological struggles and differences that were being fought out, also in France, in the second half of the 1970s in relation to the politics of the Red Army Faction (RAF). Michel Sennelart points out in his contextualization of the lectures on the history of governmentality that "'the German question' as it was posed in an urgent way by the debate on terrorism" was for Foucault, one of the "essential keys to understanding contemporary politics."[98] Sennelart recalls as well the meaning that attached to the Klaus Croissant affair in terms of Foucault's political engagement as well as in terms of its theoretical implications. Klaus Croissant was the lawyer for the Baader-Meinhof Group and in July 1977 had requested political asylum in France in order to avoid possible imprisonment in Germany. He was extradited to Germany after the death of the Baader-Meinhof prisoners and the kidnapping and murder of Hans-Martin Schleyer on November 16, 1977, and was sentenced there to two and a half years of prison for supporting a terrorist organization. Foucault supported his request for asylum by referring to the "rights of the governed" to mount a defense in a court of law. He took part in many demonstrations against the extradition and even broke a rib at one of these demonstrations. Yet, he also made clear that his support only related to the defense of the rights of the lawyer and not the political goals of the RAF. In contrast to Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari signed a petition in which West Germany was described, in accord with the RAF, as a potential police state. Foucault broke off contact with Deleuze after this; they no longer spoke to one another.[99]

98. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 454.
99. Cf. Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, p. 372.

One must keep these public appearances in mind in order to be able to understand Foucault's apology for liberalism, particularly German "ordered liberalism" (*Ordoliberalismus*), as well as his strident critique of the socialist model, which, he writes, lacks an "intrinsic governmental rationality."[100] In contrast to the socialist model, liberalism does not have to be true or false: "One asks whether a liberalism is pure, radical, consistent, mild, etc. This means that one asks which rules it sets itself and how it implements the compensation mechanisms and control measurements that it has established within its governmentality. I believe that when one has, by contrast, such a strong desire to pose to socialism this indiscreet question concerning truth, which one never poses to liberalism—namely the question, 'Are you true or false?'—it is because socialism lacks an intrinsic governmental rationality and this [lack of a] governmental rationality, which is essential to it, has, as I believe, up to the present day not been overcome, and one ends up replacing this problem of an inner governmental rationality with the relationship of conformity with a text."[101] One must, however, add at this point that Foucault understands the governmental rationality of liberalism to be that "critical governmental reason" that formulates the condition of its own limitation in the question of how one can manage not to govern too much.[102] Political economy is, as Foucault subsequently maintains—against Schmitt's rejection of liberalism and the mixing of the political with the economic—"a kind of general reflection on the organization, distribution, and limitation of power in society."[103] Liberalism is, as Foucault summarizes, "no dream that collides against reality and fails to inscribe itself there"; it constitutes an "instrument of reality critique: the critique of an earlier governmentality from which one seeks liberation."[104] And it is precisely for this lack of a general reflection on the question of the limitation of power in society that Foucault rebukes socialism.

Foucault prefaces his eighth lecture in 1979 with some general comments concerning the methodological reach of his analysis of micropower in order to then formulate on this basis a radical critique of the recurring phobias of the state and the resulting inflationary critical commonplaces.

100. Foucault, *Die Geburt der Biopolitik*, p. 136.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid., p. 29.
103. Ibid., p. 30.
104. Ibid., p. 438.

In support of his critique of leftist positions that claim a continuity between different state forms (such as the welfare state, the administrative state, the bureaucratic state, the fascist state, and the totalitarian state) in order to blame the state in general for a proximity to totalitarianism, Foucault presents three reasons: "First, because I think that this thematic increases the interchangeability of the analyses, and does this ever more rapidly. In the end, for example, an analysis of social security and the administrative apparatus upon which it depends, beginning with a few displacements and based on a few words with whose meaning one can play, will point to the analysis of concentration camps."[105] The second, related reason is that this inflationary critique follows a logic that Foucault describes very accurately as a "general disqualification through the worst case."[106] The third, and possibly most serious, reason for Foucault is, finally, that this sort of analysis allows one "to avoid the price of the reality of the present."[107]

The reality that these positions miss is that, as Foucault already underlined in the late 1970s, the present is not characterized by the increasing power of the state but by the expansion of a neo-liberal governmentality and, as a consequence, by the disappearance of the state. Foucault's attitude to these developments, as his remarks concerning both a possible neo-liberal penal law and a neo-liberal social policy show,[108] is not necessarily a critical one, or at least not a judgmental one. He does not demand more state, but rather he attempts to test out the critical potential of the neo-liberalism that he analyzes. He presents a thoroughly surprising image on the horizon of his analysis. This image does not present the ideal of a totally disciplinary society nor the society of a general normalization and exclusion of the non-normalizable, but rather the "programmatic theme of a society in which there would be an optimization of the systems of differences, in which one would allow adequate space for fluctuating processes, in which there would be a tolerance for individuals and the practices of minorities, in which there would be no possibilities of influencing the players of the game but only the rules of the game, and in the end in which there would be interventions that would not lead to the inner subordination of individuals but to their interaction with their environment."[109]

105. Ibid., p. 263.
106. Ibid.
107. Ibid., p. 264.
108. Cf. ibid., p. 346.
109. Ibid., p. 359.

For Foucault, the political originates in the confrontation between varying governmentalities, varying forms of the art of governance, to which the art of de-subjectivation and the art of self-government also belong.[110] His own political engagement was carried out under the sign of this art of de-subjectivation.[111] It involved a consistent engagement in the rights of the governed, an engagement for the right of de-subjectivation, within an international or global space. He thus defended his support for the Iranian revolution—upon which he commented in a series of intellectual reportages for the *Corriere della Sera*—in a May 1979 article entitled, "Does it Make Sense to Rebel?" in which he points to the necessity of reconstituting history against the totalizing and individualizing tendencies of biopower:

> People rebel, that is a fact. In this way subjectivity (and not just that of great men but of any given person) enters into history and blows its life into it. A prisoner sets her life against an excessive punishment. A mentally ill person does not want to be incarcerated and robbed of rights. A people sets itself against a regime that oppresses it. In this way, the prisoner does not become innocent, the mentally ill person does not become healthy, and the people do not take part in the promised future. And no one must show solidarity with them. No one must believe that these voices might sing more beautifully than others and pronounce the final truth. It is enough that they are there and that everything attempts to silence them in order that it becomes meaningful to want to listen to them and understand what they say. A question of morality? Certainly a question of reality. All the disappointment of history will not change that. Because such voices exist, the era of humans does not have the form of evolution, but of history.[112]

110. Michel Foucault, *Was ist Kritik? Vortrag gehalten am 27.5.1978 in Paris*, trans. Walter Seitter (Berlin: Merve, 1992), pp. 12, 15.

111. The intensive occupation with an ethics or aesthetics of the self that was taken up after the lectures on the history of governmentality stands under the sign of this art of self-government in the sense of an art of de-subjectivation or an art of critique. Foucault describes the connection between a resistance against governmentality and an ethic of the self (which cannot be discussed here due to space limitations) in a lecture of February 17, 1982, on the hermeneutics of the subject: "While the theory of political power as institution normally refers to a juridically conceived legal subject, it seems to me that the analysis of governmentality—that is, the analysis of power as an ensemble of reversible relationships—must be based on an ethics that is defined by the relationship of the self to itself" (Foucault, *Hermeneutik des Subjekts*, p. 314).

112. Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits*, 3:991.

To politicize means to lead biopolitics into history. And this is, as Foucault continues,

> implacably linked to another principle according to which the power that one person exercises over another is always dangerous. I do not say that power is in its essence an evil. I say that it is in its mechanisms endless (which does not mean, however, that it is all-powerful, on the contrary). The rules for limiting power cannot be too strict. The universal principles that deny it opportunities that it would take advantage of cannot be too stringent. Power must always be opposed by untransgressible laws and unlimited rights.[113]

113. Ibid.