

MICHEL FOUCAULT – THE GOVERNMENT OF THE SELF AND OTHERS

„(...) the theme of man, and the human sciences that analyze him as a living being, working individual, and speaking subject, should be understood on the basis of the emergence of population as the correlate of power and the object of knowledge. (...) [M]an (...) is nothing other than a figure of population.“ (Foucault, quoted in Sellenart 2007: 492)

Maybe the most important turnover in a long tradition of political theory brought by Michel Foucault, was his reconceptualization of the notion of power. As described above Max Weber ascribed bureaucracy with such a great power, as to transform society possibly to an iron cage. Compared to Weber, Foucault was much more subversive, but in the sense that he „endowed bureaucratic power with more effectiveness, not less“ (Graeber 2015: 55). Having explored the vast impact of social control, that governments exercise on the bodies and minds of their people, in his manifold examinations of institutions, such as clinics, asylums, and prisons, in his last two conceptions, governmentality and biopower, the importance of knowledge as an administrative instrument for control is emphasized – to a distressing extent that Weber could never have anticipated (Graeber 2015: 55).

In his essay on governmentality, Foucault pictured a history of government studies throughout the centuries. Departing from Machiavelli's „The Prince“, he described a transformation from „the art of government“ to political and administrative science, from a focus on the family as a unit of governance to the administration of populations. He saw the development of statistics crucial to this transformation, government techniques, knowledge and discipline (Foucault 1991: 102–103). He identified three stages throughout this transformation: the first one he based on the state of justice, which was brought forth by a territorial feudal system, and which he mainly characterized as a society