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Michel Foucault's Critical Empiricism Today: Concepts and Analytics in the Critique of Biopower and Infopower

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Putting Foucault to Work Today

Michel Foucault is one of our most widely read theorists today. He is also one of the most widely used. Foucault has been productively deployed and redeployed for all manner of pursuits that he himself could not have dreamt of. This suggests a tremendous fecundity in Foucault's writings. But where exactly do we locate that fecundity? In the totality of his work? Is every last blessed bit of Foucault valuable for us today? Or should we be more selective? Is it the case that Foucault's richness for us today has more to do with only a part of the many moving pieces exhibited in his writings? The argument I develop here rests on the claim that in pushing with Foucault beyond Foucault we expose ourselves to dangers as well as opportunities. If not sufficiently self-reflective, our uses of Foucault may run counter to his own work or, more problematically, counter to our own intentions and efforts as these motivate our inquiries.

In what follows, I encourage such self-reflectiveness in an explicitly methodological vein that should be of use for both critical philosophy and critical social science. I begin by offering a

distinction between *analytics* (or *methods*) and *concepts*. I argue that this distinction helps sort out different elements in Foucault's work, different insofar as they are differently productive. Following this, I turn to a consideration of how this distinction features in Foucault's own work on biopower, focusing here on *HS1*. This prompts a contrast between two contemporary uses of Foucault that intersect in different ways with the analyses of biopower in *HS1*. I discuss these with an eye toward what comes to the fore when different elements of Foucauldean inquiry, analytics and concepts, gain priority over one another. On the basis of this distinction, I then offer an outline of an emerging field of inquiry that could make use of Focuault's work on biopower whilst also needing to go beyond it. My suggestion shall concern a *concept* of infopower that Foucault's genealogical *analysis* of biopower invites but does not itself fully develop. If biopower in its first functioning made heavy use of technologies of statistics and recordkeeping, then those very technologies have in the century since developed a gravity of their own in part due to the contributions of electrification, digitization, and other processes at the heart of our contemporary information societies. The interrogation of infopower after biopower thus offers an exemplary case for scrutinizing the utility of Foucauldean *analytics* beyond their original *conceptual* employments. Making some sense of the infopolitical developments of our present, I shall suggest, is up to us, beyond and after, but still possibly very much through, Foucault.

Analytics and Concepts in Foucault

I begin with a distinction between two different elements in Foucault's work which might be put to use by inquirers pursuing their own lines of research which are not necessarily to be found in Foucault's thought: analytics and concepts. *Analytics* refer to strategies, techniques, and forms for inquiry: the ways in which inquiry is conducted. *Concepts* refer to the ideational material that is the yield of inquiry: that which inquiry works to produce. Analytics function as grids or lenses that make possible a coherent practice

of inquiry, whilst concepts function as the materials which inquiry works with in drawing objects of inquiry through the analytical grid. There are, of course, other elements featured in Foucault's work that vary independently of analytics and concepts – a fuller taxonomy would attempt to take all of these into account (see Koopman and Matza 2013).

Concepts form a major aspect of Foucault's historical-philosophical work and they are that which lend much of his work its vividness. Some of the most memorable examples of concepts in Foucault's corpus include discipline, biopower, security, and care of the self. These concepts might be better described as conceptual networks or conceptual assemblages insofar as they invoke a complex plurality of notions. Certainly it is true that none of Foucault's most important concepts is simple. Their complexity is a condition of their transformability. Biopower in the nineteenth century was, according to Foucault, a complex amalgam of efforts in public health, nationalism, medicine, psychiatry, demography, information sciences (e.g., statistics), emerging sciences of sexuality, and the tentacles of public policing efforts. Today, biopower in the early twenty-first century is an assemblage that includes genetic technologies, biological weapons, dense global communication assemblages, and other newly emergent objects of analysis. This easy-to-see shift underscores an inherent danger in "applications" of Foucault's conceptualizations to fields where his thought did not range. Foucault's concepts were often precisely tailored for the fields into which he was inquiring. Thus, it may well prove fruitless to inject these concepts in unrevised fashion into wholly different fields. Certainly, extending Foucault's concepts beyond the sites of inquiry for which he developed them would require putting those concepts to the test of the new realities which they are proposed to cover.

Analytics refer to the methodological constraints in virtue of which Foucault is able to operationalize the concepts central to his work. I conceive of Foucault's analytics as broadly referring to the various research strategies and tactics that Foucault employed to guide (that is, to modalize) his own inquiries. As one of several possible modes of inquiry, Foucault's analytics can be contrasted with other analytic strategies: structuralist analysis, hermeneutic

interpretation, and systematic theorization. The most familiar examples of analytics in Foucault's works are archaeology and genealogy, both of which involve, and in complementary ways, the history of present practices. Another analytical device that is properly central to all of Foucault's work concerns the focus of inquiry around problems or problematizations – Foucault's much discussed emphasis on contingency is always focused on the contingencies by which the most fraught and fragile problems of our presents were constructed.

Recognizing archaeology, genealogy, and problematization as analytical devices helps establish the specificity of their critical effectiveness. An analytic is a tool for inquiry (for instance, an analytics of power, or of knowledge, or of power/knowledge). Foucault's analytics should not be understood as if they were designed as answers to philosophical conundrums and so should not be read as mounting arguments for certain philosophical theses (for instance, nominalism or constructivism). At the same time, however, Foucault clearly does not only offer analyses of the various sites of inquiry on which his work was trained (though he clearly does that as well). Foucault wrote histories, to be sure, and in the course of doing so he developed historical methods that function as analytical grids for inquiry. Neither looking to establish a general theory nor looking to assert only a string of particular points, Foucault's work productively and reflexively traffics at the level of critical analytics, methods, and designs. The analytical aspect of Foucault's work is a provocation to prevailing modalities of critique. This was noted by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow in their justly influential early book on Foucault's method, claiming that Foucault's "practice of historical writing is cast in unorthodox terms" (1982, 118). They settle on a characterization of this practice as an "interpretive analytics" that "enables [Foucault] to go beyond theory and hermeneutics" in the sense just described (1982, 124). This work, they show, is properly a "diagnosis of the current situation" (1982, 119). Foucault's work was always diagnostic, always oriented around the work of problematization, which is the work of undertaking inquiry for the sake of gaining conceptual grip on a complex problematic field.[1] Foucault's analytics are, as such, diagnostic analytics.[2]

In his late "What Is Enlightenment?", Foucault wrote of the modern tradition of self-critique as not "a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating" but rather as "an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life" (*EW1*, 319). This attitude, he continued, must take the form of "diverse inquiries" which would require three forms of coherence. First, "methodological [or analytical] coherence" as gained through "the at once archaeological and genealogical study of practices." Second, "theoretical coherence" in the specification of "historically unique forms" as sites where generalities get "problematized." And third, "practical coherence" in the work of "putting historico-critical reflection to the test of concrete practices" (*EW1*, 319). I will say more later about this third, practical aspect of Foucault's critical practice, namely its empirical aspect. For now, however, I want to draw attention to the first two aspects in their emphasis on genealogy and archaeology as analytical (or methodological) approaches performing a diagnostic (or problematizing) work, for this offers evidence on behalf of the general line of interpretation proffered by Dreyfus and Rabinow.

It is on the basis of analytics that Foucault's work gains its rigor whereas concepts are what lend his work its vividness – analytics provide guidance to motion and concepts afford friction for inquiry. These two together form the fantastic combination, highly readable and yet profoundly precise, that are Foucault's books. Distinguishing these two aspects of elements within Foucault's work helps us see that they are non-co-determinative. This is a deceptively simple point that many contemporary uses of Foucault nevertheless neglect, for example in attempted efforts at "genealogies" of "biopower" that consist in arguing that (but not genealogically investigating how) the concept of biopower helps make sense of some contemporary political practice. That analytics and concepts are non-co-determinative means that one can, for example, use a given set of analytics (e.g., Foucault's genealogy) without employing any particular set of concepts (e.g., discipline). Thus one could just as well write a genealogy of sovereign power as a genealogy of some insidious new exercise of disciplinary power. Or, to state again what should be obvious but which is overlooked with surprising frequency in the literature, to employ

a given set of concepts (e.g., Foucault's discipline or biopower) is not by itself determinative of any given analytic (e.g., genealogy). Thus one could (and many do) write of the nefarious effects of contemporary forms of disciplinary power and biopower without detailing these effects on the basis of a patient methodology for critical inquiry such as genealogy. Such accounts often suffer from a lack of methodological and theoretical coherence, and in part as a result of this further suffer from a debilitating lack of practical-empirical coherence. In other words, accounts such as these are too often exercises in mere speculation.

How do analytics and concepts function in Foucault's work and the work to which we might put Foucault's thought? One way to answer this question is by way of a brief review of *HS1* in terms of the distinction just offered. According to this approach, *HS1* offers a critical analysis of the complex congeries of concepts congregating around sexuality beginning in the nineteenth century. *HS1* involves the use of an *analytic* procedure (namely, genealogy) for inquiring into a particular *field* or site of inquiry (namely, sexuality) in such a way as to yield a family of *concepts* (namely, biopower, amongst others) that help make sense of this object.

To begin with the *analytic* procedure, I shall summarize the methodology guiding Foucault's project here as possessing (at least) three qualities that taken together are distinctive of a genealogical analytic for diagnostic problematization. Genealogy, as I shall be summarizing it, is a form of critical inquiry that emphasizes *complexity*, *contingency*, and the idea of *conditioning*. In a phrase, genealogy is critical inquiry into the complexity and contingency of the conditions of our present.

First, genealogy involves a form of historical inquiry meant to facilitate an analysis of the full-scale complexity of its objects of inquiry. Thus, *HS1* can be read as a history of a wide range of practices that intersected across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to form a deep problematization that sits at the center of who we are today. The knotty problem at the center of it all is naughty sex, such that the book tells the history of how sex itself contingently came into being, and not all that long ago. The story therein digests a remarkable diversity of practices. Chief among these are the bio-, medico-, and psycho-sciences, insofar as these

particularly inform our conceptions of the meaning, function, and (limited) possibilities of sexuality today. These sciences of sex formed through a complex mesh of instruments and practices involving a long back-history of confessional rituals whose technologies of truth were later operationalized in a variety of nineteenth-century domains including psychiatric examinations, familial surveillance, pedagogical inculcation, and grandiose efforts in public health, all of which invoked increasingly meticulous forms of power, knowledge, and subjectivation.[3] Foucault casts a wide survey over the nineteenth century in order to gain some grip on the sexuality with which it still haunts us.

A second notable feature of Foucault's methodology is its emphasis on historical contingency in place of rational necessity in history. Foucault, of course, was not the first to emphasize contingency in history. Foucault's crucial analytical breakthrough was to make use of contingency as an analytic modality for demonstrating how certain practices have come to seem necessary. The major insight, then, is not contingency so much as the excavation of contingency at the heart of necessity. What could be closer to us, what could hold us in greater thrall, than our sexuality? And yet Foucault's primary point in *HS1* is that the thrall we are in has no nature or necessity behind it. All it has is a complex history. It is no less enthralling for it, no less an object of obsession, but at least it is not a necessary obsession that puts us in touch with something supposedly deeper in ourselves than our own contingent self-fashioning.

I understand the orientation toward complexity and contingency as twain aspects of a historicized form of Kantian inquiry into the conditions of possibility that enframe subjects capable of acting and objects capable of being acted upon. This brings me to the third of my three aspects of Foucault's analytics, namely conditioning. Foucault is not merely describing the contingency and complexity of the present, but rather the way in which the present is contingently and complexly conditioned. It is in virtue of this focus on conditions that Foucault can be said to be a kind of Kantian. There is, of course, much in Kant that Foucault felt free to leave behind. That is probably for the better. But the idea of conditions of possibility was a powerful Kantian insight. It is the

best insight of the critical philosophy. Foucault recognized this and so appropriated the labor of critique for his own purposes. Thus, we can recognize Foucault's critical analytics as orienting inquiry around the work of conceptualizing the conditioning limits (i.e., the conditions of possibility) that simultaneously enable and constrain the practices under investigation. If for Kant these conditioning limits had been transcendental, for Foucault the empirical is historically conditioned by the empirical.

The *concepts* that result from Foucault's analysis of the contingency and complexity of that which conditions the present were harnessed in *HS1* for a specification of a particular functioning of power that Foucault famously names biopower. Biopower, for Foucault, is a form of power in which politics and life directly and deeply impact one another, such that political technologies can no longer afford to ignore questions concerning the regulation of life itself and the biological and human sciences can no longer leave aside as secondary, questions concerning the political valences of their yield: "For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence . . . One would have to speak of *bio-power* to designate what brought life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life" (*HS1*, 142–3). Biopower for Foucault has to do with an assemblage of historical intersections that are central to contemporary organizations of regimes of knowledge, power, and self hood. These intersections are complex, they are the product of contingencies, and they continue to condition who we are in the present. There is much more that can be said about biopower, of course, but for the purpose of distinguishing biopower as a conceptual product of Foucault's inquiry and the methodological apparatus that helped produce that concept, the minimal characterization above is safest for now, so that we can turn in a moment to different ways in which that concept has been taken up since Foucault.

What, then, can we say about the relationship between concepts and analytics in Foucault? While there is clearly an elective affinity between Foucault's analytics and concepts, these are nonetheless distinct aspects of the project outlined in *HS1*. This noted, we can locate the attraction and power of Foucault's work in his dual

deployment of these differentiable kinds of elements. While so many theorists in the humanities are content to make transcendental (non-genealogical, non-empirical) pronouncements about biopower, technology, writing, history, and everything else, and so many laborers in the social sciences are content to offer astute empirical analyses of highly circumscribed objects of inquiry that often seem to have little bearing outside of a scholarly domain, Foucault's work expresses a powerful interdigitation of analytic and concept working together at decisive edges "beyond theory and hermeneutics" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, 124). Therein lies a good share of Foucault's fecundity for us today.

Biopower after Foucault

The distinction I have been drawing matters because it matters to how we use Foucault today. We find ourselves facing today two diverging theoretical tendencies, each of which exerts tremendous influence at the same time that they negotiate a complex relationship with the thought of Foucault. These tendencies can be usefully framed in terms of two divergent uses of Foucault's genealogy of biopower, as he presented it in *HS1* and elsewhere. On the one hand, there are those critical-transcendental appropriations of Foucault's concept of biopower that would inflate this concept to something that simply could not be made sense of by way of a genealogical or archaeological analysis. On the other hand, are those critical-empirical usages of genealogy that confidently leave the specifics of his conceptual apparatus to the side in order to develop inquiries into other aspects of our present over which we do not already have good grip. Each tendency exhibits different kinds of theoretical relay with Foucault's genealogies of biopower.[4] Both aspects of Foucault are valuable for us today. But insofar as the present in which we find ourselves is one that is constantly transforming, we gain more from Foucault if we make use of his analytics to analyze emergent transformations than if we stick to concepts that were fashioned for situations that have already been transformed.

In offering cautions about contemporary transcendental invocations of biopower, I have in mind work that collects a diverse range of theorists. Certainly it is not the case that all of these theorists are of one mind about biopower. Yet they all might be said to be of a shared mindset about how biopower should be positioned as a theoretical object. Perhaps the most prominent instance of work in this vein is that of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Agamben, in *Homo Sacer*, positions biopower as one of "the keys to the historico-political destiny of the West" (1998, 182). In *The Open*, Agamben is similarly preoccupied with something that he takes to be more originary than the contours of biopower as described by Foucault: "In its origin Western politics is also biopolitics" (2004, 80). Insofar as he spreads biopower as a thin film over the entirety of Western history, Agamben is able to gather together a remarkably diverse array under the auspices of this concept. It is on this basis that he provocatively suggests that there is a "biopolitics of both modern totalitarianism and the society of mass hedonism and consumerism" (1998, 11). Roberto Esposito in *Bios* forwards a similar style of methodological inflation: "the politics of life that Nazism tried in vain to export outside Germany . . . [has] been generalized to the entire world" (2008, 147). The indictment lurking behind both Agamben and Esposito rests on their unquiet attempts to dedifferentiate fascist totalitarianisms and liberal capitalisms. Toward the aim of issuing stark political judgments, Esposito and Agamben cannot resist finally ontologizing what Foucault rigorously preserved as fully historical.[5]

Caution about this work is needed insofar as the current theoretical moment is witness to the enormous influence of this style of theorizing biopower. Transcendental philosophy, alas, is still a sexy kind of thing for those inhabiting an academic culture pervaded by theory envy. Though all this may be a sufficient cause for thinking there is deep insight in the transcendental analysis of biopower, it is not to my mind a good reason for that thought. This is because the deployment of Foucault's concepts without the guidance of Foucault's analytics risks losing a grip on the specificities for which those analytics give our analyses traction. I regard such usage as generally, though certainly not always, against the grain of the better insights of Foucault's work. If the prevailing

norm in contemporary uses of Foucault involves adoption and elaboration of his conceptual material without corollary attention to the analytical elements of his wider methodological repertoire, then caution is warranted.

Caution is also warranted by Foucault himself, at least insofar as he offers explicit cautions against precisely these kinds of "inflationary" use of concepts in *BB*. Whereas *HS1* concentrates explicitly on biopower's many scientific, especially social-scientific, dimensions, the *BB* lectures should be read as a companion genealogy of the specifically governmental dimensions of biopower. According to Foucault's methodological claims in *BB* concerning the study of biopower, an inflationary style of critique makes it "possible not only to use different analyses to support each other, but also to refer them back to each other and so deprive them of their specificity" so as to result in "an increasing interchangeability of analyses" (*BB*, 187, 188).[6] Foucault in fact had in mind precisely the sort of equivocations through which Agamben and Esposito propose to gain force for their arguments: "the welfare state has neither the same form, of course, nor, it seems to me, the same root or origin as the totalitarian state, as the Nazi, fascist, or Stalinist state" (*BB*, 190). Now Foucault, of course, does not get to be the sole authority on how we can and should make use of his work. But the concern he raises with respect to a lack of specificity is surely something that any reader of Agamben, or Esposito, can recognize as a potential problem.[7] This is, however, not the place to offer a complete criticism of these appropriations of Foucault.[8] It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness – rather than dwelling on what I find wrong with transcendental Foucauldeanisms, let me turn instead to empirical Foucauldean critiques that I find more productive.

An empirical deployment of Foucault's analytics might be useful precisely where we find ourselves in changed, or changing, circumstances. The use of Foucauldean analytics in contexts where inquiry requires substantial variation of his concepts, or perhaps even detachment from his concepts, represents a productive path forward today for Foucauldean inquiry after Foucault.[9]

Consider as an exemplar of such uses of Foucault beyond Foucault the elaboration of biopower developed in Ian Hacking's

histories. Hacking's histories of the overlay between the biological and the political feature two interwoven processes. The one he calls "the avalanche of numbers" and the other he places under the banner of what he calls "making up people." Hacking's "avalanche of numbers" refers to the solidification and explosion in the nineteenth century of "statistical information developed for purposes of social control" (2006c, 6; cf. 1990). This period was witness to the emergence of all manner of demographic data in public health, the rise of census bureaus, education statistics, crime statistics, and all other manner of numbers for very large sets of things. The all-seeing avalanche that brought life under the auspices of power in seemingly innocent books of tables, numbers, and other such data had a corollary that has to do with the categorizations of the kinds of persons counted in that data. Hacking explains: "Enumeration demands *kinds* of things or people to count. Counting is hungry for categories" (1982, 280; cf. 1981, 194). Thus, "statistics has consequences for the ways in which we conceive of others and think of our own possibilities and potentialities" (2006c, 6). The solidification of racial categories on census forms is a familiar case in point. In our times, a more recent wave of intersections of statistical enumeration and human categorization has been spawned by genetics.[10]

Now, one might ask, particularly if one is accustomed to thinking about biopower under the sway of Agamben's influential inflations, what does all this obsession with numbers and numeracy, and counting and classifying, have to do with Foucault's provocative critiques of the politics of modern sexuality? Where we find ourselves at bureaus of numbers we are quite a distance from the politics of the death camps that Agamben proposes as a paradigm for biopower. We know why the death camps should matter so much to us. But why should Hacking's institutions of enumeration matter too? Indeed why, as I am suggesting, should *histories* of statistics matter just as much as, if not more than, *ontologies* of the camps?[11]

In favor of Agamben's approach, or at least the initial plausibility of that approach, is the observation that biopower need not, as it were, automatically implicate statistics. That Agamben himself offers a theory of biopower without reference to its supposed

statistical aspects indicates the sure conceptual difference between sciences of numbers and the regulation of life. Agamben shows that it is quite possible to take life as an object of politics without even a minimal understanding of life as an informational object. In further support of Agamben's approach is recognition that practices of counting are only obliquely featured in Foucault's own illumination of the implementation of biopower, at least as he charts its histories in his major published works, most notably *HS1*. Though this book certainly makes occasional reference to statistical notions as integral to biopower, Foucault's concentration on the increasing "interference" (*HS1*, 64) of the political and the biological in that book never makes fully explicit how this entwinement makes use of statistical-informational techniques as a crucial third relay in this assemblage.[12] Thus, contemporary theorists forming their conceptions of biopower by way of engagement with Agamben's work may find themselves puzzled at claims that Hacking's efforts represent crucially important work on biopower.

Although it may not be downright nonsensical to claim that political arithmetic could be only a very minor episode in a politics of life, it would in fact be quite senseless to assert this about the *actual history* of the operations of modern biopower. Granted that Foucault's *concept* of biopower does not necessarily entail statistical techniques, the *analytical* procedures through which he conceptualized biopower positively invite further genealogical inquiry into the functional role played by statistics (and much else, too, of course) in biopower. In other words, that Foucault's account of biopower is a conceptual product of a genealogical investigation already suggests the need for exactly the kind of history of statistical information undertaken in Hacking's work (and the work of others). If Foucault's account does not already include histories of these matters at the same level of detail as found in the work of Hacking and others, I would suggest that this is only because in the work of history not everything can be kept in place – selection is inevitable. Further, if we allow our range to extend beyond Foucault's major publications, we can in fact note compelling engagements with questions of statisticalization and informationalization in his work, perhaps most fully in his discussions of "normation" and "normalization" in *STP*.[13] These lectures help

show how Hacking cannot be far off the mark, an impression which some readers unfortunately may have if they take too much of their Foucault from Agamben.

That a study of the history of statistics is motivated by Foucault's genealogies of biopower does not, of course, entail that Foucault's genealogies develop that history in sufficient detail. Indeed they do not. This is why it is up to us, after Foucault, to take up Foucault's concepts and keep them in genealogical motion. My argument is that the connection between statistics and biopower is best seen not as purely conceptual, but rather as an emergent historical connection whose conceptual contours deserve to be illuminated historically, for instance, genealogically. Hence the importance of being able to specify the kind of work that Foucault's analytics expressly facilitate.

Infopower after Foucault

I have suggested that Foucault's genealogies of biopower lead quite naturally to Hacking's genealogies of statistics. In this section I develop that claim with an eye toward the conclusion that the history of statistical biopower can be read as an early chapter in the history of what we might be prepared to call today "infopower." My suggestion is that in attending carefully to the contours of Foucault's work, we can see how there is already an incipient idea of powers of information present in his work on biopower. If part of the orbit of the historical moment of biopower can be shown to be a politics of statistics, then the next moment in that history may very well have been the emergence of an infopower whereby statistics and other manner of informational phenomena begin to gain a gravity of power all their own. There is a history of the present (I mean our present today, not Foucault's in 1976, nor even Hacking's in 1990) that moves from, say, the politics of health in the eighteenth century, to the politics of the census and social regulation in the nineteenth century, to the politics of, say, electronic communications surveillance in the twentieth century. All of this forms a background out of which there emerge

some of the bravest new objects of our twenty-first century: for example, the immanent ubiquity of eyewear that informationalizes everyone's immediate environment (including facial recognition of passers-by on the street, keyed indirectly to online data profiles containing such information as phone numbers, places of employment, and home address) or the promise of a government surveillance enterprise that would amass a yottabyte of data (a yottabyte being 10^{24} bytes, which is an amount that if stored on current hardware would occupy the entire surface of Delaware and Rhode Island combined). The infopolitical problematics therein may seem a long way from biopolitics indeed. But my claim will be that such infopolitical practices are part of a present, our present, whose history is best seen as emerging out of a biopolitical past. To see how the history of infopower can be seen as an extension upon Foucault's history of biopower, consider first that Foucault contrasted biopower as "the right to make live and let die" from the classical right of sovereign power "to take life or let live" (*SMBD*, 241; cf. *HS1*, 138). In coming to terms with the very idea of biopower, it is crucial to note two things about it. First, the idea of making live only makes sense at the level of the population. Second, population is a concept that can be elaborated only through statistical, and therefore informational, techniques.

How is biopolitics a politics of the population? Foucault himself explicitly counted it as such: "power [with respect to biological existence] is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population" (*HS1*, 137; cf. *SMBD*, 245). But what does he mean here? Were it situated *only* at the level of the individual, the techniques of biopower would be incoherent at best and intolerable at worst. In the political rationality Foucault was seeking to understand, making a single individual to live could only be a sovereign intervention. Beyond the familiar sovereign-legal bans on assisted suicides, the idea of making an individual live is for us unthinkable. Try to imagine the impossible levels of control implicit in directing a single individual life to increase its life span or decrease its proneness to major disease and illness. But if exercised at the level of the population, this power to make live is something easy to both imagine and endorse. It thus imperceptibly became something that almost all of us today

are always in favor of. Public health and hygiene, inoculations, nutritional labeling, and school exercise are only a sliver of the ways in which we pursue the biopolitical project of "making live" at the level of populations. There may, of course, be disciplinary implementations at work in many of the most familiar exercises of biopower. For example, public health is biopolitical in orientation though quite often disciplinary in its techniques of execution ("wash your hands," "get your shots," "eat your vegetables"). Thus, though biopolitics may often involve extensive and thorough uses of disciplinary implementation, the specificity of biopolitical regulation cannot be wholly comprehended in terms of disciplinary dressage. The techniques involved in training children to eat their vegetables are not sufficient to invest the idea of tracking correlations between vegetable consumption and physical health across populations of schoolchildren nationally. This is why the biopolitics of the school lunch are *more* than just disciplinary matters, and also *more* than just sovereign matters, too. After all, biopower can, even if rarely, function wholly outside of the scope of discipline. One example would be atomic warfare, mentioned by Foucault himself as exemplary of this mode of power (*HS1*, 137). Another would be urban water management systems in highly developed nations, where it is difficult to discern visible disciplinary correlates. These examples help show how biopower is *primarily* about the regulation of populations and thus only incidentally, even if quite often, implicated in the disciplinary training of individuals. The important point is just that these are all distinct modes of power – which is exactly why inquiries into their relation can be so productive.

A second important facet of biopower begins to take us out of Foucault's texts and into those of historians of nineteenth-century statistics such as Hacking. Here the crucial point is that a politics of population is an inherently informational politics. Populations are not natural kinds, though they are not therefore unreal. Populations are the real correlate of certain informational technologies, most obviously those of statistics and of counting. Before one has techniques in place for counting a population, there just is no population in a meaningful sense, and certainly not as an object of biopolitical intervention. Sometimes counting is easy enough, and involves only a clipboard, pen, and paper, but often counting

is much more complex than that, especially where the objects one is counting are disparate and diffuse such that counting takes much time. Consider an edict issued in France by the radical National Convention upon having replaced the Legislative Assembly toward the end of 1792 – the Convention's Committee of Public Works sent a circular instructing agents "to obtain an exact knowledge of the population of the French territory," therein justifying the instructions by claiming that "all means of public prosperity are on the agenda and we can no longer neglect to know one of its most essential elements, the population. An enumeration of free men! Can one conceive of the idea without carrying it out?" (quoted in Headrick 2000, 72–3). As it turned out, this particular instruction proved enormously difficult to implement – something seemingly so simple as counting is a technical art and requires all kind of supporting apparatus to gain stability.[14] Once one has mechanisms in place for enumerating countable members of populations, there are further technical matters at stake in observing and transforming these numeral correlates of masses of living human beings. Statistical techniques help facilitate these observations and transformations. These techniques of counting and statistics represent a specifically informational engagement with populations, or a work on populations as informational phenomena.

These twin aspects of biopower, the concept of a population as a correlate of statistical techniques, are sometimes explicit in Foucault's discussions, but as noted above, are not developed there in full detail. Here is where Hacking picks up on a crucial theme in Foucault and develops it further according to the genealogical manner of Foucault's own investigations.[15] Hacking's genealogy focuses on utilitarian reformers such as Adolphe Quetelet in Belgium and William Farr in England. These were statisticians who sought to deploy enumeration for beneficial social control. Their goal was not to use numbers to wield repressive sovereign power over populations. Statistics would rather be the crux of the productive improvement of the lives of the laboring masses. These functionaries, says Hacking, "created the infrastructure of one of the kinds of power by which our society operates" (1990, 119). One of Hacking's favorite phrases throughout this book is "information and control" (cf. 3, 5, 94, 115, 141).

In virtue of the history of info–control, largely only implicit in Foucault, and far more explicit in Hacking, we can risk today to speak of an infopolitics that constituted one vector in the emergence of the more general problematization of biopolitics: *an infopower operative within and alongside of biopower*. And what happened to these powers of information after their emergence? Has infopower remained within the orbit of biopower? Or are we prepared to think of an infopower that, despite emerging from within the context of biopower, is today a form of power in its own right?

A critical investigation of *the possibility of infopower's detachment from biopower* such that it has assumed gravity in its own right would be one way of taking Foucault beyond Foucault, and of taking ourselves into our present today (it would also, presumably, involve taking Hacking beyond Hacking). And why might this matter? A critical investigation of the history of our present infopolitics seems much needed today insofar as we find ourselves in the midst of increasingly complex, confusing, and critical informational problematics.

I have already mentioned a few humble technologies (e.g., Google Glass) and hubristic enterprises (e.g., the National Security Agency) now yielding a potentiality for bewilderingly massive informational surveillance. Consider also the recent spate of headline-level conflicts over infopower between such illustrious agents as the Pentagon and WikiLeaks or the Recording Industry Association of America, the Department of Justice, and MegaUpload, or the not unrelated anxieties over privacy and identity in digitally networked social media contexts.[16] Or consider the quite different, but surely resonant, debates over genetic enhancements and cloning, which are surely debates about life and the body, but also just as surely debates about the politics of information insofar as the concept of the gene is, at bottom, an informational concept as it gets operationalized in molecular biology.[17] These examples, it might be objected, can all be seen as fitting neatly within the mold of biopower, and perhaps also disciplinary power and sovereign power, too. But my argument is only that biopower (and other familiar forms) cannot fully exhaust the new modes of information surveillance, aggregation, and distribution in our midst – a history of infopower is useful not

because we have left biopower behind but rather because something new is emergent too.

One of the brightest examples of this for us today is financialization. While the statistical techniques and property codes at the heart of finance capitalism obviously emerged through biopolitical and sovereign crafting long ago, the middle decades of the twentieth century were witness to whole new orders of informational possibility that simply cannot be boiled down to biopolitical and sovereign techniques. Informational forms emerged in those decades having very little to do with the management of populations and explicit legal controls. And yet they possess a remarkable impact in terms of facilitating new ways of conducting our conduct. It should be unsurprising that these are among our shiniest new objects of cultural perplexity. We, as yet, little understand the problematics out of which they arose. And it would be a mistake to reduce those problematics to all-too familiar terms. For we would thereby miss most of what is novel in, say, the securitization of risky mortgage debt or institutional shifts from pit floors to speculative screen trading. These perplexities are part of a thread that weaves from stable conduct at the Chicago Options Board to hyper-unstable objects such as all-digital peer-to-peer encrypted currencies like BitCoin – my claim is just that this thread is not wholly spun out of biopolitical material.

The broader powers of information in which we are enmeshed are today so ubiquitous as to sometimes seem necessary (rather than contingent), simple (rather than complex), and obligatory (rather than entrenched but ultimately optional) – this is why we find it difficult to even think of life outside of the constraints of our contemporary problematics of information. And yet human cultures and societies were, obviously, not always deeply penetrated by processes of informationalization. It is only within the last two decades that conditions emerged such that your personal information might be vulnerable to appropriation and theft on a global scale due to its accessibility over the internet, and it is only within the last two centuries that conditions emerged such that it even makes sense to speak of there being information that is personal. It is only in the last two decades that we have begun to dream about real-time networked statistical aggregation (of, say, financial data),

and only in the last two centuries that it has even made sense to speak of a politics of a stable statistical object like a gross national product.

There is a history of making information stable, usable, and powerful. Foucault directs us to that history, but he himself did not write all of it. Nor have I here mounted a complete argument for the coherence of infopower. Such a project would clearly be beyond the scope of anything less than a book. Rather, I have sought to attend to the need for this project, or some other project quite like it, as an instructive exemplar of how we might make further use of Foucault today. *I have sought to exemplify how Foucault's analytical strategies demand of us that we move beyond the conceptual territory already illuminated by those very strategies.* This, I have argued, is a decidedly different direction from more familiar efforts in inflating Foucault's conceptual apparatus to the effect of what we might call the bloating of biopower. If we today work to further develop certain strands of the massive history of biopower beyond Foucault's own histories, we put ourselves in a position to learn something that Foucault himself did not teach us, and indeed could not have taught us, given that his present which is now in the past simply could not have prophesied our present today. What is therefore at stake here is an attempt to attend to the specificities and advantages of Foucault's own critical analytics.

Foucault's Critical Empiricism

What Paul Patton calls "Foucault's relentlessly empirical approach" (2011, 41; cf. Veyne 2010) can best be discerned in the mobilization of Foucauldean analytics for the purposes of inquiry into such emergent phenomena in the present as infopolitics, rather than in a generalization of Foucauldean concepts that forces them to colonize domains that demand different conceptualizations. Thus, if the work of transcendental Heideggerean-Foucauldeans from Agamben to Esposito and beyond would seek to disinter concepts from the historical weight that would always condition them, then this would require a transcendental philosophical perspective that a

careful Foucauldean empiricism would eschew. Foucault's empiricism, of course, is not just any empiricism. While it is certainly the empiricism of the smallest differences and the most momentary shifts, it is also the empiricism of explosive and momentous intersections.

Foucault offers us what should be called a *critical empiricism*. This is a form of critique whereby we can engage how we are conditioned today, in all our complexity and contingency. This is a critique that would attend to all the little differences that separate us from who we could otherwise be and all the unobvious relations that are welded together to form our very selves. Foucault's critical empiricism offers us, among other things, methodological analytics for bringing into view these constitutive features of our presents and indeed our very selves. These analytics are the truest source of the ongoing fecundity of his work for us today, at least insofar as we might aim to make use of Foucault to go beyond Foucault.[18]

Notes

1 I take Foucault at his word when he states, in a 1984 interview, that "the notion common to all the work that I have done since *History of Madness* is that of problematization" (*PPC*, 257). This notion is central in my interpretation of genealogy and archaeology in Koopman (2012), where I show in detail that Foucault's retroactive self-interpretation here is most insightful.

2 James D. Faubion rightly notes that Foucault's methodology is one that does "not seem appropriately construed as pursuing the necessary conditions that make ancient philosophical discourse on the carnal pleasures possible, much less the necessary conditions of any possible practice or discourse that could be called ethics" (2011, 44). Thus for Faubion, "analytic" is an imprecise term, given the stark contrast between its classical valences and Foucault's own work. Unlike Faubion, I am content with Foucault's own usage of "analytic" as a description of his detranscendentalized procedures (cf. 43). Faubion prefers the label of "diagnostic" for Foucault's procedures (and his own, too) because he takes an analytic in its classical sense

as a "methodology specifically designed to identify the necessary conditions of any possible experience" (43). Though this interpretation of the term "analytic" is true to the philosophical tradition, I am content with the existing terminology even if it is not always technically precise.

3 See Part III, and Part IV, Chapter IV of *HS1*.

4 For a review of the literature on biopolitics, see Thomas Lemke's *Biopolitics: An Advanced Introduction* (2007b). On what is missing from Lemke's account, see Morar and Koopman (2012).

5 Other influential examples of this style of transcendentalizing, ontologizing, and even metaphysicalizing Foucault can be found in the collaborations of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004), and more recently the work of Esposito's translator Timothy Campbell in *Improper Life* (2011).

6 Foucault details four problems with conceptually "inflationary" critique. Having already named the first above, the other three are that inflationary critique: (2) facilitates a generalized and nonspecific form of polemical denunciation or "a general disqualification by the worst," (3) "enables one to avoid paying the price of reality and actuality," and (4) too often fails to develop critical reflexivity (*BB*, 187–8).

7 See Connolly (2005), Lemke (2007a), Oksala (2010), and especially Patton (2007) for criticisms to this effect.

8 See Koopman (forthcoming) for an elaboration of these criticisms.

9 Examples of such work include Ian Hacking's *The Emergence of Probability* (1975), *The Taming of Chance* (1990), *Rewriting the Soul* (1995), and *Mad Travelers* (1998), some of which are discussed below, as well as works such as Ladelle McWhorter's *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America* (2009), Arnold Davidson's *The Emergence of Sexuality* (2001), Paul Rabinow's *French Modern* (1989) and *French DNA* (1999), Nikolas Rose's *The Politics of Life Itself* (2006), Jenny Reardon's *Race to the Finish* (2005), Mary Beth Mader's *Sleights of Reason* (2011), James D. Faubion's *An Anthropology of Ethics* (2011), James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1994), and Saba Mahmood's *The Politics of Piety* (2005).

10 In a discussion of what he calls, following a widely read article by Paul Rabinow (1992), "biosocial identity," Hacking notes that "knowledge of genetic 'identities' will forge social ones, creating

new communities of shared recognition based on partial science . . . new kinds of people will come into being, people characterized by a certain risk factor, who band together to create a social group that evolves its own collective characteristics" (2006b, 88).

11 The emphasis here is exclusively on the difference between "histories" and "ontologies." There is no implication whatsoever that the camps do not matter or should not matter – clearly they do and for reasons quite obvious to all. Indeed it is that obviousness that helps specify the delicate difference between totalitarianism and statistics as objects of philosophical critique. My contention, to state it simply, is that today we do not need philosophers to tell us that something went terribly wrong at the camps – we all know this. By contrast, philosophy can make itself quite useful by explicating what is problematic (in Foucault's sense of that term) about statistical thinking – given especially that so many take it as obvious that there is nothing at all problematic here.

12 Foucault indeed mentions, but only mentions, statistical notions as part of the technical workings of biopower (cf. *HS1*, 25, 144, 146). My point is just that he does not there develop these notions in detail such that nobody should read this book as a major contribution to the history of statistics. A different interpretation of the relation between Foucault's concept of biopower and informatics is developed from a media-and-information theory perspective in Galloway and Thacker (2007, 70–7). In my view, Galloway and Thacker needlessly overstate the extent to which Foucault's work itself actually functions as a guide to, rather than a pointer toward, all manner of informatics. Such overstatement is unfortunate because it blocks paths of inquiry where we need to press beyond Foucault himself and precisely for Foucauldean reasons.

13 *See STP(E)*, 29–86 (Lecture 2 and especially Lecture 3), Foucault *BB*, and *EW3*, 134–56. It is worth noting that in the late 1970s Foucault was in extensive communication with a number of scholars who were working on these informational aspects of modern politics – some of this work was collected in *The Foucault Effect* (Burchell et al., 1991). See also Foucault's own editorial efforts in this area in Foucault (1976b).

14 An easy exercise will make this vivid, at least for we academics: try counting all the books in your library. Though it seems at first

blush that this should be remarkably easy, it will not be long before you come across items that will require you to make decisions. What about manuscripts? And digital copies? Books on loan from the library? How to count multi-volume works? If you count your books in one way, and I count mine in another, difficulties may ensue. Thus it was that counting all the people in France, under the administration of different local officials with different sensibilities for how to count, proved a resilient problem in the late eighteenth century.

15 For explicit statements of his project's debts to Foucault, see Hacking (1982, 279; 1990, 21).

16 For one helpful introduction to some of the issues involved here that I would read as amenable to a Foucauldean analytic (even if explicit in the departures from Foucauldean concepts that may be required here), see Chun (2006, 2011).

17 For a source of these ideas with which Foucault himself was surely conversant, see the work of François Jacob, winner of the 1965 Nobel Prize in Medicine: "Heredity is described today in terms of information, messages and code . . . What are transmitted from generation to generation are the 'instructions' specifying the molecular structures" (1970, 1). Foucauldeans interested in the connections between contemporary bioscientific information and contemporary biopower would do well to consider the leads of Rabinow (1992, 1999) and Rabinow and Rose (2006).

18 For comments on previous versions of this material, I would like to thank Tomas Matza, Nicolae Morar, and audiences at the Northwestern University Philosophy Department, the Pacific Association for Continental Theory, the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, the Critical Genealogies Collaboratory, and a Foucault Circle session at the American Philosophical Association. Special thanks also to James D. Faubion for characteristically thoughtful suggestions that facilitated important improvements.

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