Governing through contingency: The security of biopolitical governance[☆]

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Space of experimentation

In an interview at the end of 1978, Foucault observed:

> "I write a book only because I still don't know exactly what to think about this thing I want so much to think about, so that the book transforms me and what I think…I am an experimenter in the senses that I write in order to transform myself and in order not to think the same thing as before." (Faubion, 2001: 239–240)

A fortiori, so with his lectures. Foucault was always a provocateur. His task was to reformulate the questions we habitually pose and the analytical perspectives we traditionally bring to bear on our conditions of subjectification and rule. In that respect the lectures discussed here are exemplary. Their infelicities, gaps and confusions are themselves further provocation to 'experiment'. Such further provocation for thought applies especially in relation to Foucault's observations about how biopolitical governance revolves around what he calls the contingent or 'aleatory' features that are displayed by populations.

The age-old question of chance has a long history and contingency is said in many ways. For the ancients, including notably Diodorus and Boethius, it was related to necessity and the wider philosophical question of the nature of the cosmological order (Vuillemin, 1996). Throughout the Middle Ages, especially in disputes about money, usury and fiscal innovation, it was increasingly debated in the form of arithmetic calculation and risk (Bernstein, 1998; Poitras, 2000; Shell, 1982). At the beginning of political modernity, for Machiavelli especially, contingency was related to evental time, factical freedom and the power of political *virtù* (Althusser, 1999, 2006; Vatter, 2000). For Foucault, too, it arises in a novel way at the beginning of the

modern age. It does so when it becomes instituted as the principle of a political rationality pre-occupied with the promotion of species existence and the exercise of power over life through novel governmental practices.

Foucault was not only observing a change in the exercise of power and the conduct of conduct, however, when noting the emergence of governmentality and biopolitics at the beginning of the modern age. He was also observing how such changes were taking place in correlation with complex changes in truth-telling practices concerning uncertainty, the nature of the contingent and the very understanding of 'species' itself; including species as money, species as scientific taxonomy and, ultimately, species as biology (Dillon & Lobo-Guerrero, 2006; Poitras, 2000). The space of problematisation of government was therefore also related, amongst other factors, to that of the changing problematisation of chance itself. These developments were in turn related to a changing biopolitical problematisation of security in which the referent object of security was population rather than territory. Towards the end of the 20th century contingency seems to have graduated from being one intelligible mechanism of government amongst others into an entire field of political formation for populations globally.

Space of problematisation: the government of effects

The problematic of government is not of course a uniform or homogeneous space. It is a diverse, heterogeneous and dynamic topology of power in which complexes of problems continuously emerge. There was not one form of government, for Foucault, for example, but two. The first was that of *polizeiwissenschaft* or 'police'. Allied to sovereignty, 'police' was concerned with "the internal refinement of 'reason of State'" (Foucault, 2004a: 29). 'Police' was, however, also subject to external restraint through the operation of public law; matters which included what Foucault aptly calls "the royal questions" of state concerning constitutions, rights and legitimacy. The second was a form of liberal governmentality quite different from that of 'police', not least in that it was distinguished by seeking self-measurement and limitation through reference to domains of factical life; notably for Foucault that of political economy in general and the operation of markets in particular. These domains were increasingly understood to operate according to their own 'natural' rules of formation. Such domains, "could be thwarted, they could be confused, they could be obscured, but in any case they could not be avoided, they could not be suspended in totality and definitively. In some way they would come back into governmental practice" (Foucault, 2004a: 17–18). Here government had to take account of the 'nature' of the object to be governed.

Such liberal government was a government of 'utility' and 'frugality': "The problem was to know what effects it has and if these effects are negative.… what are the real effects of governmentality in its exercise, not what are the original laws which could provide the foundation of this governmentality" (Foucault, 2004a: 17). Here, liberal governmentality aimed to regulate and evaluate itself according to its changing understanding of the emergent natural processes that it sought to govern. Contemporary military strategists might now call this 'effects-based' government (Smith, 2002); a practice of rule in which, "[w]e see the substitution of success for legitimacy" (Foucault, 2004a: 18).

Liberal governmentality is not only measured, however, according to whether or not it is effective. The 'natural' process that it must take into account itself emerges through complex power/knowledge discourses of microphysically organised regimes of truth. In this respect, the history of liberal governmentality, "is not the history of the true, it is not the history of

the false, it is the history of truth telling processes…" (Foucault, 2004a: 38). Foucault is especially provocative in thus describing the operation of markets: a complex of practices which not only specify the truth of the situation but also administer and regulate a form of 'justice' (Foucault, 2004a: 35). Governmental effectiveness in turn reflected how well government understood the independent forces of factical life—"the appearance of phenomena, processes and regularities which were produced necessarily as a function of *intelligible mechanisms*" (Foucault, 2004a: 17, emphasis added)—and how much it was judged to have respected their autonomous developmental dynamics. Especially influenced by English radicals and utilitarians, this liberal form of government continues to mutate in many ways, now posing our own contemporary problematics of government and rule. For that reason it is more politically interesting to Foucault; and to us.

Society Must Be Defended (SMD) dealt primarily with the problematic of rule and war. In addition to a variety of other analytical concerns Foucault also broached the problematic of what happens to government when it takes 'species life' as its referent object of governance—the problematic of biopower and biopolitics. At the end of this lecture series, clearly thinking through what he had broached, Foucault recognised that promoting species existence introduced a biopoliticised strategic logic whose infinite and continuous assay of life ultimately demanded criteria by means of which life inimical to life could be differentiated, corrected, punished and, if necessary, eliminated. Here, he says that while biopolitics recuperates the death function (and elsewhere that, biopolitically, "massacres become vital", Foucault, 1987) racism also becomes a logical strategic corollary of biopower (Foucault, 1987).

Security, Territory, Population (STP) dealt extensively with governmentality and biopolitics. It specified in particular how the problematics of government differ from the royal questions of state.[1] It is here that Foucault first detailed how government began to revolve biopolitically around the specific question of 'population'. The third of the lecture series, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, establishes the distinction between *polizeiwissenschaft*, or 'police', and liberal governmentality. Much of this series is also devoted to post-war developments of liberalism in Europe and the United States.

Contrary to the way in which Foucault has been thought simply to oppose governmental, disciplinary and other forms of power relations to sovereign power relations, he constantly insists that the royal questions remain significant and that there are complex intersections between all these forms of power relations:

> "For all that, monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, all these questions were not to disappear." (Foucault, 2004a: 30)

He notes, for example, how the development of an 'effects-based' art of government led to two ways of constituting the regulation of public power in law, and to two conceptions of liberty: "one conceived from the starting point of the rights of man and the other proceeding from the starting point of the independence of those who are governed" (Foucault, 2004a: 43). But he also insists "I do not mean to say that it is a question of two separate systems, alien systems, incompatible systems, contradictory systems, totally exclusive of each other" (Foucault, 2004a: 43). Rather, "I mean there are two coherences, two ways of doing things which are if you wish, heterogeneous" (Foucault, 2004a: 44). What is necessary to remember he says, is, "that this

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[1] The fourth of these was translated and published some time ago as "Governmentality" in, Gordon and Miller (1991).

heterogeneity is never a principle of exclusion, or that heterogeneity never hinders co-existence, or joining, or connection''. It nonetheless does substitute a strategic political logic for a dialectical one. ''Dialectical logic'', he says, ''is a logic which plays with terms which are contradictory but within the element of homogeneity….which promises to dissolve them into one unity'' (Foucault, 2004a: 44). Strategic logic, on the other hand, is concerned instead, ''to establish the possible connections between disparate terms which remain disparate''. ''The logic of strategy'', he continues, ''is the logic of the connection of the heterogeneous and it is not, repeat not, the logic of the homogenisation of things which are contradictory'' (Foucault, 2004a: 44). Strategy is an *ars combinatoria,* rather than an *ars differentia.* It is most in evidence when biopolitics seeks to govern through the governance of contingency.

Contingency as "intelligible mechanism"

In order for the contingent character of life to emerge as a certain kind of 'aleatory truth' about life, however, life as such must first be understood in biological terms as *être biologique* (biological being). Biology, too, must be concerned with certain processes of differentiation and classification, specifically in terms of species and populations, as well as more generally distinguishing between what is animate and what is inanimate. Similarly, the human has also to be classified as species existence (*espèce humaine*). Foucault devotes the early lectures of STP to sketching how some of these key distinctions are drawn, noting in particular how the biological *espèce humaine* differs from the juridico-political and cultural concept of *le genre humain* (Foucault, 2004b). The root of *le genre humain* is '*gens*'. '*Gens*' refers to the great tradition of Roman and medieval law of *jus gentium*, where *gentium* invokes the idea of juridico-cultural notion of a 'people' or 'peoples', not the biological notion of 'species' which is, of course, the root of *espèce*. In the move from *genre* to *espèce* is a transformation of the very understanding of life itself.

Concerned with collective phenomena, whose economic and political effects only become pertinent at the level of the mass, biopolitically relevant phenomena are Foucault says: ''phenomena that are aleatory and unpredictable when taken in themselves or individually, but which at the collective level, display constraints that are easy or at least possible to establish'' (Foucault, 2003: 246). Biopower is thus concerned primarily with the, ''essentially aleatory events that occur within a population that exists over a period of time'' (Foucault, 2003: 246). Such mechanisms include, ''forecasts, statistical estimates and overall measures'' (Foucault, 2003: 246). Equally important and distinctive are the ways these ''intelligible mechanisms'' are designed to operate: ''their purpose is not to modify any given phenomenon as such, or to modify any given individual in so far as he is an individual, but, essentially, to intervene at the level of their generality'' (Foucault, 2003: 246). In short, Foucault says, ''[s]ecurity mechanisms have to be installed around the random element inherent in a population of living beings so as to optimise a state of life'' (Foucault, 2003: 246). They install a regulatory technology of life in the form of, '''population', with its numerical variables of space and chronology of longevity and health…not only as a problem but as an object of surveillance, analysis, intervention, modification and so on'' (Foucault, 2001a: 95).

Thus did political power begin to be exercised, via the governance of contingency, in and through the biological mass which constitutes the species rather than through the belonging said to constitute the *gens* of *gentium,* or *le genre humain.* Primary amongst the truth-telling practices that began to focus in detail on, and scientifically codify the law-like operation of, the aleatory character of 'population' was the ''political arithmetic'' of statistical truth telling.

This was enabled on the one hand by Pascal's 'discovery' of probability (Daston, 1995; Hacking, 1975, 1990), and on the other by what Ian Hacking called the avalanche of statistics (Hacking, 1982, 1986). By these means the aleatory was progressively turned into the kind of ''intelligible mechanism'' that biopolitical liberal governance began to employ in order to regulate, evaluate and limit itself.

The fourth of the STP lectures, published as ''Governmentality'' begins with a useful summary account:

> ''In a previous lecture on 'apparatuses of security,' I tried to explain the emergence of a set of problems specific to the issue of population; on closer inspection it turned out that we would also need to take account the problematic of government. In short, one needed to analyse the series: security, population, government.'' (Foucault, 2001b: 201)

The wider political ramifications and implications of the emergence of biopolitically governing through contingency were, however, also somewhat anticipated by Foucault in the earlier SMD lectures. There he reflected on how the new technology of governmental biopower, *le dispositif de sécurité*, is addressed to, ''a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness and so on…not individualising but, if you like, massifying…a biopolitics of the human race'' (Foucault, 2003: 242–243). Such a *dispositif* also, however, installs an *impératif*, something that consists in dynamics that comprise both a powerful self-generating logic as well as a space of problematisation. In the first lecture of STP Foucault also noted how the operation and proliferation of mechanisms of security continually inflated the concern with security. Echoing the daunting observation made elsewhere that a certain threshold of modernity is reached when it wagers the life of the species on its political strategies (Foucault, 1987: 143), Foucault goes so far presciently as to say there that the ''general economy of power'' is in the process of becoming an order of security with society dominated by security technologies that put *le destin biologique* in question (Foucault, 2004b: Lecture 1).

Government has thus to take into account the nature of the thing to be governed. In biopolitics the referent object of governance is life; specifically, in the beginning, 'population'. Life, especially the life of populations, is characterised by contingency. Contingency is not arbitrary chance. It represents a complex discourse—set of truth-telling practices—about the knowledge of uncertainty. In retrospect, we can therefore see that the question of contingency, or 'the aleatory', arises for Foucault as one of those factical elements or 'natural' processes to which liberal governmentality must attend, with which it must deal and in relation to which it has to regulate and evaluate its own performance and effectiveness in its ambition to exercise power over life. In governmental terms, the contingent features that life and populations display are not an ideological disguise for the operation of some hidden interests and they are not part of a dialectical historical process. They are a function of truth-telling practices of the life sciences, uncertainty and risk. These perform a whole variety of governmental as well as scientific functions, not least in telling different stories about different categories of living things and their governability, as well as what falls into the category of living thing as such.

These processes are also subject to a strategic rather than a dialectical logic in as much as the outcomes of these truth-telling practices—the accumulation of statistical data, the compiling of statistical tables, the employment of probability analysis to derive socially relevant meaning from data already collected, which in turn stimulates demand for new data—allowed new productive connections to be made between different aspects of the life of populations and new strategic formations of government to emerge. One of these, François Ewald was amongst the first to observe, was that of the widely underrated governmental technology of insurance

(Ewald, 1991, 1999, 2002). Most people in the developed world get most of their everyday security most of the time, for example, from insurance rather than the state. Insurance is one of those mechanisms which carry the commercial principle of making an entrepreneur of oneself—a preoccupation in *The Birth of Biopolitics* lectures—deep into the heart of the widely disseminated processes of subjective self-regulation and rule.

Le dispositif de sécurité

Whereas the geopolitics of security began to revolve around the space of territory, that of the biopolitics of security began to revolve around the 'space' of species or population. Central to the securing of populations according to Foucault were the emerging sciences of the aleatory or the contingent—statistics and probability. It is therefore important to draw attention to the way that Foucault recorded a re-problematisation of security—a novel *dispositif de sécurité*—as he observed an increasing preoccupation with governing through contingency in the process of the biopoliticisation of rule. The strategic principle of formation for this security *dispositif* was that of the contingency (amenable to statistical and other forms of political arithmetic) which was immanent to life in general and population in particular. One might say that this initiated a government of the contingent, by the contingent, for the contingent: government of population (in its very contingency) by the burgeoning new sciences of contingency (statistics and probability) for the contingent (effects-based) promotion of life. The institution of this novel biopolitical *dispositif de sécurité* continues to ramify throughout the evolution of the complex security processes of liberal governmentality today. Arguably, the contingent has now become the primary strategic principle of formation for the generic securing of life which liberal governmental rule now pursues globally.

"Intelligible mechanism" to "field of formation"

Having to take into account the autonomous nature of the thing to be governed biopolitics therefore seeks to govern through contingency since contingency is what characterises its very object of government, namely the life of species existence. Contingency also came however to be understood as an essential element of the wider freedom characteristic of individuals and populations. Their economic and political preferences and choices, for example, came to be regarded as contingent on their own calculations of utility. Similarly, those contingent calculations of utility re-injected a contingent uncertainty back into economics and politics. Governing through contingency was therefore an extension of governing through freedom. One of those intelligible mechanisms autonomous of government that government had to take into account as it sought to govern, contingency has increasingly however come to be equated with freedom as such. To the degree then that freedom becomes equated with contingency, governing through freedom begins to be conflated with governing through contingency. What was once one "intelligible mechanism" amongst others has now burgeoned into a much wider field of political formation and intervention over every aspect of life. Rule through freedom as contingency becomes the continuous governmental management of uncertainty in liberal regimes of power.

I want to end by suggesting that there is a powerful analogy to be drawn between the advent of 'the economic' and the advent now of 'the contingent'. Had I more space I would like to develop this point into an even more extensive argument. It is not simply a matter of risk being an epiphenomenon of the social as social theorists of risk maintain. 'The contingent' now rivals 'the economic' and the 'social', in as much as both of these domains are increasingly also being

re-inscribed and governed through contingency because, like the probability revolution that has inflected science itself throughout the last century (Lorenz, Daston, & Heidelberger, 1987) the social and the economic are coming to be fundamentally understood in terms of a broad ontology and epistemology of the contingent. Hence, biopolitical liberal governance both governs through, and is in turn widely governed by, the changing truth-telling practices of 'the contingent'.

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Explain the concept of security governance and how it differs from security management. Provide an overview of the key components of security governance. Discuss the topics that should be covered in a strategic security plan. Discuss the topics that should be covered in an information security report. Â The security governance level communicates the mission priorities, available resources, and overall risk tolerance to the security management level. In essence, security governance is the process of developing a security program that adequately meets the strategic needs of the business. The security management level uses the information as inputs into the risk management process that realizes the security program. Request PDF | Biopolitics and Adaptation: Governing Socio-Ecological Contingency Through Climate Change and Disaster Studies | This paper brings together Foucauldian approaches to biopolitics and recent developments in climate change and disaster studies on vulnerability, | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. Â Consequently, shared-responsibility becomes essential as it links the security and well-being of both individual and collective life [9]. This is achieved principally, through the assignment of different roles and responsibilities, for different segments of Australian society. It presents global governance not as impartial institutionalism, but as the calculated mismanagement of life, directing biopolitical neoliberal ideology through global networks, undermining the human security of millions. The book responds to recent critiques of the human security concept as incoherent by identifying and prioritizing transnational human populations facing life-ending contingencies en mass. Furthermore, it proposes a realignment of World Bank practices towards mobilizing indigenous provision of water and sanitation in areas with the highest rates of avoidable child mortality.