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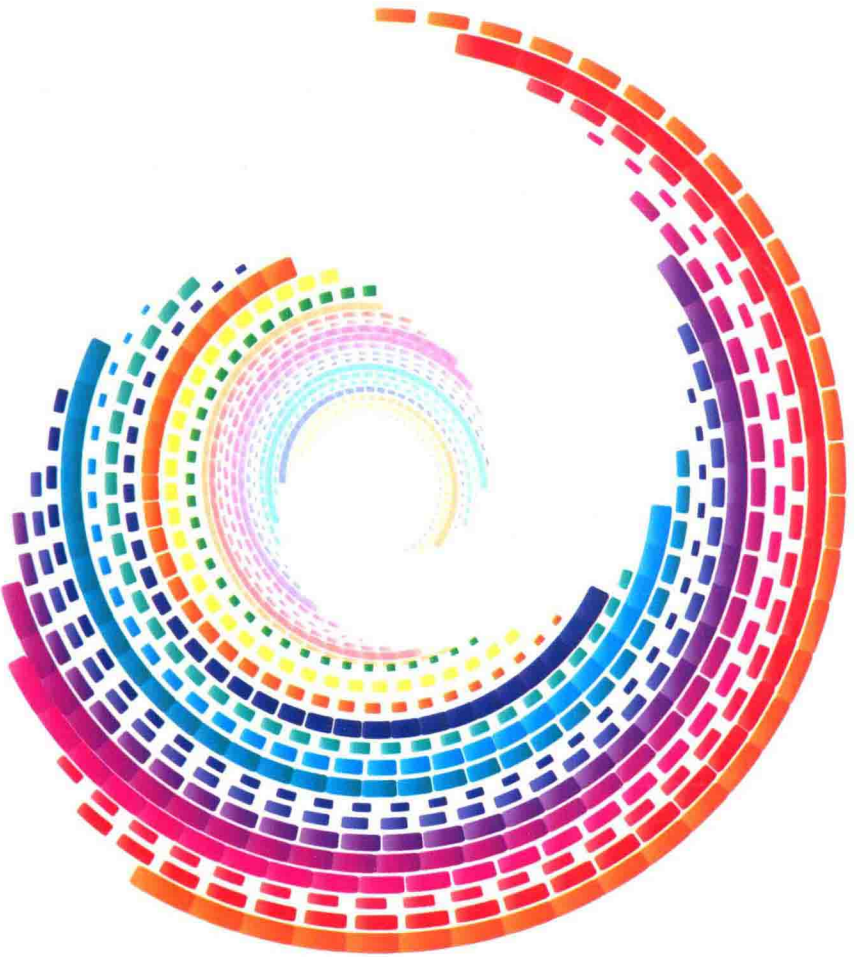

BIOPOLITICS OF SECURITY

A political analytic of finitude

MICHAEL DILLON

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BIOPOLITICS OF SECURITY

Taking its inspiration from Michel Foucault, this volume of essays integrates the analysis of security into the study of modern political and cultural theory.

Explaining how both politics and security are differently problematised by changing accounts of time, the work shows how, during the course of the seventeenth century, the problematisation of government and rule became newly enframed by a novel account of time and human finitude, which it calls 'factical finitude'. The correlate of finitude is the infinite, and the book explains how the problematisation of politics and security became that of securing the infinite government of finite things. It then explains how concrete political form was given to factical finitude by a combination of geopolitics and biopolitics. Modern sovereignty required the services of biopolitics from the very beginning. The essays explain how these politics of security arose at the same time, changed together, and have remained closely allied ever since. In particular, the book explains how biopolitics of security changed in response to the molecularisation and digitalisation of Life, and demonstrates how this has given rise to the dangers and contradictions of twenty-first century security politics.

This book will be of much interest to students of political and cultural theory, critical security studies and International Relations.

Michael Dillon is Professor of Politics and International Relations at Lancaster University. He has written extensively on international political theory, continental philosophy, security and war, and cultural research.

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Biopolitics of Security
A political analytic of finitude
Michael Dillon

No one writing about security issues is as philosophically astute, conceptually innovative, politically attuned, and eloquent as Michael Dillon. Everyone in academic, journalism, and policy communities concerned with security thinking should read *Biopolitics of Security*.

Michael J. Shapiro, University of Hawai'i, Manoa

For Laurence Montagu

By the time that we have discovered that things are at a given juncture, they have already changed several times. Hence we always perceive events too late, and politics must always foresee, as it were, the present.

(Turgot)

For all their boasting, practical men do not know either men or the world; they do not even know the reality of their own works. [If they could return to life], the geniuses of pure politics, the *fatalia monstra* recorded in histories, would be astounded to learn what they have done without being aware of it, and they would read their own past deeds as in a hieroglyph to which they had been offered the keys.

(Benedetto Croce)

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Since these acknowledgements are a celebration of friendship, I wish to dedicate the book to my oldest friend, Laurence Montagu. Laurence and I grew up together in working-class Liverpool. His family was my family. Laurence went on to be a nationally decorated and acclaimed high school Headmaster. He devoted his life to improving the prospects of those without privilege, and championing their welfare. He was justly celebrated for it throughout English secondary education. It was Laurence who taught me that you could not teach anyone anything unless you first treated her or him with love and respect. For that reason, I know, thousands filled Gloucester Cathedral at his passing.

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INTRODUCTION

> This great Leviathan which is called the state, is a work of art; it is an artificial man made for the protection and the salvation of the natural man.
>
> (Hobbes 1960: lxiv)

> The Baroque refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, to a trait.
>
> (Deleuze 1993: 3)

I thought I had finished this book long ago. It was to be a series of previously published essays exploring different expression of what Michel Foucault called biopolitics. I was not so much interested in considering how Foucault's account of biopolitics differed from other accounts of biopolitics, most notably those of Agamben, Esposito, and Negri and Hardt. It was not a matter of dismissing these accounts. I was simply not that interested in confining myself to exegesis, or to comparative analysis. Inspired by Foucault, I was more interested, like them, in continuing to put his insights to work. I was especially interested in updating Foucault's account of biopolitics to encompass how the digitalisation and molecularisation of Life had changed the biopolitical mission to 'make live'. And I was especially interested, also, in developing his account of the biopolitics of security. Or, rather, as Foucault put it, of biopolitics as a collection of changing *dispositifs de sécurité*. So far, so good.

Then things changed. It was not so much that I was dissatisfied with the essays. They were, of course, limited in the many ways in which all essays are limited, and no doubt, also, in many ways specific to these essays as well. I was bound to be dissatisfied. That wasn't the problem. Having been invested in Foucault's lecture courses for some considerable time, I had made the 'mistake' of re-reading Foucault's magnum opus *The Order of Things*. It is a brilliant and somewhat neglected book. Reading it

once more put my own book back years; and precisely because *The Order of Things* is so clever and prescient. In the penultimate chapter in which Foucault analyses the aporias characterising the modern episteme – of how Kant had given epistemic form to finitude, anchoring it in the figure of Man – I was especially captured by that single expression, 'giving concrete form to finitude'. What, I thought, is meant by finitude here? Surely finitude is just the fact that we are born and that we die. But, of course, not. There are many different accounts of finitude. Why, also, must concrete form be given to finitude? And how? What could this mean?

I consequently paid renewed attention to Foucault, in general, and *The Order of Things* in particular. What was the finitude that Foucault was talking about? How did it matter politically? What relevance did finitude have to politics of security, in general, and to the biopolitics of security in particular? Better put, how were both politics and security problematised when they were addressed through the optic of finitude, whatever this finitude was taken to be? What form, or forms, does concrete form take? Is there such a thing as concrete political as opposed, for example, to concrete epistemic form, which is what I took Foucault to mean when discussing Kantian epistemology? And why, especially, was Foucault so fascinated with the baroque? I had never given any serious thought to the baroque. I assumed that it referred to a period and to an aesthetic, and had not linked that closely to the question of temporality in the form of finitude, or with politics, government and rule as these came to be problematised through the temporal enframing of time as finitude. How, then, were time, this finitude and politics in general, as well as politics of security in particular, linked?

I could have done without this. But then I discovered that I couldn't write the book without posing and answering these, and other related, questions, at least to my own satisfaction. I had already worked out how biopolitics of security differed from geopolitics of security. One revolved around the properties of Life understood in terms of species existence, while the other revolved around the properties of the sovereign territorial state. That story is part of the story that gets told throughout the essays that follow. That was, however, the easy bit. What had 'finitude' got to do with it? And what finitude were we, was Foucault, talking about?

Working this out is what took the time. It also took me a long way from Foucault and, then, it seemed inevitably, back to Foucault. The journey was exhilarating, but it long delayed the book, and radically changed the enframing of it. I came to see the essays in a new light, and the whole enterprise began to concern the modern problematisation of politics, government and rule as such, rather than the biopolitics of security as one expression of it alone. I also came to accept, at face value so to speak, Hobbes' account of how the seat of power is centred in artifice, to connect that to the baroque of his time, as well as ours, and then to appreciate, more generally, how baroque artifice characterised the very character of modern politics as such, the politics of security especially. For it became clear throughout this process of reading and reflection that the baroque was not a mere period, nor was it confined to the aesthetic, to art and literature. It was a shifting field of emergence, formation and problematisation in which the problematic of politics, government

and rule was cast in a novel and dynamic way, preoccupied with the manipulation of appearance. Moreover, it was a field of formation and problematisation comprised of many changing points of application, of many characteristic and inventive modes of expression, as well as surfaces of friction, that were themselves a response to something else.

If the baroque engendered a certain political anthropology, for example that classically of the sovereign tyrant and martyr, prey also to the court plotter, depicted in the German tragic dramas (*Trauerspiel*) of the late seventeenth century, analysed by Walter Benjamin, it was not only a field of formation and problematisation, it was one characterised, also, by the absence that the retreat of the Christian God into the otherworldly obscurity of his inscrutable majesty had left in accounts of nature, human nature, and time itself. This *deus absconditus* (Blumenberg 1985) resulted in a profound, historically engendered lack, the absence of any transcendent intelligibility ordering the universe in general, and human affairs in particular. The lack had to be filled by human artifice. Filled, not only in the field of knowledge, the modern episteme, or even also in the field of social and political organisation. The point applied to the very constitution of modern individual self-hood.

There was, in short, no nature, no human nature, that was not comprised historically, here, of this lack in the nature of nature as such. Culture, the whole gamut of human artifice, was summoned to bridge the gap. But at the same time it was of course fated, fated to fail since there is no bridging the gap. The artifices of human design and desire play it out, but they cannot resolve it. In other words, the baroque was itself a field of emergence, formation and problematisation responding to a lack in the time bequeathed to it by the withdrawal of the Christian God. It was this historically emergent temporal lack – of the advent of an understanding of time, or history, bereft of extra human guarantees as to its intelligibility or teleology – that had been precipitated by the loss of faith, politically and socially at least, in the promised resolutions offered by Christianity's salvation history.

Here was the link to the finitude to which Foucault referred in *The Order of Things*.[1] Here, also, was the link to the business of having to give concrete form to a finitude which was no longer understood to be informed and underwritten by a divinely ordered, salvational, order of things. Since there was no guaranteed form in nature, theistically or naturally, other than that which positivistic knowing was to draw from it through the astonishing power of the epistemic, scientific and technological devices that demand it show itself in forms consonant with the ways in which it was summoned to show itself, concrete form was brought to it, or brought out of it, in terms set by the mechanisms through which it was addressed.

With this additional point. The baroque is no fixed field of formation and problematisation. It is a changing manifold of formation and problematisation responding to an historically induced sense of a profound lack in nature, specifically, as it were, in human nature, that was bequeathed by the dissolution of a soteriological understanding of finitudinal time. This required that the lack, thereby opened up, be bridged by the genius of human artifice. Not by human artifice as such, as if it transcended the ways in which it is manifested historically. The baroque was

distinguished less by a reliance upon artifice as such, therefore, than a reliance upon the radically changing forms of artifice introduced, from the sixteenth and seventeenth century onwards, by successive scientific and epistemic revolutions, and their allied rules of truth and truths of rule, especially those concerning politics, security and government (Gal and Chen-Morris 2013a; and Gal and Chen-Morris 2013b). The pathos of modern mourning for this lack, the absence of something towards which it expresses radical incredulity, has an odd ring to it, since what seems most characteristic of the baroque character of modern times is not lack but the very pluripotency of its morphological capacities, its apparently infinite ability to experiment creatively with form and renew finite appearance economically and politically as well as scientifically.

What inspired the political anthropology of the baroque was, therefore, the political temporality to which it gave expression in the field especially of politics, government and rule, as well as of representation in the arts, science and literature (Gal and Chen-Morris 2013a; and Gal and Chen-Morris 2013b). Indeed the entire ordering of representation was, thus, set in play in ways not only different from but also alien to Christian rules of truth and truths of rule, because the representation of representation, as such, had been problematised in novel ways. This was the lesson that Foucault taught via his reading of Velasquez's painting *Las Meninas* with which he introduced *The Order of Things*.

Politics, government and rule are always also correlated with, align themselves to, the properties of whatever is to be governed and ruled. Since the defining property of that which was now to be ruled was, henceforth, defined by the lack supposed at its centre, by a lack once filled by the soteriological account of human finitude offered by Christianity, the baroque is that field of formation and problematisation, and of application, which explicitly negotiates and exploits this gap by mobilising human artifice within the theatre of opportunity of necessity and contingency that it presents; of the very necessity of contingency, and contingency of changing necessities. This chiasmus of terms, less their binary opposition than their endless intersection and reversibility, is itself, also, a characteristically baroque response to a world rendered more and differently contingent, and therefore in its own manifold ways also, more necessary, than hitherto imagined. The baroque sensibility does not so much expect to heal this rift in time and nature, as conceived from this historical perspective of the loss of the Christian God, as construe it as a stage, a *theatrum mundi*: 'There was ultimately no more visible or influential way to take part in baroque social principles than in theatrical representations' (Maravall 1986: 234). Here, then, was an opportunity to put human artifice on display and to work as the very means by which natures of every description, having no inner or external guarantee, are nonetheless capable of having the marvels, mysteries and predicaments that they pose played out through human enframing, intervention and design. Here was a new real. Its realism was 'never a question ... of pure realism. The remains of idealism, of Neoplatonism, appeared everywhere.' (Maravall 1986: 258).

One final important point. This lack, this so-called deficiency, was a consequence of the withdrawal, absence, or, otherwise radical incredulity that began to

be expressed towards narratives, liturgies and belief systems once premised on the proposition that the order of things revolved around a very particular, historically variable, expression of divine order. It is the gap left by the dissolution of the social and political priority accorded to precisely that historical field of formation in religious, social and political affairs alike, that leaves the gap. It may concern the ontological – specifically onto-theology – but it was, in fact, historical. The peculiarity of the modern is that, so self-consciously aware of itself as historical, it seems to mourn the loss of this extra human guarantor as if it were ontological, rather than an historical, phenomenon.

As this new historical play of rules of truth and truths of rule gathered power and pace, so also, however, were the 'natures' in play transformed. This theatre of 'deficient' natures is thus unstable precisely because, acting into it, human artifice transforms the very taking place of natures themselves, their very appearance. And does so in radically contingent, unexpected and ultimately, it seems, vertiginously unmanageable ways.[2] Its military and political spectacles, especially, cast the human self in terms of spectator, artificer and, ultimately also, mere disposable stuff. In political terms this very staging, the artifice to which Hobbes refers, for example, is designed to render human beings more governable via their very spectatorship on the one hand, and their artfulness on the other. Consider how, in the frontispiece to *Leviathan*, for example, the spectators' gaze is transfixed by the visage of the sovereign, and that the sovereign is a visage for which they all fall. They seem stupefied by it. And they are meant to be so. Transfixed by the abstract gaze of the sovereign – its eyes are empty and unseeing, its visage a death mask – they fall for its promise of security. Put differently, the very organisation of the theatre of politics around the gaze of the sovereign is designed to keep subjects fixated in this way. For that way they are rendered governable; at least governable by these means, because subjectified by its ordering of things.

Only marginally does Hobbes accept that the relationship is reversible. But the acceptance is nonetheless there, as an integral part of the rule of truth and truth of rule of which it is comprised. Leviathan is a veridical apparatus and Hobbes a certain new form of political truth-teller. There is, however, no reason in principle why, in the Hobbesian order of things, spectators cannot themselves become artificers. If they feel their security threatened they are in principle, according to Hobbes, allowed to become so. No reason why those domesticated through the play of power may not, therefore, also turn that play against itself in newly inventive ways.

Here, then, a further peculiar feature of the baroque becomes evident. It is not simply a formation of truth and rule. It is a problematisation of truth and rule to which many different expressions may be given. One, moreover, in which the very staging and playing-out of truth and rule is evidently not only changeable, but also reversible. For there is no natural law, or nature of natures, that specifies that spectators cannot become artificers, or that artificers may not in turn become spectators; in the ways, for example, that contingency and necessity might be reversed, or in the way that, to give a different and more revealing example to which Foucault

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