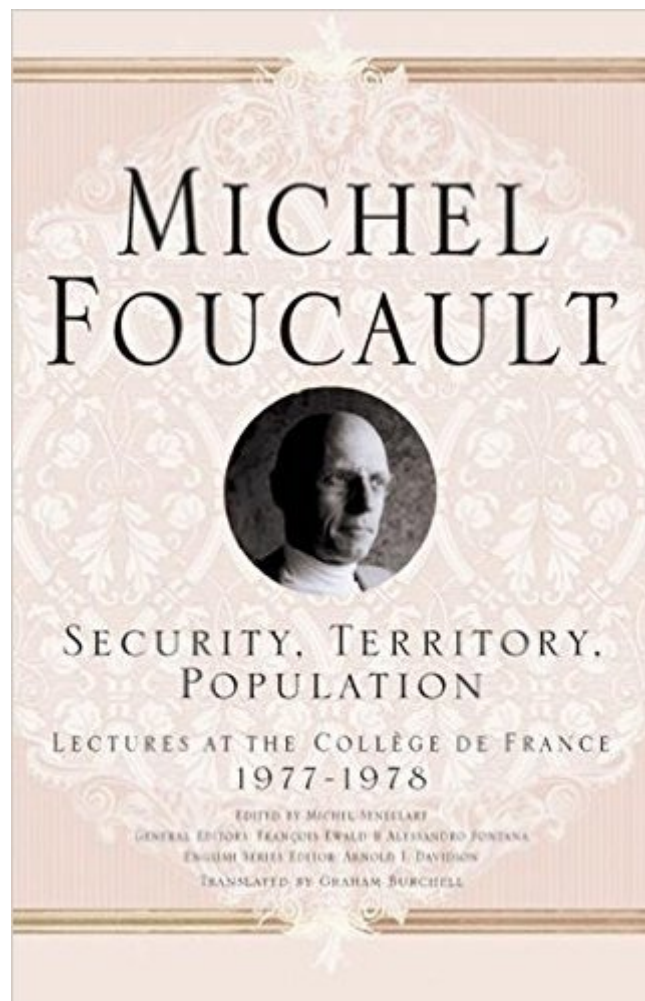


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Security, Territory, Population: Lectures At The College De France, 1977 - 78 (Michel Foucault, Lectures At The Collège De France)



Synopsis

This book derives from Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France between January and April 1978, which can be seen as a radical turning point in his thought. Focusing on 'bio-power', he studies the foundations of this new technology of power over population and explores the technologies of security and the history of 'governmentality'.

Book Information

Series: Michel Foucault, Lectures at the Collège de France (Book 4)

Hardcover: 417 pages

Publisher: Palgrave Macmillan; 2009 edition (May 1, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1403986525

ISBN-13: 978-1403986528

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1.1 x 8.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (9 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,002,672 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #705 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Social Philosophy](#) #2684 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Political](#) #6482 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Political Science > History & Theory](#)

Customer Reviews

These are the complete course lectures in which Foucault developed his theory and history of "governmentality" as a discursive threshold of modern society. This volume is critical to any student of Foucault or government in general. To the Foucault student, it refines his concept of power and signifies a break from power as "domination" to power as the "conduct of conduct." This is the first printing of the full lecture series, of which only two portions were available previously, and shows the full empirical range of his study of governmentality. To the more general student of government, this work is equally valuable. It clearly situates government as a practice contingent upon durable forms of thought and action in western history. It is primarily concerned with the shift from governing territory to governing populations with the emergence of liberalism and the collapse of feudalism. More advanced students may find this work especially useful because of its contraposition to marxism, critical theory, and mainstream liberal critiques of government. In this respect, it offers a genuinely alternative voice to the problems and prospects of modern politics - a very rare

achievement.

I wish I had got around to reading this much sooner. "Security, Territory, Population" is one in a series of lectures Foucault delivered at the College de France. I started here to find out more about Foucault's development of the concept of government and was so impressed that I have come back to to order the other books in the series. This series is as clear and accessible as anything I have ever read by Foucault. The lecture format is much more conversational in style than his books but still as wide ranging and impressive in examples. The lectures are intriguing as you see Foucault's ideas literally develop and fill out week to week.

These lectures -- more so than many in this excellent series -- contain novel ideas and formulations ripe for further research. From a new conceptualization of the state, to a unique account of the Protestant Reformation, and lineages of absolutist monarchy, Machiavelli criticism, and the birth of the Police state, if his approach seems fragmentary and incomplete, it is because we are reading the raw thought materials of a masterful scholar at the top of his game.

With the publication of these lectures, we are given a special privilege to fully understand a fundamental transition in Foucault's political thought, where he integrated questions of discipline and biopower into a larger analytic about the political rationality of a state formation. He coined this tool of study "governmentality" and used it to trace a genealogy of Western liberal politics, going back to earlier forms of Christian pastoral power, through the rise of nation-states up through the Enlightenment. Along the way, he discusses more day to day political functions that work into this framework, such as police power, the management of goods and resources in a society and the distribution of wealth. Some of these analyses are uneven and certain pathways are left unexplored, as should be expected as this is a lecture course of research material in their rough stages, not a published book. Nevertheless, they provide a set of powerful suggestions for further research and analysis. Governmentality studies has been a thriving field for the past 25 years yet much of it seems to have been based on a single lecture from this course that was the only thing available for a long time. This lecture course provides a full picture of what Foucault had in mind by governmentality and has been useful I'm sure in revising and correcting a lot of preconceptions about his formulation of this concept in the existing literature. No one can fully grasp Foucault's political thought without reading this. Be sure to read this course along with its successor - The Birth of Biopolitics, where he continues his study of governmentality in relation to the economy, providing

a fascinating study of neoliberal trends that foreshadow much of what would come during the 80's and after.

This text is as close as you will get to hearing Foucault's voice (unless of course you listen to bootlegs of his lectures or the cassette tapes at the Centre Michel Foucault in Paris). The pauses and silences are evident through the text and the sentences - sometimes convoluted and incomplete - give a real sense of Foucault thinking, especially as he makes the shift towards governmentality. Along with the extensive notes these lectures provide a useful springboard to Foucault's fully edited works and to the main sources he draws on to mount his various arguments. Unlike other published works however they are uneven. Obviously some days Foucault was in worse form than others - like in the lecture presented on February 8 1978 when he was suffering from the flue - and like a lecture, listener/reader concentration lags after 20 or so minutes as the intensity drops. Foucault's thoughts are not always clear and coherent and he sometimes dives off at a tangent, inducing a sense of vertigo. This is useful when the focus is on the process of learning and researching, but it can be distracting and tiring. Foucault was at pains to destroy incomplete works and notes and it would be interesting to hear what he would say about this publication and the reasons behind it, given his dislike of the herd learning on offer in this forum and the lack of space and time for in-depth discussion and debate.

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