

of this analysis adds a layer to the field by avoiding the usual rise-and-fall story of Western modernity. If the polis has been stained since its earliest days by the crimson tides of internal conflicts, its constitutive order should be seen in a different light. What might it mean to be “European” when a father can slaughter his son, or if rape—as Herfried Münkler pointed out (see his *New Wars*)—can serve as part of a “war economy”? What does it mean if the supposedly dissonant relation between fascism and antifascism continued to fine-tune the post-1945 European march to success and unity?

It is both a strength and a weakness of Traverso’s book that he keeps, for the most part, to the rather familiar history of the two world wars. His narrative never strays from sources already well mined in spite of the alternative conceptual framework. So what does the history of civil war add to this discussion?

Reframing the story of the last century as a European civil war enables Traverso to avoid the clichés concerning the rise of nationalism and the multiplication of more ethnically discrete nations in favor of a more focused story spotlighting the fragility of that identity and the set of political, cultural, and intellectual interests that shaped it. This approach allows one to focus on the *mechanisms* that make possible such incredible explosions of violence, hatred, and fear rather than their ideological justifications. Traverso concludes that investing in “brutalizing . . . language and forms of struggle” (p. 51) is a necessary condition for genocidal violence. The postwar period of silence and suppression, followed by the backlash against fascism, makes up a state-supported form of “collective ethos” (p. 260). So while Traverso’s book helps to shed light on the internal limitations of classic historiography of postwar Europe, in line with Tony Judt’s *Postwar*, Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands*, Dan Diner’s notion of *Zeitbruch*, or Pierre Rosanvallon’s critique of the antifa—he never extends his assessment to the world outside Europe. While scholars of total war have addressed such themes as globalization, “low-intensity warfare,” the neoliberal outsourcing of military capability, and the surveillance state, Traverso has nothing to say about these. This silence is troubling because it keeps his own narrative limited to the safe zone of the same historiography he wants to replace.

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**Mitchell Dean and Kaspar Villadsen.** *State Phobia and Civil Society: The Political Legacy of Michel Foucault*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2016. 196 pp.

DANIELE LORENZINI

What is the political legacy of Michel Foucault, more than thirty years after his death? There is no simple answer to this question because Foucault’s work is increasingly (well) quoted and used by scholars and critical thinkers who belong to different and sometimes even opposed political fields. Mitchell Dean and Kaspar Villadsen offer a most welcome discussion of this issue, taking as a vantage point the classical problem of the relationship between state and civil society. Indeed, from management and organizational studies to governmentality studies, and from supporters of neoliberalism to neo-Marxist critics of capitalism, contemporary references to Foucault share a common attempt to decenter and deconstruct the state, either theoretically (as a misleading

concept that we should get rid of) or practically (as an oppressive order that we must fight).

*State Phobia and Civil Society* successfully manages to show that this theoretical and practical critique of the state, as well as the corresponding praise of a civil-society politics over a state-based one, can be found in Foucault's works of the 1970s only at the price of a banalization of his analyses and positions. It thus represents a salutary reminder of both Foucault's famous critique of the juridical-political theory of sovereignty and his less well known but crucial warning against (and rejection of) "state phobia," that is, the exaggeration of the state's negative role and the eschatological vision according to which it should dissolve and merge with civil society (see pp. 1–5).

Given the overall accuracy of the authors' interpretation of Foucault's work, the lack of a serious confrontation with Foucault's peculiar notion and use of history<sup>1</sup> in their discussion of his genealogy of the arts of government might seem striking (see pp. 133–44). Similarly, whilst the authors succeed in doing justice to the complexity of Foucault's ideas without falling into the most common (over)simplifications, they tend to be too indulgent with the widespread picture of Foucault offering an "apology" of neoliberalism (see pp. 145–64). Indeed, according to them, his vision of the subject as self-creation necessarily implies a normative preference for a power leaving maximum space to it (see p. 8). This is why Dean and Villadsen considerably downplay the consequences of one of the central theses in Foucault's lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics*, namely that neoliberalism is a specific art of governing people and the neoliberal subject someone who is "eminently governable" (through her or his very field of freedoms and through accurate interventions on her or his "environment").<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it seems always possible, legitimate, and even necessary to raise about neoliberalism the critical question of its acceptability: is it acceptable to be governed like that and at that cost?<sup>3</sup>

However, *State Phobia and Civil Society* does not (only) aim at offering an interpretation of Foucault's work and a critical discussion of its legacy in contemporary political thought. It is also (although often implicitly) traversed by a substantial normative vision that reveals the authors' clear-cut position vis-à-vis a fundamental problem: Dean and Villadsen suggest that we should get rid of the common analytical fear of the state and the widespread disdain of political projects aimed at contending for state power. According to them, in fact, the state still constitutes a crucial political *enjeu*: it is not only something to be fought but also the essential condition of the order and security as well as of the development of individual and collective capacities—including critical ones (see p. 19). Hence, their main objective is to show the danger inscribed (ambiguously) in Foucault's thought and (more clearly) in his followers and interpreters' positions, namely the danger to refigure the state as "a mere play among diverse technical rationalities" (p. 103) and resistance as a series of struggles fought by nonstate movements and activists within the space of civil society (see pp. 3, 48).

This is why *State Phobia and Civil Society* will speak not only to students and scholars interested in Foucault's work but also and more generally to all those interested or participating in the (always topical) debate on the role state and civil society respectively should play in political theory and practice.

1. On this point, see Judith Revel, *Foucault avec Merleau-Ponty: Ontologie politique, présentisme et histoire* (Paris, 2015), pp. 21–109.

2. See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, 2008), pp. 270–71.

3. See Foucault, "What Is Critique?" trans. Lysa Hochroth, in *The Politics of Truth*, trans. Hochroth et al., ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles, 2007), pp. 41–81, esp. 45.

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**Maurizio Meloni.** *Political Biology: Science and Social Values in Human Heredity from Eugenics to Epigenetics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 284 pp.

NORMAN MACLEOD

This short volume demonstrates that there are few better examples of the complex relation between the practice of science and its influence both on and by politics than the development of genetic research in the interval between the confirmation of Gregor Mendel's laws of particulate inheritance in 1900 to acceptance of the Modern Evolutionary Synthesis in the years following World War II. It's a case that has been made before, but rarely with the eloquence, passion, and focus Maurizio Meloni brings to the task. His review dwells on the efforts made by many prominent biologists to advocate eugenic social policies that confirmed prejudices and assumptions on both the right and left of the political spectrum. However, in his rush to demonstrate how mired in the web of their personal political views these scientists became, Meloni often fails to provide sufficient background to establish an appropriate context from which to view their nonscientific activities. He also falls into the trap of rendering judgments on the people and events of the past without referencing the moral standards of their time and often gets the facts, and the history, of the science horribly wrong. This is most obvious from his oft-repeated, but weakly supported, claim that results of experiments and interpretations of some contemporary, self-styled epigeneticists embody the resurrection of Lamarckian soft inheritance and his conviction that those interpretations represent a credible alternative to the gene-based, hard-inheritance consensus of contemporary evolutionary theory.<sup>1</sup> To be fair, an explanation of the scientific aspects of this history isn't really what interests Meloni. Rather, his volume is a manifesto for a new field of social/philosophical inquiry: political biology (which he defines as a unification of the sociology of scientific knowledge), science and technology studies, biopolitics, and a project for historical ontology and epistemology.

In a review solicited by the publisher, Staffan Müller-Wille observed that "for Meloni, biology is always a form of doing politics," an interpretation with which I agree.<sup>2</sup> However, if politics infuses all aspects of biology (or any science), analysis of its political aspects becomes synonymous with efforts to come to grips with the science itself, which this volume does not do. Perhaps a more useful parsing would be to separate the facts that scientists discover from the uses to which those facts can be, and have been, put.

1. Those interested in the latter topic should consult Ute Deichmann's recent articles, which offer a more penetrating, well-documented, and authoritative perspective; see Ute Deichmann, "Epigenetics: The Origins and Evolution of a Fashionable Topic," *Developmental Biology* 416, no. 1 (2016): 249–54 and "Why Epigenetics Is Not a Vindication of Lamarckism—and Why that Matters," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 57 (2016): 80–82.

2. Staffan Müller-Wille, review of *Political Biology* by Meloni, [www.palgrave.com/la/book/9781137377715#reviews](http://www.palgrave.com/la/book/9781137377715#reviews)