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Biopolitics

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1989 marked not only the end of communism but also the beginning of a drastic change of pattern in modern politics. The authors analyse an emerging new type of political activity which they call “biopolitics”. They trace back its origins, first, to the promises modernity made about the “liberation of the Body” and the fusion of the corporeal and the spiritual which have never been kept. In the second place, they connect it with certain failed hopes and perspectives of the Enlightenment and the dominant models of politics in the nineteenth century as well as with the “end of the grand narrative”. In the main, they derive the rise of biopolitics from the weakening of class politics and its vocabulary, the transition from a class-based politics to the politicization of the Body (as well as from additional contingent factors, such as the appearance of the AIDS epidemics and the petering out of the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s).

They investigate the difficult coexistence of the values of freedom and life in biopolitics in four major areas: health, environment, sex (gender) and race. On the basis of a rich material, taken from both the major analysts of modernity and the present-day discussion of biopolitics in the media, the authors try to set up a preliminary balance of the pros and cons presented by the new phenomenon.

Although they accept the “language of difference” in which the movements of biopolitics predominantly articulate their programme, the authors argue for a minimalist conception of universalism and for dialogue, against the self-closure of the movements which inevitably generates violence and closes the avenues of reconciliation.

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