

Environmental politics

Environmental issues are integral to research in politics and the life sciences. Indeed, environmental questions in many ways are the *foundational* issues of biopolitical research. Underscoring this point, this issue features three environmentally themed research articles, each touching on pressing concerns that affect human welfare: global warming, management of fisheries (and the maintenance of an important food supply); and, the politics of preventing the spread of the deadly H5N1 virus.

The lead article by Sophal Ear reports on the efforts of international aid agencies and governmental authorities to contain the spread of avian influenza, or “bird flu,” from poultry to human handlers in Cambodia. Given the reliance on subsistence and backyard farming by a great many Cambodians, addressing the problem is not as simple as mass kill-offs of poultry stocks, even if that were a manageable solution. Ear’s research combines original interviews and observational data from multiple visits to Cambodia to produce an insightful analysis of the challenges facing policymakers attempting to eradicate interspecies infection.

Also in this issue, Ann Williams looks at the causes, catalysts, and consequences of global warming (or “climate change,” in its watered down form) and finds a connection between different forms of media use and beliefs about manmade causes of planetary warming. Scott Crosson next examines attitudes toward alternative models of fisheries management among North Carolina fishers. His analysis employs a measure of investment diversity to assess diversity in fisheries harvests and demonstrates an association with management preferences.

In an illuminating reflection on the state of politics and the life sciences research three decades in, Gary Johnson responds at some length to the Founders’ Forum essays from the previous issue of the journal celebrating the association’s 30th anniversary. Johnson provides a service to readers by going well beyond a proforma response to the forum and recounting the history of the association and “unfinished revolution” of which biopolitics is an integral part. As a former editor of the journal and executive director of the association,

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Johnson is well positioned to offer a rich set of insights, and he delivers.

Owing to a fortuitous set of circumstances, we are pleased to publish in this issue an NSF workshop report by Skip Lupia and colleagues on Genes, Cognition, and Social Behavior. The report summarizes an intensive set of discussions convened by the NSF that were focused on near-term investment strategies the National Science Foundation and other funding agencies should adopt to promote transformative scientific practices, infrastructure, and findings of high social value.

The report’s emphasis on the need for interdisciplinary collaboration and social scientific research grounded in biological principles will be familiar to longtime readers of the journal. Along with the accompanying white papers by Jeremy Freese, Elizabeth Hammock, and Rose McDermott, the report documents the substantial contributions to knowledge that studies of social behavior can make when they build from discoveries in genetics and cognitive neuroscience—and illustrates the increasingly mainstream character of research in biopolitics.

Looking ahead to the next issue, the term “biopolitics” itself comes under close scrutiny, as Laurie Liesen and Mary Walsh document the now bifurcated use of the term by scientifically minded scholars on the one hand and critically minded scholars on the other. Where once the term connoted an empirical approach to research related to politics employing frameworks, theories, and methods from biology, it now seems to have more currency as a critical Foucauldian term evoking power relations between the individual and state, focusing on the body as a contested site of power.

Given these competing meanings, Liesen and Walsh question whether we should continue to describe research in politics and the life sciences as *biopolitics* or admit that the once-common meaning of the term has morphed into something no longer recognizable, and should therefore be abandoned.

The debate awaits.

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