Many of the basic elements of recognizably modern European and American literature emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—that is, the Romantic period—and many of these focused readers on differences among individuals. It was during this period, for example, that poets argued against older modes of poetry that involved “personifications of abstract ideas” and in favor of the use of “the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation” to focus on wildly eccentric individuals or on the poet’s own idiosyncratic emotional experiences. In keeping with this focus on individual idiosyncrasies, the quests of action-oriented heroes across external geographies that characterized earlier literature were “internalized” into dramas of the individualized psyche. It was also during this period that novelists began to develop what would eventually be called realistic novelistic techniques, such as an emphasis on “round” (versus flat) characters; free indirect discourse, which brought readers into contact with the fugitive thoughts and feelings of those round characters; and the construction of plots that involved increasingly large populations of ordinary, yet also individualized, characters. At this same time, the very term “literature” was narrowed down to include solely imaginative texts, and these kinds of texts began to be described as both “experimental” and potentially world changing. This period also witnessed the consolidation of the Romantic understanding of authorship—the understanding of the literary author as a unique genius who experiences the world more intensely than others but who is able to pass on that experience to readers via literature—and this premise about literary production not only continues to determine our understanding of authorship but structures more generally our current intellectual property regime. The Romantic era saw the development, especially with respect to novels, of a large literary market segmented by different genres, along with the consolidation of a journal reviewing system.
that allowed a reader to locate those genres and novels that best corresponded to her particular taste.\textsuperscript{6} Though each of these developments has been refined, altered, or contested in subsequent literary periods, each nevertheless continues to determine our own sense of what counts as good (and bad) literature.

Earlier literary criticism has tended to approach this explosion of difference—differences among the individuals of increasingly large and diverse populations of characters in novels, differences among literary genres, and differences in literary preferences among an ever-expanding number of readers—as a surface-level illusion that covered up more subterranean processes of homogenization and sameness. For critics working in a Marxist literary tradition, these various literary developments were part of the more general bourgeois construction of the cultural capital necessary to remake social relations to advance their class interests. The forms of difference among characters, texts, and readers are thus understood as ideological illusions of variety that function in the service of enforcing very narrow forms of normative behavior among readers.\textsuperscript{7} For literary critics more influenced by Michel Foucault’s work on the rise of the disciplinary society, these differences are also treated as illusory and in this case as distractions that obscured the ways that literature contributed to an increasing disciplining and policing of individuals.\textsuperscript{8}

Despite significant theoretical differences between these two camps of literary criticism, both have approached literature as, in essence, a technology of normativity. In the case of accounts of the rise and development of the new literary form of the novel, for example, whether it is the “monitorial image” that Ian Watt suggested a novel such as \textit{Robinson Crusoe} established for modern society; or the symbolic acts, ideologemes, and assumptions about genre that, according to Fredric Jameson, establish the limits of our utopian “collective thinking and our collective fantasies about history and reality”; or the proleptic semiotic construction of “the ordered space we now recognize as the household,” which Nancy Armstrong describes as serving as “the context for representing normal behavior”; or the disciplinary “spiritual exercise[s]” that D. A. Miller suggests were provided by the Victorian novel, all of these critics understand the ultimate effect of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels as the inculcation of “liberal” normative beliefs and practices, a drive toward sameness disguised under the cover of the celebration of individual difference.\textsuperscript{9} Or, as Miller puts it, the function of nineteenth-century novels and all their attendant forms of apparent difference was to
confirm the novel-reader in his identity as "liberal subject," a term with which I allude not just to the subject whose private life, mental or domestic, is felt to provide constant inarguable evidence for his constitutive "freedom," but also to . . . the political regime that sets store by this subject. (x)

For critics from both Marxist and Foucauldian literary-critical camps, literature is “liberal” in the ideological sense that it produces sameness out of difference and does so by naturalizing normative beliefs and behaviors and encouraging readers to conform to these social norms.

While I draw on much of this earlier literary-critical work in this book, I nevertheless approach the relationship of modern literature to difference in a fundamentally different way. I also read the elements and institutions of modern literature that I have sketched as liberal, that is, as fundamentally connected to the emergence of a liberal political-economic philosophy that valorized the unique individual and her freedom but purported that a capitalist order was the only guarantee of such liberty. However, I read liberalism as fundamentally a mode of what Foucault called biopolitics. Foucault used the term “biopolitics” to refer to the development of techniques focused not on training and disciplining individuals but rather addressed to “a multiplicity of men”—that is, to populations—“to the extent that they form . . . a global mass that is affected by overall processes characteristic of birth, death, production, illness and so on.” From this perspective, liberalism was one of several eighteenth-century attempts to see the world biopolitically, in terms of populations and the regularities that occur within these collective bodies, and to use such knowledge to alter those regularities.

Foucault’s approach allows us to see eighteenth-century liberalism as part of a wider biopolitical effort to use the sciences to limit sovereign political and legal power. Biopolitics limited political and legal power by “scientizing” a concept such as population and arguing that this collective body had immanent and natural dynamics that could be illuminated, and partially regulated, by sciences such as political economy or medicine. Biopolitical techniques were premised on the position that these immanent and natural dynamics took place beyond, or below, the direct reach of law and political power. Legal authorities, for example, could not prevent smallpox outbreaks by commanding members of a population to avoid contracting this disease, but outbreaks could be limited by employing new developments in inoculation (and, later, vaccination). In similar fashion, liberal theorists such as John Locke, Adam Smith, and Thomas Malthus
argued that the science of political economy revealed population-level economic behavior that could not be politically commanded or forbidden in the traditional sense but that could be partially regulated by adapting law to the findings of political economy. Inoculation campaigns, efforts to regulate population growth, liberal political-economic theory: These were all expressions of a more general biopolitical approach to collective relations. Foucault’s approach allows us to see in a new light the link between liberalism’s stress on individuals and liberty, on the one hand, and the collective entity that became known as population, on the other. Commentators have sometimes sought to distinguish between “political” liberalism, which is primarily focused on securing individual liberty, and “economic” liberalism, which “is focused on the general prosperity of the society, not on individual advantage.” Yet this distinction between two modes of liberalism obscures the fact that key “political” liberal theorists such as John Locke and John Stuart Mill were also economic theorists (a point to which I return in Chapters 5 and 6) and overlooks the political implications of the epistemological shift stressed by Foucault. Foucault’s approach helps us see the liberal defense of the unique individual as a means for securing certain kinds of population-level regularities. That is, liberals wish individuals to be “free to choose” within certain areas, such as religion or market relations, because such individual autonomy and difference purportedly produces regulated order at the level of the population in a way that enforcing more rigid norms would not. Adam Smith’s claims about the “invisible hand” of the market, which comes into being when each individual is free to focus on his or her own interest, is one well-known example of this link between individual freedom and population-level regularities. In this sense, the individual uniqueness prized by liberal theorists—as well as the legal and ideological means for protecting individual uniqueness, such as individual property rights—was a biopolitical means and not an end in itself.

These points allow us to see relationships among late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature, difference, and norms in a significantly different way. If we think late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature within the milieu of biopolitics and understand liberalism as one particularly important expression of biopolitical logic, then we can understand modern literature less as a normalizing technology that encouraged readers to internalize specific norms and instead as a technology that encouraged readers to see the world biopolitically, especially in terms of populations. Encouraging readers to see the world in terms of populations is itself a certain kind of normalization, since it may discourage readers from
understanding the world in terms of other kinds of collectives (for example, classes or “the multitude”). Yet it is a very peculiar mode of normalization, since population concepts aim at altering norms. Moreover, as I document in this book, there were multiple eighteenth- and nineteenth-century concepts of population, and so understanding the world in terms of populations meant that readers were always implicitly or explicitly choosing one concept or model of population over others. Some population models, such as Malthus’s “principle of population,” implied that there were few important differences between members of a population. However, other models of population stressed the importance of individual uniqueness, the multitude of norms that such uniqueness enables, the regularities that could emerge immanently on the basis of those differences, and the capacity to use the knowledge of regularities to change those regularities (that is, to create new norms). This does not mean that the literary critics I have cited here were wrong, for modern literature may indeed have disciplined some readers to conform to a small number of bourgeois or liberal norms. My point, though, is that modern literature could do this only because it was more fundamentally a technology able to establish new norms, and this latter capacity could never be fully contained within the frame of those bourgeois or liberal norms.

Approaching the liberalism of modern literature in this way changes our relationship, as literary critics, to literature. The literary-critical methodologies I have noted approach literature by means of a hermeneutic suspicion that seeks out the ways that literature constrained the imaginative and political potential of readers. Approaching the institutions of modern literature through the biopolitical frame I have sketched out allows us instead—or at least in addition—to understand late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literary texts as proposing a multitude of different models and norms for the relationship of readers to their natural, political, and economic milieux. This encourages us to consider both the ground of possibility for such norm creation and to focus on how this ground of possibility enables the creation of new norms, which in turn allows us to see continuities between past literary texts and our own efforts to discover new norms that can help create a better world. The critical task to which I hope this book in part contributes is, in other words, that of pushing our understanding of biopolitics beyond the frame of liberalism and toward a positive, affirmative, and just version of biopolitics.

I exemplify the potential of this approach with six chapters. The first three focus on classic “literary” concepts: genius, character-systems, and free indirect discourse. I refer to these as literary concepts to emphasize
that we now tend to associate these terms primarily with the production and reading of literary texts. I suggest, however, that each concept is better understood as a means for aligning literary and biopolitical strategies. The next three chapters take up three more general concepts—global flows, collective experiments, and self-regulation—that were central to the alignment of the sciences, biopolitics, and liberalism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and developed both in literary texts and nonliterary texts. These chapters also take up literary concepts: The final chapter, for example, reads the contest between different eighteenth-century concepts of regulation as the enabling frame for a key mid-eighteenth-century debate about whether there was a “standard of taste.” However, these final chapters focus on concepts that were not specific to literary or artistic endeavors and that linked scientific debates with liberal and biopolitical policy proposals.

In the first chapter, I demonstrate that a biopolitical lens illuminates the extent to which mid- and late-eighteenth-century debates about genius were not primarily about the “nature” of genius, as earlier critics have suggested, but more fundamentally about how to maximize the number of geniuses in a population. I stress that this effort depended on the cultivation of two kinds of worry: the worry of losing potential geniuses and the worry of losing past geniuses in the torrent of new kinds of print publications. Significantly, the cultivation of these worries occurred not in treatises focused on genius but in poetry about genius, including that of Thomas Gray and William Wordsworth.

In the second chapter, I focus on the development of a “population imaginary” in both the political philosophies of Thomas Malthus and William Godwin and the fiction of Mary Shelley. Despite Malthus’s and Godwin’s public antagonism toward each other, both assumed that population-level analyses could disregard individual differences. Hence, the true rivals of Malthus—or rather, of the Malthus-Godwin couple—were authors such as Mary Shelley, who presumed that the individuals who make up a population differ from one another in innumerable ways. As I note, some of Shelley’s first readers—namely, critics of her novel who wrote for periodicals—demonstrated that her encouragement to view the world in terms of populations could be spread even via criticisms of her novel.

The third chapter focuses on two literary devices central to the development of nineteenth-century novels: the massive expansion of character systems in nineteenth-century novels and the emergence and development of free indirect discourse. I present the emergence of free indirect discourse as a tool through which nineteenth-century novelists developed “probes” that
allowed them to search, in quasi-scientific ways, for forces that determined the characteristics of populations and that included nondiscursive causes such as habitual comportments and evolutionary endowments. Yet understanding free indirect discourse in this way requires that we keep this device connected to character-systems, since free indirect discourse could only function as a probe when it was tied to the territory of a specific character-system.

The next three chapters focus on more general concepts, ones central to the development of both biopolitics and liberalism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries but that also help us rethink the nature and possible functions of literature. The fourth chapter focuses on the concept of global flow. I use this term to capture a mode of thinking, exemplified in multiple Romantic-era sciences, including physics, meteorology, and political economy, which presumed that, since humans were inextricably situated on a globe, every movement in one direction would eventually return to its point of origin. Seeing the world in terms of flows across the surface of a globe contributed to the tendency of liberal theorists to understand liberalism as a necessarily global phenomenon that would eventually encompass all of humanity. However, as I demonstrate through readings of Erasmus Darwin’s and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s reflections on possible human transformations of the physical characteristics of the globe, the concept of global flow also gave rise to reflections on globality that exceeded that liberal frame and did so by focusing attention on the extent to which humans can alter their global natural environment. Emphasizing the resonance of these Romantic-era reflections with our own concerns about global warming, I suggest that Shelley’s approach is especially useful for us in our era of the Anthropocene.

The fifth chapter focuses on the concept of the “collective experiment.” My starting point is what the Victorian theorist of liberalism John Stuart Mill described as the need for collective “experiments in living,” and I trace the genealogy of Mill’s concept back into eighteenth-century liberalism and forward into twentieth-century neoliberalism. As earlier literary criticism has noted, the concept of experiment was central for Romantic literary practice and political theory, the former exemplified by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s description of many of the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* as “experiments” and the latter by Edmund Burke’s description of French revolutionaries as desiring that “the whole fabric [of the French government] should be at once pulled down, and the area cleared for the erection of a theoretic, experimental edifice in its place.”

My argument is that liberalism has been, since its eighteenth-century
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origins, intrinsically bound to the concept of the collective experiment and that the latter concept is a key way that specific liberalisms express their biopolitical visions. Liberalisms from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries employ the concept of collective experimentation as a way of mediating among individual freedom, collective “learning,” and institutional stability. To put my point polemically, the concept of the collective experiment seems to me more central to liberalism than the principle of individual liberty, which is generally understood as the core of liberal theory. To put my point less polemically, the specific way that a liberal theorist understands collective experimentation determines how he or she understands the nature and extent of individual liberties. Recognizing this allows us to understand why advocates of liberalism turn consistently not only to categories of individual choice, property, and liberty but also to concepts of population and immunity.

The final chapter takes up one of the central concepts—arguably, the central concept—of both biopolitics and liberalism, namely, “self-regulation.” Aspirations for self-regulation appear in many late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century literary, political, scientific, and philosophical texts. However, as my focused readings of Thomas Malthus and Immanuel Kant demonstrate, such efforts tended to oscillate back and forth between two different models of regulation. The first model was grounded in a schema of conformity to an invariable, sovereign-issued standard; the other model of regulation focused on a fluctuating, hidden, and variable standard that revealed itself in the interactions of a collective. I contend that these Romantic efforts to puzzle out what self-regulation might mean are important for a variety of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates about the ways that “standards” (including the standard of taste) could guide and regulate the collective. Equally significant, though, these debates remain relevant for our own “Anthropocenic” moment, since these same difficulties in understanding the nature of self-regulation reappear in contemporary reflections on how to deal with the impact of a large global population on an increasingly endangered global ecosystem.

In each chapter, I have focused on texts that were important within the Romantic era but that also—and perhaps even more importantly—had long post-Romantic afterlives. I focus on Thomas Gray’s Elegy in Chapter 1, for example, in large part because it became one of the most heavily anthologized English poems during the nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth century. Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, the main subject of Chapter 2, more or less instantly became a cultural myth and is now likely the most read Romantic-era novel in the world, while Thomas Malthus’s An Essay on
the Principle of Population, another key text in Chapter 2 and also in Chapters 3 and 6, continues to exert a strong influence on our own reflections about global population control. I focus on Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Queen Mab in Chapters 4 and 6 in part because it had a long influence on the labor movements in multiple European countries throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My corpus of eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century texts in this book is thus intended less to be representative of Romanticism as a whole—though these were all important texts in that period—and more to underscore the continuing persistence of Romantic-era approaches, framings, dilemmas, and considerations into the present.

As a consequence, while these chapters are focused primarily on eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century texts and debates, each chapter also traces the reverberations and resonances of these debates within the twentieth-century transformation of liberalism into neoliberalism, which latter is characterized by the efforts of economists and policy makers to force every aspect of life into economically oriented models of population experimentation. I explore these resonances between Romantic and contemporary texts and debates with the hope that careful exploration of Romantic-era efforts to coordinate liberalism, biopolitics, and literature can provide us with resources for our own struggles in the era of neoliberalism, population-oriented “smart” biopolitical technologies, and ecological disaster. Though my analysis will point to liberal dimensions of Romanticism, my point is not, fundamentally, to critique Romanticism as a mode of liberal ideology, but rather to understand Romanticism as an attempt to steer the biopolitical techniques of liberalism toward more liberatory shores.

Liberalism and Biopolitics: A Few More Words

Though each chapter of this book is largely self-sufficient, and so the chapters could be read in any order, my hope is that readers will read them in the order presented, as the stakes of the last three chapters are more evident when read after the first three. However, since some readers may choose to approach the book differently, I will explain here how I approach the terms liberalism and biopolitics, so that I can avoid repeating this discussion in each chapter.

For scholars of Romanticism, my focus on liberalism may seem peculiar. Liberalism is not often associated with Romanticism, and there is, accordingly, very little work focused specifically on their relationship.18 This ought to surprise us, since many of the key authors cited in intellectual
histories of liberalism—Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, Adam Smith, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Immanuel Kant—are also widely acknowledged as key reference points for many Romantic authors. Nor is it hard to see parallels between the twin premises of most varieties of liberalism—namely, that if individuals are “freed” to determine and follow their own sense of their best interests, then an immanent form of collective order will emerge—and the stress of Romantic authors on individual uniqueness, which was frequently linked to the hope that this would lead, in some often unspecified way, to new, more equitable forms of social order. Such parallels between liberalism and Romanticism were evident to the Victorian-era theorist of liberalism John Stuart Mill, who explicitly acknowledged the importance of Romantic-era poets such as William Wordsworth for his overall intellectual development and also cited the German Romantic-era author Wilhelm von Humboldt prominently in Of Liberty, Mill's classic articulation of liberalism. Yet one of the peculiarities of contemporary literary-critical scholarship is that even as liberalism is a central category for Victorianist literary criticism, it is more or less absent as a term from Romantic literary criticism.

The relative disinterest of scholars of Romanticism in liberalism may be a function of a long-standing tendency within Romantic literary criticism to parse discussions of Romantic-era politics through the binary of “radicalism” versus “conservatism.” Liberalism is hard to situate within such a binary, since it is both radical in its aim to eliminate traditional social relationships in favor of new modes of human relations and conservative insofar as these changes tend to benefit an existing bourgeois class. It was for this reason that Isaac Kramnick coined the term “bourgeois radicalism” to describe the liberal political positions of authors such as Joseph Priestley and Tom Paine, and a similar rationale underlies Saree Makdisi’s distinction between Blake’s (true) radicalism and the (merely bourgeois) radicalism of authors such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. Yet the risk run by such coined terms and distinctions is that we lose sight of a longer history that connects Romantic-era authors both to earlier building blocks of liberalism, such as seventeenth-century political arithmetic (which was not clearly “bourgeois”), and to post-Romantic developments in liberalism, such as John Stuart Mill’s critique of capitalism and, conversely, the tight neoliberal embrace of capitalism represented by twentieth-century authors such as Friedrich von Hayek. In this book, I explicitly employ the term “liberalism” in order to keep this longer history in view.

My use of the term “liberalism” also draws heavily from Foucault’s approach, which differs in emphasis from more traditional philosophical
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and political-theoretical accounts of liberalism. As many historians and theorists of liberalism have noted, it is difficult in practice to establish unambiguously the core tenets of liberalism. Or, as the political theorist Alan Ryan puts it, it is “easy to list famous liberals; it is hard to say what they have in common.” However, the brief definition of liberalism that I offered—the premise that if the resources of the state, such as law (especially that which ensures private property and contracts), are oriented toward “freeing” individuals to determine and follow their own sense of their best interests, then an immanent form of collective order will emerge—seems to me to be a fairly uncontentious summary of key aspects of what Ryan calls “classical” liberalism, exemplified by authors such as John Locke and Adam Smith.

Foucault’s account of classical liberalism does not so much contest this definition as refine it. This is evident if we consider Ryan’s own definition of classical liberalism. Ryan argues that classical liberalism was

focus[d] on the idea of limited government, the maintenance of the rule of law, the avoidance of arbitrary and discretionary power, the sanctity of private property and freely made contracts, and the responsibility of individuals for their own fates. (24)

Rather than simply noting that liberal theorists such as Locke or Smith advocated for limited government and against arbitrary and discretionary power, Foucault focused on the transformation of epistemology that enabled the success of this attack on sovereign power. He stressed that this occurred because authors such as Locke, Hume, Smith, and the French physiocrats, among others, convinced their readers that there were “natural” dynamics of economic order that escaped the reach of sovereign power but that nevertheless could be channeled and regulated by new forms of knowledge, such as the new sciences of political economy and physiocracy. Foucault’s focus on liberalism as dependent upon an epistemological transformation led him in turn to recognize the importance of eighteenth-century concepts such as “population” and “regulation” for liberalism, for these were among the new concepts that enabled theorists of liberalism to alter the relationship between epistemology and political power.

Foucault’s stress on the importance of concepts such as population and regulation for liberalism underscores the extent to which classical liberalism was a form of biopolitics, that is, an approach to power focused not on micromanaging individual behavior but instead interested in locating, and thereby enabling some kind of steering of, regularities within the collective
“body” of the population. Romantic literary criticism has been more attentive to the development of biopolitics than to liberalism. However, within most literary-critical accounts of Romantic-era biopolitics, the latter has been assumed to be pernicious, and literary authors are cast either as the heroes who fight against biopolitics or the dupes who furthered its reach. Though this approach is not surprising when it comes to assessing, for example, the rather nasty implications Thomas Malthus drew from his account of the “principle of population,” biopolitics also covers developments such as smallpox inoculation and various other forms of disease prevention that developed from that. It is often not clear in Romantic literary criticism whether those latter biopolitical technologies are also understood as inherently oppressive and problematic. It is thus worth considering more closely three rationales that seem to underpin this more general literary-critical tendency to understand biopolitics as something that should be opposed at all costs, even if these rationales have often remained implicit in Romantic literary criticism.

First, insofar as biopolitics requires some form of political coercion over individuals—for example, via strong suggestions or even legal requirements that individuals be inoculated against smallpox—such control can be opposed in the name of individual freedom and autonomy. I am tempted to call this the “liberal” critique of biopolitics, since it opposes biopolitical developments in the name of the individual autonomy that has been so important to classical liberal theorists. Yet if, as I argue here, liberalism is itself a mode of biopolitics, to critique biopolitics in the name of individual autonomy will likely result in a paradoxical and self-defeating position. Part of the intellectual appeal of liberalism is that it does not oppose individual autonomy and population-level interests; it instead suggests that individual differences and autonomy lead to collective improvement, and it strikes me as unlikely that any position that begins by valuing individual autonomy will not end up finding itself led back to the more fundamental body of the population.

A second argument against biopolitics contests its apparent premise that there are corporeal aspects of collective living—for example, the bare minimum of food an individual requires to survive or an individual’s resistance to a disease such as smallpox—that cannot be altered by means of collective rational discussion. It was precisely this critique that structured the Romantic-era debate between William Godwin and Thomas Malthus that I consider in Chapters 2 and 6. Godwin argued that all aspects of human existence, including reproduction, disease, and human lifespan, could be altered through rational decision making; Malthus responded that
reproductive drives and food production would always escape such control. Karl Marx embraced Godwin’s side of this debate, and a vaguely Marxist vision of humanity’s complete control over nature lies, I suspect, behind much of the recent animus toward biopolitics. Yet such an animus raises the question of whether the classless society of the future would also engage in fundamentally biopolitical practices such as disease vaccination and leaves obscure the question of how the vision of human mastery over nature comports with our increasing awareness of our embeddedness within ecological systems that cannot be controlled in this way.

Finally, some theorists have argued that a seemingly life-oriented biopolitics either contingently or necessarily leads to its opposite, what the political theorist Roberto Esposito calls a “thanatopolitics,” in which biopolitical policies are employed to deliberately kill (or let die) certain groups of people for the sake of saving other, purportedly more valuable lives. This line of argument has been developed most extensively by Giorgio Agamben and Esposito. Agamben argues that biopolitics necessarily employs what he calls the “sovereign exception,” by means of which sovereign political power is constituted around an ancient Greek distinction between properly political life (zoe) and the “mere” life (bios) of those who are excluded from properly political life and who can be killed without legal or moral consequence. Agamben traces the political-legal structure of the sovereign exception back to ancient Roman law and sees modern biopolitics as simply the continuation of this logic within a modern context. What distinguishes our modern context, though, are technologies that enable those excluded from properly political life to be killed en masse, and Agamben sees National Socialist concentration and extermination camps as the logical terminus of modern biopolitics.

Esposito, by contrast, argues that biopolitics leads to thanatopolitics only when the former is combined with what he calls the “immunitary paradigm.” Building on Foucault’s work on biopolitics, Esposito argues that modernity—that is, those political concepts, institutions, and practices that first emerged in Europe in the seventeenth century and continue to determine national and international political relations—is best understood as the unfolding and increasing intensification of the paradigm of immunization. This paradigm has three key elements. First, politics is understood as the solution to the problem of human survival (rather than, for example, the collective pursuit of excellence, as politics was understood in the classical Greek tradition). Second, what purportedly threatens collective survival is not an external threat, but rather something immanent to human relations. Third, the latter problem is to be solved by “shelter[ing] life in the same
powers that interdict its development”—that is, by “immunizing” social relations against the internal threat that places them in jeopardy, most generally by sacrificing lives understood as less worthy for those considered more worthy. For Esposito, when biopolitical techniques are subordinated to the immunitary paradigm, they indeed lead to the thanatopolitical outcome of Nazi Germany to which Agamben points. However, because biopolitics and the immunitary paradigm are analytically separate for Esposito, he also holds out hope for what he calls an “affirmative” biopolitics, which would not understand politics as oriented primarily toward human survival and hence would not engage in the immunitary solution of sacrificing some lives for the sake of others.

Of the critiques of biopolitics I have outlined here, I find Esposito’s the most convincing and also the most useful for understanding the relationship between biopolitics and liberalism. Esposito argues compellingly, for example, that the modern, liberal concept of liberty—that is, the explicit centerpiece of liberalism in all its forms—developed fully within the immunitary paradigm. Echoing a long lineage of liberal theorists, Esposito distinguishes between an “ancient” and a “modern” understanding of liberty. He contends that “the concept of liberty, in its [ancient] germinal nucleus, alludes to a connective power that grows and develops according to its own internal law, and to an expansion or to a deployment that unites its members in a shared dimension.” That ancient concept of liberty was connected to the awarding of a “privilege” that was granted to some individuals by a collective body, such as a city-state, so that the individual could more fully pursue his or her (usually his) ends within that collective. However, Esposito contends that, beginning in the seventeenth century, liberty began to be understood in a “negative” fashion, that is, not as a mode of becoming, such as the ability to grow and change within a collective framework, but rather as the absence of any obstacle between oneself and one’s will (71). Modern liberty is thus fundamentally a concept of security of the individual against outside threats, not a concept of privilege that allows one to do something (72). Esposito contends that, because of this emphasis on security, modern authors never limit themselves “to the simple enunciation of the imperative of liberty” but also necessarily “implicat[e] the organization of conditions that make this effectively possible,” namely, strong law and police forces (74). Hence, even though liberty is understood as freedom from external constraints and compulsion, this goal apparently can only be pursued when it is supported by external constraints and compulsion. For Esposito, this emphasizes in dramatic fashion what he calls the self-destructive nature of the immunitary paradigm, which, he argues,
always ends up destroying precisely what it had aimed to save. Or, as Esposito writes, “it isn’t possible to determine or define liberty except by contradicting it” (75).

Esposito’s approach provides a way of understanding liberalism as a mode of biopolitics but also of distinguishing biopolitics from liberalism, with the goal of making it possible to think an affirmative biopolitics beyond liberalism (and neoliberalism). Esposito’s own method, which he describes as a “constructive deconstruction,” does not allow him to say much about the content of an affirmative biopolitics, for he claims that it is first necessary to reveal the various “antinomies” that structure earlier political, philosophical, anthropological, and scientific thought before one can develop such a biopolitics positively. While I share Esposito’s goal of sketching out an affirmative biopolitics, I am less convinced by his methodological premise that one can only approach this task asymptotically, and I seek to show in this book not only that many Romantic authors sought to develop the contours of an affirmative biopolitics but also that they provide us with positive resources for our own efforts. Looking to the Romantics for a provisional orientation, then, an “affirmative” biopolitics would not set self-preservation but rather self-transformation as its goal, and it would affirm every human life (and likely also many forms of non-human life), rather than searching for those human lives that can be sacrificed for the sake of the rest.

In part because I share Esposito’s interest in thinking through what an affirmative biopolitics could mean, I return repeatedly to the example of inoculation in this book. From one perspective, the practice of inoculation (and later, vaccination) was just one of many examples of the results of new eighteenth-century biopolitical sciences, and to acknowledge this, I often pair inoculation with the equally new science of political economy. Yet my emphasis on inoculation is intended to have a tactical benefit that is itself bound up with Esposito’s understanding of the singular importance of concepts of immunity for the modern development of biopolitics. Scholars interested in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century biopolitics have often focused on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economy and have adopted an understandably critical approach to the claims of authors such as Smith and Malthus. Such a critique comes easily to scholars in the humanities, in part because the class, racial, and gender inequities to which eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economy led are hard to deny and because the persisting importance of Marxist critique within the humanities ensures that one can imagine that economic relations could and should be organized completely otherwise (even if the details of that
alternative organization are a bit fuzzy). Biopolitical practices such as inoculation and vaccination lead, however, to trickier, less predictable terrains of thought, for though these practices have often been applied inequitably, it is less clear that they are simply ideological mystifications. Moreover, as Esposito stresses, practices such as inoculation and vaccination underscore our radical openness to one another, an openness that both enables infection among individuals and the immunological channeling of that openness into preemptive immunity via techniques such as inoculation and vaccination. The examples of inoculation and vaccination thus encourage us, in ways that the example of political economy generally does not, both to engage and to think through the implications of this common openness.

With that said, Esposito’s approach also helps us understand better the relationships among biopolitics, political economy, liberalism, and neoliberalism, though the latter is not a term that Esposito uses. As both Foucault and historians of economics such as Philip Mirowski, Dieter Plehwe, Edward Nik-Khah, and Robert Van Horn have noted, neoliberalism was first formulated in the 1930s by economists such as Friedrich Hayek, who felt that nineteenth-century liberals had not recognized the extent to which governments must actively construct the conditions for successful markets, rather than simply adopting a hands-off, laissez-faire approach to them. Combining Foucault’s and Mirowski’s accounts, I approach neoliberalism in this book as committed to the principle that “the market” is in its essence an information processor and, moreover, the most efficient information processor possible. However, neoliberals also believe that the market-cum–collective computer cannot fully optimize itself when simply left alone, as eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers had believed. Rather, the goal of government is to force individuals in directions that will enable a full optimization of market relations. This is to be accomplished by actively encouraging individuals to become “entrepreneurs of the self,” which in turn requires an aggressive reconceptualization of all human relations as market relations, the elimination of welfare provisions, and the creation of sufficient police forces and prisons to immunize society against those who either do not wish to participate or do not “succeed” in this grand vision of market optimization. Despite the hopes of many critics that the worldwide financial crisis that began in 2007 would destroy the legitimacy of neoliberalism, in fact the opposite seems to have been the case, for—in a reversal that induces rather painful intellectual whiplash—the financial crisis caused by neoliberal policies has served as a means for
neoliberalism to integrate itself even more deeply, and biopolitically, into everyday life.\textsuperscript{39}

In such a context, it is vital to keep firmly in view not only the close relationship between biopolitics and neoliberalism but also their fundamental distinction. That is, on the one hand, it is important to recognize that the neoliberal goal of establishing a fully optimized market society requires the development of ever more expansive and precise biopolitical technologies, such as the now vast range of “smart” devices and processes that make it possible to grasp and manipulate algorithmically nearly all of daily life.\textsuperscript{40} On the other hand, it is equally important to recognize that these same biopolitical technologies exceed the neoliberal goal of a global market society, in the sense that they also enable other kinds of human relations. My hope is that, by emphasizing the difference between biopolitics and liberalism in the Romantic era, the fault lines of this distinction in our own period will also become more evident.

**Liberalism, Biopolitics, and the Sciences**

I follow Foucault in understanding eighteenth-century sciences as essential to the emergence of biopolitics in general and that specific form of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century biopolitics that we now call liberalism. Eighteenth-century sciences enabled biopolitics and liberalism by providing their advocates and proponents with putative truths—namely, those “laws” and “principles” discovered by new sciences such as political economy, physiocracy, and inoculative medicine—that could be used to reduce the power of those who believed that only sovereign commands, translated into laws that were faithfully respected by legal subjects, could enable social order. Advocates for new sciences such as political economy and inoculative medicine argued that, just as Newton had revealed immutable laws for matter, their sciences revealed immutable laws of human behavior, which determined the movements of humans, no matter what a sovereign might command.\textsuperscript{41} Yet advocates of new sciences such as political economy and inoculative medicine also argued that knowledge of the laws that they discovered would, very much unlike Newton’s laws of matter, enable human relationships to be altered for the better. To put this another way, those eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century sciences especially important for the emergence of biopolitics and liberalism were what we might call “regulative sciences,” in the sense that these sciences both aimed to locate self-regulatory movements within
human relationships and sought to apply knowledge of those movements directly to human affairs.

The sciences that I focus on in this book thus tend to be both extraordinarily applied and—as a consequence—were often sciences that were contested, in the sense that the question of whether in fact they produce real knowledge was never a given. For many eighteenth-century commentators, for example, it was by no means clear whether smallpox inoculation actually worked. Advocates of inoculation argued that the best way to settle the question was to allow “the Experiment [to] go on” by inoculating large populations against smallpox and then checking fatality statistics; critics of inoculation responded by attacking a science that proceeded in this way as amoral at best.\textsuperscript{42} The sciences of political economy and physiocracy were equally contested, especially when advocates such as Thomas Malthus moved demographic claims about the laws that determined the increase and decrease of population size to the center of political economy. Advocates of the sciences that I consider had to fight continually to legitimate their claims as valid contributions to natural philosophy (and, later, “science”), and that fight was never decisively determined one way or the other.\textsuperscript{43}

As a consequence of this way that eighteenth-century biopolitics, liberalism, and the regulative sciences were linked to one another, I focus less on how literary authors explicitly engaged the work of famous scientists and more on how literature itself became part of the contests around concepts central to the regulative sciences, such as “regulation,” “population,” and “experiment.” Eighteenth-century regulative sciences were often effective less because a particular claim of a specific author was widely accepted and more because these sciences effectively promoted or transformed the basic coordinates of a concept such as “population.” Eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century regulative sciences sought to convince readers, for example, of the importance of questions such as: What is a population? How can one best study populations? Are differences among people important or not for the study of populations? What are desirable behaviors? How can populations be manipulated to increase the incidence of desirable behaviors and decrease the incidence of undesirable ones (or people)? While the regulative sciences had a variety of answers to each of these questions, so too did authors whom we now consider to be literary, such as Wordsworth, Hazlitt, and Mary Shelley. And because the regulative sciences and their answers were contested in the Romantic era, literary authors contributed to these debates neither as tyros nor as emulators of the
sciences but as advocates for different constellations of biopolitics and the sciences.

This approach helps us recognize literary texts as elements of what Foucault described as “technologies of the self.” Foucault did not explicitly discuss biopolitics after the late 1970s, turning instead to historical investigations of what he called “governmentality.” Foucault used this term to refer to practices by which individuals and groups employed truth claims in order to govern, or regulate, themselves. Governmentality thus includes practices by which individuals

effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain [what they believe will be] a certain state of perfection, happiness, purity, supernatural power.44

As Thomas Lemke notes, Foucault’s interest in governmentality was not a turn away from but rather an attempt to recontextualize biopolitics.45 While from one perspective biopolitical projects such as eighteenth-century political economy and inoculation represented a lessening of juridical-political power in favor of allowing “the truth” about the nature of populations to determine political policy, these projects also required that individuals learn to look at the world in terms of truths about populations and to alter “their own souls, their own thoughts, their own conduct” accordingly. Romantic-era literature, I contend, was one of the mechanisms that enabled these biopolitical technologies of the self in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it did so by connecting otherwise abstract truth claims about populations and power with aspirations for states of “perfection, happiness, [and] purity.”

As I document in each of my chapters, literature provided elements of technologies of the self that could support liberal forms of biopolitics, but literary texts often also pointed toward nonliberal forms of biopolitics. The first chapter, for example, explores how the concept of genius makes concrete otherwise abstract aspirations for maximizing qualities within populations—and makes equally concrete what will happen if a desired quality is not maximized—and this lent itself easily to the liberal project of political economy. However, as I note at the end of the chapter, the project of genius maximization also led authors such as Godwin and Wordsworth beyond liberal biopolitics, toward forms of biopolitics no longer bound to class division and ecological plunder. More briefly, the
second chapter connects governmentality to the concept of population by exploring both liberal and nonliberal versions of this concept; the third chapter considers some of the technical devices (character-systems and free indirect discourse) by means of which literature could claim to articulate truths about populations; the fourth chapter explores liberal and beyond-liberal approaches to globalization and the natural systems of the globe; the fifth chapter connects governmentality to concepts of self and collective experimentation and to the related question of whether the “we” to which individuals are connected should be understood as a historical inheritance that must be defended or a community that can only be achieved in the future; and the final chapter explores the concept of governmentality through analysis of its key modern synonym, self-regulation.

Each chapter, in short, connects biopolitics with governmentality, with the goal of exploring both the development of liberal and nonliberal techniques of the self. My hope is that this approach helps us move our understanding of biopolitics and its sciences beyond the frame of liberalism, and the wager of this book is that Romantic authors introduce many of the problems, regulative concepts, and experimental stances that will be necessary for this collective work.