

## Freedom Beyond the Labyrinth of Sovereign Power: Foucault's Parrhesia as Critical Praxis

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### ABSTRACT

This paper draws attention to Foucault's critical insight on Modernity in which the Hobbesian-Sovereign model of power re-emerges in our social-political landscape carrying the dangers of rigid supervision engendering a political rationality of exclusion, absolutism, and exceptionalism emblematic of totalitarian regimes. Foucault argues that while dissolving premodern modes of violence and the curtailment of human autonomy in favor of a decentralized form of power that invests on human life, the Enlightenment tradition gave rise to a novel yet insidious form of social control which dominated the forces of the body and psyche. Through the strategy of "discipline" the facets of biological life were gradually integrated *en masse* with politics for the efficient management of the population. This paper aims to link the later themes Foucault discussed from the period of 1979 to 1983 which focuses on *the Care of the Self* expressed through the practice of *Parrhesia* and situate its significance on his early problematization of Sovereign power. I would argue that in *The History of Sexuality Vol.1* and *Society Must be Defended* altogether, Foucault underscored the oscillating presence of the Leviathan in the landscape of contemporary politics which carries the tendency of exceptionalism and Statist-domination. Both works explored Foucault's question whether we have cut the King's head in the landscape of our contemporary democracy. The following points will be delineated: 1) the emergence of *biopolitics* and incessant domination on the individual via the disciplinary apparatuses of control which aided the production of docile and obedient bodies; 2) The inscription of a socio-political rationality which excludes unwanted social elements and dialectically produces its existence; and 3) the diminution of the practice of speech in our present political fabric. These thread of themes highlights Foucault's version of ethical praxis of *Parrhesia* as a practice of freedom which signifies the importance of resistance and its defense in an increasing panoptic society which normalizes blind conformism in the name of a secured population.

**Keywords:** *Biopower and Biopolitics, Disciplinary Power, Care of the Self, Parrhesia*

**INTRODUCTION: The Resurgence of the Elephant in the Room?**

We live in a world wherein shallowness is celebrated as an ideal and our silence indicates that the courage to speak reflect our state of social paralysis. In a passage in the introduction of *The Use of Pleasure (L'usage de Plaisirs)*, Foucault surmised that now, more than ever, is a period in which the need to think differently is an important factor in our social-political life. This insistence for a stance of active critique is thought to be interweaved in his later discussions found on his published works and the series of lectures at the Collège de France which centers on the question of truth and ethical substance. It underscores the message that if we are serious enough in seeking to recognize ourselves as free agents and eager to practice our freedom, critique needs the companion of resistance via the courage to speak against an authority that normalizes what is socially pathological.

This invitation for a philosophical critique becomes a pressing matter in political theory and in the backdrop of an overriding sovereign model of power which was thought to be a political passé in our modern society, yet its presence still pervades in the very institutions that embody our supposed universal ideals for humanity. The caveat is that these institutions are susceptible to be overrun by myopic agents who carry a political rationality imbued with dangerous aspirations for a “collective identity” which intends to create a social space that dismisses social “others” deemed as pathogens in the context of our post-911 landscape. Foucault sketches this political reality in his lecture on *Society Must Be Defended* which provided the definitive object of inquiry in the discussion of what shall be the content to be criticized or resisted by our ethical substance. In this light, Foucault argues that while dissolving premodern modes of domination and its curtailment of human autonomy in favor of a decentralized form of power which invests on bodies, Enlightenment rationality gave rise to a novel yet insidious form of social control which quantified the forces of the body through disciplinary strategies integrating the facets of life *en masse* with the management of the population. This social mechanism of biopolitics is instrumental to breed animosity and classify certain elements of the population as abnormal.

In his lecture delivered at Collège de France in the mid 70's, which eventually was published as *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault argues that the historical transformation of modern political authority still contain elements of authoritative political discourse typical of the Hobbesian model of juridico-sovereign power.<sup>1</sup> It is a mode of power in which subjects completely surrender their will, or to be more specific their natural condition, to a single source of authority – the Leviathan which engulfs the topographies of human

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<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, Andrew Neal elaborates this point in his reading of Foucault's arguments in *Society Must Be Defended*. He writes, “Instead of a model of power derived from the singular conditions of possibility manifest in modern state sovereignty, Foucault initially suggests that we examine power under the rubric of a multiplicity of force relations manifest in a perpetual underlying war. Whereas the Hobbesian model of modern sovereignty was established as a radical, dualistic temporal and spatial break from the premodern war of all against all, *Foucault suggests that that war never really went away* [my emphasis]. It continues, he suggests, in the fabric of modern politics and its discourses and institutions. Inverting Clausewitz's famous aphorism, he captures this in the initial hypothesis that politics might be the continuation of war by other means, and not the other way around.”

See Andrew Neal, “Cutting off the King's Head: Foucault's Society Must Be Defended and the Problem of Sovereignty,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 4 (2004): p.375 ,

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life. This totalizing framework or rationality becomes even more pronounced as the concept of “Nation” – referred to as collective identity of subjects – became infused in the transformation of modern political discourse which reverberates in the ideals of various institutions and governmentalities that call for universalistic values to secure the state from dangerous elements identified as ‘others’. What lies at the core of this social imagination is a politics of exclusion which gradually becomes naturalized. Foucault emphasized in *Truth and Power* that “what we need, however, is a political philosophy that isn’t erected around the problem of sovereignty . . . We need to cut off the King’s head: in political theory that has still to be done.”<sup>2</sup> It may seem prophetic on the part of Foucault that the significance of *Parrhesia* ( often translated as “fearless speech”) as an ethico-political praxis may be deemed as an antidote to our mistaken assumption that we already progressed into the path of Enlightenment and had cut the King’s head. This apprehension is not saved from the apparent reversal common to critical theory which sees the flipside and oscillating irony of things.

This paper aims to elucidate Foucault’s later discussions which include the Greco-Roman concept of *Parrhesia* as an important ethical practice and critical impulse apropos to the challenge of the re-emergence of totalitarian tendencies intrinsic in the model of Sovereign-power which is found in the concept of “nation-state”. I argue that to better understand the possibility of human freedom in the genealogical work of Foucault, which has been or continuous to be a crucial question hurled by his critics on his discussion of power, it is an essential route to weave the notion of *Parrhesia* with the problematization of political sovereignty found in *Society Must Be Defended*.

The seeming shift in Foucault’s *oeuvre* from biopolitics towards the theme of ethics found in his two succeeding volumes of *Histoire de la Sexualité*, which include *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, is not a complete abandonment of his early works, but rather should be perceived as an enhancement of his exploration on genealogy. Thus, to look at the genealogical work of Foucault exclusively in the light of his two-major works, *Discipline & Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1*, is a haphazard form of reading which restricts ones view that the subject is incapable of the practice of freedom brought about by the trappings of disciplinary power. To put more emphasis on this point, Foucault explains that the critical practice of *Parrhesia* is an essential quality that an individual can possess to resist a power which encroaches our social-political life. He writes that “the object [of philosophical exercise] was to learn to what extent the effort to think one’s own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enables it to think differently.”<sup>3</sup> The writings of Foucault generally convey the message that we should unsettle what is commonly perceived as already known, spoken of, and settled about ourselves and our current state of affairs together with the power that enmeshes it.

### **Counting Bodies like Sheep: on “Life & Death” and “the Power over Life”**

Foucault maintained that the trajectory of Enlightenment ushered a form of social control which impinges its violence in a subtle yet effective manner on the body through the finer mechanism of scientific supervision in the plane of the psyche. What lies at the core of his genealogical analysis is the historical process in which the subject is made docile by the clout of “disciplinary power” to meet the demands of

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, ed. Mauro Bertani, Francois Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault. *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality, Vol.2*, Vintage Books: New York, 1990: p. 9

modern society. These forms of social control are intended to harness on the one hand the forces of the body to ensure its utility and productivity and on the other invade the human mind. The formation of the self lies in the intersections of power/knowledge which enable the propagation of discourses that define the “truth” of the individual. This process of development in Foucault’s view is tied to the thread of various institutional conduits. Thus, power wields the “subject” and is at the same time subjected to its domain.

Foucault writes in the *History of Sexuality, vol.1* that the premodern form of power is described to embody a political thump over subjects intended to seize life, to end it, impoverish or enslave it. In political theory, Thomas Hobbes wrote this point in the *Leviathan*:

For seeing there is no Common-wealth in the world, wherein there be rules enough set down, for the regulating of all the actions, and words of men ... it followeth necessarily, that in all kinds of actions, by the laws permitted, men have the Liberty, of doing what their own reasons shall suggest, for the most profitable to themselves.<sup>4</sup>

This jurido-legal model of power, a form of power which governs subjects through rules or laws laid down by the Sovereign, is based on a principle of deduction in which the standing authority bears the right either to take life or let it live. It is a power whose primary symbol is the “King” who in a sleight of hand has the sole authority to reduce the individual to its plainest form of subsistence in a sense of taking not only life, but the wealth, labor, services, and products of a servile subject. In a reading by Chloë Taylor, Sovereign power possesses the right of subtraction as opposed to a power of control or regulation.<sup>5</sup> Hobbes’ model of political power pointed out that the “juridico-legal power to kill leaves the daily life of the body alone”<sup>6</sup> and does not concern itself with the mundane bodily concerns such as dwelling, diet, and childcare.

Following this point, prior to the modern period, the way life was seized by Sovereign authority was exclusively focused on apprehending the body. As Johanna Oksala puts it in her reading of Foucault vis-à-vis the transformation of biopolitics, “while human bodily existence and biological life are inextricably tied to the violent struggle for survival and the cycle of birth and death, the defining feature of Western tradition of political thought has been the separation of the political from the biological.”<sup>7</sup> The difference between sheer existence grounded on mere biological survival paralleled to animal life and on one hand the characteristic of being human, a rational and political animal who transcends the level of the animal, is a defining feature of Western political thought which can be attributed to Aristotle’s political philosophy. He emphasized this point in *Politics* arguing that politics is the means for us to juxtapose the opposition between the mere biological subsistence of animals and human society in which its distinguishing feature is the specificity of the human practice of speech.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford Press, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> Chloë Taylor “*The Routledge Guidebook to Foucault’s The History of Sexuality*” Routledge, New York, 2017: p. 44

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44

<sup>7</sup> Johanna Oksala, “Violence and the Biopolitics of Modernity,” *Foucault Studies*, no. 10 (2010): 23–43.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 11.

In her book *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt also held a similar Aristotelean view on how biological life is separated from the meaning and activity associated with political life found in her ontological description of political life present in Ancient Greek society. She finds in the Greek social fabric the clear demarcation between the private and the public sphere of human life and explains that the former is found on the setting of the *oikos* or the household where the realm of human biological necessity is grounded, whereas the latter refers to the realm of the *polis* in which the *vita activa* of work and political action is practiced. The sphere of politics secludes the biological aspect of life because such sphere is limited to the confines of human biological necessity, i.e. the repetitive cycle of our bodily sustenance. The private aspect of life remains tied to the cycle of nature where things commence and end. Its dynamic is not covered by the activities of the *polis* or the creation of human artifice since the space of political life occupies the activities of the work of human hands, mind, and speech. It is a sphere where the ideal to immortalize humanity is solidified and human plurality is found among men in practices of speech necessary for consensus-building. This is further articulated by her tripartite terms for human action (*vita activa*) composed of labor, work, and action.<sup>9</sup>

Arendt however argues that modern politics had drawn-in the activities of labor – the biological survival of mankind – into the center of political life and therefore blurring the lines between it and the activities which are supposedly restricted in the realm of biological survival.<sup>10</sup> Thus, what characterizes Modernity is the dematerialization of the borderline that separates the activity of politics from its biological existence. Both thinkers, Arendt and Foucault, view that modern power overturned such Ancient political categories and

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<sup>9</sup> Arendt explains the tripartite terms of labor, work, and action in the first chapter of *The Human Condition*.

Starting with labor, she writes that the activity of “[labor] is the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body, whose, spontaneous growth, metabolism, and eventual decay are bound to the vital necessities produced and fed into the life process by labor. The human condition of labor is life itself.” She emphasizes that “labor assures not only the individual survival, but the life of the species.” On the other hand, “[work] is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence, which is not imbedded in, and whose mortality is not compensated by, the species’ ever-recurring life cycle... it provides an artificial world of things, distinctively different from all-natural surroundings.” Lastly, she explains the importance of human action as “the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.” See *“The Human Condition”*, University of Chicago Press:1998. (pp. 7-9)

<sup>10</sup> Arendt’s account of modern politics however is not entirely the same as that of Foucault. It must be noted that the issue that Arendt raises, from her ontological description of political life, is the manner in which political life is overtaken by the presence of labor or the “social” which diminishes or greatly excludes the possibility of political action to take place. As Oksala argues, Arendt sees that “the key concern was to redeem the intrinsic value of the political. Politics should not be reduced to an instrumental means to the apolitical ends of natural life: survival, pleasure and happiness. It has to remain an end in-itself and therefore to retain its specificity as public action and speech.” (p.28) Moreover, I would argue that both thinkers agree on the importance of the practice of speech and emphasized its significance in resisting forms of political domination, i.e. totalitarian forms of political rationality.

introduced a form of power which considered biological existence as the primary political concern. Whereas Hobbes conceived that the corporeal aspect of human such as what they purchase as a reflection of their consumerist ethos, their notion of caring for their body or diet and fitness, their housing, the welfare of children, education, down to the very detail of embodied existence – the way they walk, move, and talk – are considered to be outside the province of sovereign power, Foucault argues that these features that are deemed to be trivial in the eyes of the Leviathan remains at the focal gaze of modern politics appropriated in the mechanisms of biopower and biopolitics.<sup>11</sup> As Foucault sees it, the modern era subjected individuals to the administrative forces of disciplinary power and normalization practices to create docile and obedient bodies.

Foucault's analysis of power in the rubric of political sovereignty is not merely about what subjects are giving up to authority<sup>12</sup>, but rather centers on how subjects are administered and normalized. He writes in the *History of Sexuality, vol. 1*,

Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a *living species* in a living world, *to have a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life*, an individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner. For the first time in history... *biological existence was reflected in political existence*; the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and power's sphere of intervention. Power would no longer be dealing with legal subjects over whom the ultimate dominion was death, but with living beings, and the mastery it would be able to exercise over them would have to be applied at the level of life itself.<sup>13</sup>

To discern this shift, Foucault draws our attention to his description of the society we so conveniently call free, yet behind the surface of things what abounds are multifarious apparatuses of social control that direct and, on a higher level of influence, govern our behavior and thinking. A society where the constant administration of subjects is governed by a strategy of power called 'discipline'.<sup>14</sup> Foucault stresses that the

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<sup>11</sup> See Chloë Taylor, *The Routledge Guidebook to Foucault's The History of Sexuality*. pp. 44-45

<sup>12</sup> "Rather than asking ideal subjects what part of themselves or their powers they have surrendered in order to let themselves become subjects, we have to look at how relations of subjugation can manufacture subjects."

Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, ed. Mauro Bertani, Francois Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 1975).p. 265

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). p. 142

<sup>14</sup> By 'discipline', Foucault is referring to two intertwined concepts which is unique in the French language; first, the term connotes a form of control to the body such as how to direct the individual and its movement down to its possible subtle gestures. Second, its usage refers to the corpus of knowledge such as the scientific disciplines in the academe whose object of inquiry is mankind. Discipline is a power tactic whose influence invades the body and mind of an individual. The application of the mechanisms of discipline towards the subject lies at the intersection of power and knowledge, or power/knowledge. The strategy of discipline justifies, fortifies, and enhances power/knowledge's

function of 'discipline' is primarily its normalizing power which in effect colonizes both body and mind. Foucault argues that this method was effectively thwarted into life itself in its social and political context. Under disciplinary power, the subject is forged and refashioned in the level of life both as an individual and group levels coined as "biopower" i.e. power over *bios* or life which works through various institutions such as schools, prisons, and psychiatric hospitals. Yet at another level, regulation and administration also work in the level of population which problematizes birthrates, public health, housing, and migration, which is known as *biopolitics*.<sup>15</sup> Foucault writes that "the disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed ... the old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life."<sup>16</sup> Juxtaposed to the Hobbesian model of power which is enforced by "law" (juridical power), disciplinary power is lodged to the body or species-body through "norms" or exercises of normativity.

The fascination to control life is an undeniable hallmark of Modernity and is where Foucault situated the application of power/knowledge and the way it thrived. Brought about by the calculative character of the Cartesian cogito tied with the Enlightenment slogan proclaimed by Kant, "Sapere Aude!", both rationalities carried a promising vision which foretells that once humanity enables itself to use the authority of its own reason, it would guarantee human emancipation from the contradicting fetters of tradition ushering an age of progress. This prophetic idea on the contrary led humanity into an ostensive Faustian pact wherein the incessant drive for knowledge and control escorted us to an end which is the total administration of life suggestive of the assembly line logic found in the terrors of Auschwitz. To wit, prior to the period of Modernity, death remained as a constant companion of life. Like the ephemeral tune of music, life is sweet but short – as the musician plucks the saccharine chord of his guitar, the melody dies in an instant. This connection of mankind with the nature of life and death bewildered mankind with a dread of the uncertain. Before the discovery of vaccines, we are so tied to such cycle of life and death and the guarantee of an infant to survive is bleak. Hence, procreation was the only way to continue life and sustain existence. This austere scenario prompted mankind to find a way to know what the mystery which shrouded nature to master and administer it without exemption to human life. Eventually, the burgeoning expansion of human knowledge meant the unhindered path of science. The advancement in medicine and technology allowed us to learn how to cheat death. Enlightenment brought to light death's mystery by learning how to extend life and learn how to

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hold on the body found in its various capillaries such as institutions and other force relations not in a form of a law, but rather through norms (*normatif*). Disciplinary power embosses its clout to the body which captures its movement geared to whatever purpose it may see fit. It is a form of power whose injunction on the body is to mobilize its energies with the intent of bringing life into its full utility avoiding the likelihood of its immediate futile expiration. Dialectically, the body in its utmost point of productivity experiences a death as the weight of disciplinary control hovers over it in its intricate detail making it die a little each day.

<sup>15</sup> There are instances that Foucault describes discipline and biopower as distinct forms of power and creates the ambiguity of what is "biopolitics" in his writings. Chloë Taylor reads these terms in the following manner:

"Disciplinary power works primarily through institutions and through tactics such as incarceration and surveillance, while biopolitics works primarily through the state and through tactics of governmentality." See Routledge

Guidebook to The History of Sexuality pp. 46-47

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140

administer it. Nature gradually became wrapped in the mantle of the god-like human being, the Human as the Deus ex machina. This impulse to control the features of life, from its minute detail to its complexities, is absorbed in the domain of politics which aided the calcification of the political administration of bodies by enforcing it and preventing it to meet its inevitable death, or to make it live and let die rather than to give life or take it. “The ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.”<sup>17</sup>

As to what exactly is the rationale of absorbing life in its most organic form in the helm of politics, Foucault hinted indirectly yet profoundly argued on the possibility of the Leviathan’s resurrection via a maneuver of power which transpired from the premodern conception of the Sovereign toward its modern form. He argues in the *Right of Death and Power over Life* that patterned after the Ancient Roman tradition of *patria potestas* which granted the father to dispose the life of his children and slaves, sovereign authority over its subjects was exercised through a power of “exposing their life” which suggests that one’s life hangs in the balance because of the threat of death. This conceives life as inseparable from death because it is a property that is seized by the Sovereign. Death is given if and only if the very existence or the sole survival of the Sovereign is threatened. Hence, taking the life of a subject is an act of rejoinder of the King to re-establish his will and authority.<sup>18</sup> This is something that Foucault also showed in *Discipline and Punish* in the case of Damians the regicide. This power of subtraction (*prélèvement*) was gradually replaced by a mode of power that holds on human life at the level of the “species”. What he is arguing about in this transformation of *Biopolitics* is that the foundation of this power to ensure the longevity of life created an inversion in which the population can be flung to its demise which is a pressing political question that Foucault emphatically expressed. It created a political setting which conveys an encouragement to live and proliferate life towards a telos of death in a massive scale. Such strategy is done in the name of security and human survival.<sup>19</sup> It accentuates life only to make it more politically disposable. This point is emphasized in following passage of *La Volonte de Savoir*.

Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have been vital ... [The] power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual’s continued existence. The principle underlying the tactics of battle – one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living – has become the principle that defines the strategy of states. But the existence in question is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty; at stake is the biological existence of a population.<sup>20</sup>

## Killing in the name of the Species

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p.138

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: An Introduction*. p.135

<sup>19</sup> Foucault. p. 137

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* p. 137

Modern society no longer sees life as something to be seized then reduced into an oblivious nothing. Power over life is a kind of power which no longer holds the idea of bringing death into play in the name of sovereignty; instead it distributes the living in the field of value and utility. But what occurred according to Foucault is the emergence of a phenomenon wherein the disposability of the population is made efficient whenever the state wishes to expose its citizens to their death. Wars became 'justified' against other states to ensure the security of its survival or certain segments of the population perceived as a threat to its existence needs to be monitored via the gaze of the panopticon. The price of peace is the looming war that shall ensue after states bought enough time to prepare for such destructive measures. Foucault related this transformation of biopolitics in *Society Must Be Defended* where he stated the Clausewitz inversion "politics is war pursued by other means" and elaborates the perverse relation of politics to war. He explains that politics precedes war, and that politics serve as a smokescreen of fossilized conflicts tamed to be waged in the future. Politics is a subtle war done not in the name of the King, but rather in the name of survival of the population. As he puts it succinctly, "war is the cipher of peace." He explains the metamorphosis of biopolitics in the following manner.

A paradox appears at first glance. As States evolve from the early Middle Ages onward, the practices and institutions of war appear to have undergone an obvious evolution. On the one hand, they tended to be concentrated in the hands of a central power which alone had the right and the means to wage war; as a result, they tended to disappear, if only gradually, from the individual-to-individual or group-to-group relationship, and increasingly became, as a result of this line of development, a State privilege.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the common perception that such migration from the brute application of sovereign power paved the way to a more humane power-relation in the name of liberty, fraternity and equality, Foucault demonstrates that such Enlightenment rhetoric is a façade. What remains is the same political domination of Sovereign power, or to put it poetically, it is the same cake with a different icing. Sovereign clout masks its character by strategically diffusing its mechanism of control. By democratizing its apparatus, the sources of power pervade the social milieu beyond every day perception leaving us incapable of pointing its source following Foucault's thesis that "power is everywhere".<sup>22</sup> Foucault suggests that the inscription of our ideals in the laws and institutions we have built, the treatises of peace we have ceremoniously signed, are still wet with the blood of war. In *Technologies of the Self*, Foucault also wrote extensively about how we come to identify ourselves as a society or as a state. Furthermore, he articulated the historical formation of the art of governing and the reason for the State's political calculation of its citizens. By the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, he argues that certain specific knowledge, such as statistics, is necessary for the knowledge of the states' forces. It is a political arithmetic to determine the state's political competence.<sup>23</sup> Biopolitics forges a relation between state and population via a vision of a social order free of chaos and social pathogens. The effect of this power over the life of individuals is not only the production of a healthy state population, but what it does is it

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<sup>21</sup> Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*.

<sup>22</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol.1: An Introduction*.

<sup>23</sup> James D. Faubion, ed., *POWER (The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 3) M. Foucault.Pdf* (New York: New York Press, 2001), p. 408 .

inculcates patriotism which leads citizens to side with its own state against anything foreign.<sup>24</sup> For example, in current explorations on Foucault's biopolitics, Kelly explores how this phenomenon work in post-911 global politics. He states that "biopolitics expanded and intensified during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is seen most strikingly in the provision of healthcare, but also in social welfare services and the provision of housing."<sup>25</sup> Kelly argues in *Biopolitical Imperialism* that citizens' loyalty to the state is enforced through the provision of welfare (welfare-state economic model) patterned after the Ancient Roman strategy of the emperor providing for its citizens to lure them of their unyielding devotion. This tactic solidifies the allegiance of people to the Sovereign and the entire empire.

The danger of this austere supervision and optimization of life is the rootedness of racism or any refined form of social exclusion in its very core. Foucault extends his analysis further stressing the relation of nationalism to state-racism. In biopolitics, war is invoked in the name of the population and its survival as a species. It carries violent repercussions directed against anyone or anything perceived as a threat to its existence. Such political rationality features a status of collective effervescence in the consciousness of citizens whose fervor is weaved in the idea of "nation" expressed via a historico-political discourse which justify war. Such discourse accentuates the level of social animosity and segmentation of the population. Foucault argues in *Society Must Be Defended* that "unlike the *philosophico-juridical discourse* organized around the problem of sovereignty and the law, the discourse that deciphers war's permanent presence within society is essentially a historico-political discourse, a discourse that is darkly critical and at the same time intensely mythical."<sup>26</sup> It is a discourse which revives the forgotten struggles of the past, hidden defeats and victories, and reveals the blood that has dried on the codes. It is in this vein that Foucault unmasks the hidden mechanisms of domination and discipline running in the sinews of biopolitics which co-opts the population in the trajectory of destruction. This incisive critique of the modern West is a compelling analysis vis-à-vis the re-emergence of the King/Sovereign power in contemporary democracies. This genealogy of racism is constructed out of the vision of a racialized world brought about by the problematization of the health of the species by a biopolitical government.<sup>27</sup>

## Enlightenment, Resistance, and the Role of Parrhesia

In his reading of Kant's legacy regarding critical thought, Foucault argues that Enlightenment reason is a type of philosophical interrogation on man's relation to the present, his mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject.<sup>28</sup> Its primary aim is to acquire a philosophical praxis which shall question the self-tutelage of Enlightenment reason apropos the problematization on the limits of authority and human freedom. Foucault emphasizes that to salvage human autonomy from the straightjacket of power and its apparatuses of control, the practice of Greek *parrhesia* <sup>29</sup> is an activity which enables the self-constitution of the individual in the face of untrammelled authoritative power. *Parrhesia* is a form of critical stance reminiscent of Greek Late Antiquity's notion of the *epimeleia sautou* or "care of the self" (*souci de*

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<sup>24</sup> MGE Kelly, "Biopolitical Imperialism" (Zero Books, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Kelly.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*. p. 270.

<sup>27</sup> Kim Su Rasmussen, "Foucault's Genealogy of Racism" 28, no. 5 (2011): 34–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276411410448>.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984). p.312

<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech*, ed. Joseph Pearson, *Semiotext(E)* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001).

soi). It is considered as one of the main principles one ought to consider as a personal conduct and the art of life.<sup>30</sup>

As a part of his genealogical approach which is described as a genealogy of critique<sup>31</sup> on the problem of sovereignty, *parrhesia* as a practice of frank or fearless speech allows the subject to both put critique into question and as a practice of challenging the hovering grip of disciplinary power embedded with a governmentality or government rationality guilty of social exclusionary tactics. In the context of what he calls “the game of truth”, it serves as an act of resistance to the appeal for a universalizing moral framework which engenders a historico-political discourse of state-racism which remains tied to the biopolitical government regimes by exposing the truth content of such discourses and put power in check. As he puts it,

Genealogy is a historically informed mode of critique that does not judge the present in terms of a universal moral framework. Instead, it illuminates the historical contingency of the present and thereby discloses possibilities for changing it. Genealogy does not ask ‘what is’ just to proclaim, ‘what should be’. It poses another question: how did that what is come into being, and how can it become otherwise. ‘And this critique will be genealogical in the sense that it will [...] separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think’.<sup>32</sup>

Foucault underscores the possibility of the elephant in the room in modern day democracies as something that oscillates in the political space through such historico-political discourses which is susceptible to be absorbed in the institutions and capillaries of power. What Foucault delineates is a problematization of power and the subjection of individuals in contemporary biopolitical regimes. Although power is something that contributes to the formation of subjects, he problematizes its role in diminishing human agency in a disciplinary society where docile bodies are violently subservient to the sovereigns’ presence and play over life and death. With regards to the criticism hurled against him by critics such as Habermas which questions the possibility of freedom due to the ubiquitous presence of power, Foucault responds succinctly and clarifies that, “I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problematiques*. My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do.”<sup>33</sup> The challenge we face is that the potentially bellicose and oppressive state seeks to claim legitimacy not simply by acting according to security imperatives or on behalf of a people, but in the name of a national ideal.

Foucault’s emphasis on the possibility of human autonomy emerges in the context of a re-emerging presence of the Hobbesian-Sovereign, a Leviathan which devours the political space of participation and recognition in our current post-9/11 social and political landscape. This cancer can be observed not only on the level of the body and as to what forces control it, but on the level of the psyche as such rationality manifests in the

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New York Press, 1997). p. 226

<sup>31</sup> See Andreas Folkers, “Daring the Truth : Foucault , Parrhesia and the Genealogy of Critique,” 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276414558885>.

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*. p.46

<sup>33</sup> Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. p. 256

form of dangerous discourses. It is through the practice of speech that Foucault argues that such possibilities reverberate as the veracity of the one who speaks is challenged and determined in a public space. The practice of *parrhesia* allows us to take political agendas with a grain of salt against a power that thwarts its force upon us and proclaim, as Foucault stated, we do not want to be governed like that.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Foucault, *Fearless Speech*.

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