

THE NIHILISTIC AFFIRMATION OF LIFE:  
 BIOWPOWER AND BIOPOLITICS  
 IN *THE WILL TO KNOWLEDGE*

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I can only respond by saying that I am simply Nietzschean, and I try to see, on a number of points, and to the extent that it is possible, with the aid of Nietzsche's text—but also with anti-Nietzschean theses (which are nevertheless Nietzschean!)—what can be done in this or that domain. I'm not looking for anything else but I'm really searching for that.

Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality' in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 251

"Moreover, I hate everything which merely instructs me without increasing or directly quickening my activity."

Goethe, cited by Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 7

INTRODUCTION

In 'A Preface to Transgression',<sup>1</sup> an essay first published in 1963, Foucault sought to situate the historical specificity of the "contemporary experience" of sexuality in relation to the phenomenon of the "death of God" and the correlative realisation of the "originary finitude" of modern subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> In itself this essay was considered sufficiently important to have been included in the second volume of the *Essential Works of Foucault*, the principle behind which was to include those writings—outside of the published books and the lecture courses—"central to the evolution of Foucault's thought".<sup>3</sup> Paradoxically, given the express intention of the editors of the *Essential Works*, 'A Preface to Transgression' has not attracted much attention from commentators or critics, at least not in terms of its treatment of sexuality. Doubtless in part this is because its concern with the contemporary experience of sexuality was eclipsed by the latter, and more substantial, introduction to *The History of Sexuality*, now published in English—as in French—under the title *The Will to Knowledge*, and which has had an enormous impact on contemporary thought in terms of its identification and analysis of what Foucault termed "biopolitics". Certainly the explicitly philosophical themes of 'A Preface to Transgression' appear incompatible with the analysis of sexuality developed by Foucault in the later work in terms of an "analytics of power". Whilst I do not want to look at 'A Preface to Transgression' itself, my aim here is to suggest that despite Foucault never explicitly returning to those themes in the *History of Sexuality*, there is nevertheless an underlying continuity between this essay and the later, genealogical work on sexuality.

For the Foucault of the first volume of *The Will to Knowledge* it is most immediately a certain relation to *life*, and not the relation to death and finitude as was the case in the earlier essay, that conditions the contemporary experience of sexuality. This becomes apparent in the fifth, and final, part of the book. The first four parts of *The Will to Knowledge* prepare for the specific studies that Foucault originally intended to form the substantive

core of *The History of Sexuality*. They do so by disengaging the treatment of sexuality from what Foucault termed ‘the repressive hypothesis’, and in its place provide the outline of a positive “‘analytics’ of power” (Foucault, 82)<sup>4</sup> which would have informed the planned—but unwritten—studies of the historical constitution of the sexuality of “children, women, and ‘perverts’”.<sup>5</sup> In the fifth part of *The Will to Knowledge*, entitled ‘Right of Death and Power over Life’, Foucault moves beyond the more methodological considerations of the earlier parts to offer an outline of an historical genealogy of the mechanisms of power operative in the West. He identifies a “profound transformation” of these mechanisms since the Classical age in relation to the exercise of power over life and death. Up until the Classical age, power, Foucault argues, typically took the form of the exercise of a sovereign “right to take life or let live”, whilst since the Classical age power has been exercised as the “right of the social body to ensure, maintain, or develop its life” (Foucault, 136). It is, one supposes, within this framework that Foucault wanted to situate the histories of particular sexualities he originally planned to undertake.<sup>6</sup>

What I want to ask here, is how we are to understand the displacement in Foucault’s work that turns the question of the modern experience of sexuality from a certain relation to death towards a certain relation to life. My contention is that if there is indeed a break—or better, a breach or opening (for it is not a matter of an absolute separation)—between the problematic of the two works, between, that is, the explicitly philosophical thesis that the contemporary experience of sexuality must be understood in relation to the death of God and the thesis that it should be understood in relation to the concerted and positive exercise of power over life, this breach only serves to better preserve what is perhaps the fundamental mark and problem of our age, a problem that irrupts into the open with the death of God: *nihilism*.<sup>7</sup>

In order to do this I direct my analysis towards the concept of biopower that Foucault develops in *The Will to Knowledge*, and which for him designates the operation of power over life. The stakes of such a reflection are clarified by both Giorgio Agamben and Antonio Negri. For Agamben, “the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of the *polis*—the politicisation of bare life as such—constitutes the decisive event of modernity, and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought”.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, for Negri, the concepts of biopower and biopolitics are central to any political reflection—and critique—of contemporary society, since *bios*—or life itself—has entered “into the field of power and become a major stake therein”.<sup>9</sup> At issue, then, is the fate of the political in the current age. My intention is to show that Foucault identifies the political—and thus historico-philosophical—paradox of biopower, inasmuch as this productive power over life is, in its affirmation of life, essentially life denying, or that it is, in short, *nihilistic*. This will, on the one hand, allow me to counter the tendency, identified and criticised by Negri, to “read, at the heart of biopolitics, a kind of positivistic vitalism”.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, it will also allow me to show that there is, for Foucault at least, an intrinsic connection between biopolitics and thanatopolitics—a politics of death—a connection which does not, as Negri suggests it does, exclude “a true political affirmation of life” by offering a naturalised understanding of life that “strips it of all political power”, and reducing it to “a heap of flesh and bones”.<sup>11</sup>

The essay has four parts: in the first part, I identify the influence of Nietzsche on Foucault’s work, an influence that it is necessary to acknowledge in order to appreciate the significance of what Foucault says about biopolitics; in the second part I examine Foucault’s concept of power; in the third I examine the concept of biopower; in the fourth part I consider the relation between biopower, the power over life, and the historico-philosophical phenomenon of nihilism.

## 1. FOUCAULT/NIETZSCHE

At the end of the introductory chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, the first of his “genealogical” works,<sup>12</sup> Foucault, reflecting in advance, as it were, on the remainder of the book, announces that it is his intention to write a “history” of the prison. This intention is not motivated, he assures the reader, by an interest in the past for its own sake. Rather, such an endeavour is, for Foucault, part of the attempt to write a “history of the present”. It is difficult not to hear in this an echo of Nietzsche’s denunciation of the “historical malady” in the second *Untimely Meditation*, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*.<sup>13</sup> There Nietzsche criticises the obsession with

an objective—and thus disinterested—history that, in his eyes, characterised the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For Nietzsche, the supposition that the past can be known objectively and for its own sake, by an intellect that apprehends it much as the scientist apprehends an object, is to asphyxiate life itself, elevating the intellect outside of life in order to know it, and thus denying the knower any effective relation to history. Nevertheless, insofar as life is active it must, for Nietzsche, be grasped in its becoming, and so it must be known historically. An effective understanding of history, however, is one that furthers life in its activity, comprehending its becoming from the perspective of becoming and not being or, in other words, understanding life from the perspective of life. It is this that necessitates undertaking what Foucault calls “a history of the present”, grasping the present in its contingency, unsettling it from its prejudices and exploding their hold on reality, understanding how we have become what we are rather than importing our prejudices on to the past, in the guise of their being eternal truths apprehended by a supra-historical intellect. Thus, for Foucault, the motivation of history is, to borrow Nietzsche’s words, “to have an untimely effect”, “to act against the age and so have an effect on the age to the advantage, it is to be hoped, of a coming age”.<sup>14</sup>

I shall come back in a moment to the question of this understanding of life in its becoming—or what I have otherwise termed the attempt to grasp life from the perspective life—in relation to Foucault’s concern with power. For it is only by understanding the philosophical necessity behind that concern with power that it is possible to understand the political significance of Foucault’s work, and by extension obtain a proper appreciation of Foucault’s concern with biopolitics. First, however, it is necessary to give a preliminary justification for invoking Nietzsche here. Indeed, it is important to recognise—*contra* the claims that Foucault writes under a Kantian inspiration<sup>15</sup>—the presence of Nietzsche throughout Foucault’s work if one is to understand its philosophical significance.

*The History of Madness*, first published in French in 1961, not only ends by invoking the example of Nietzsche (along with Van Gogh and Artaud) in order to situate the fate of modernity in relation to madness, but is also, from beginning to end, written under the inspiration of the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy*. As Foucault puts it in the original introduction: “the following study will only be the first, and probably the easiest, in this long line of enquiry which, beneath the sun of the great Nietzschean quest, would confront the dialectics of history with the immobile structures of the tragic”.<sup>16</sup> A little later, in two interviews given in 1966, Foucault once again affirms the epochal significance of Nietzsche, and accordingly his centrality to his own work. In the earlier of the two, Foucault argues that if, in certain respects, Nietzsche is a man of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he has generally “brilliantly advanced our epoch”.<sup>17</sup> In the latter, he remarks that for Nietzsche “the philosopher was the one who diagnosed the state of thought. We can, then, envisage two types of philosopher: those who open new paths of thought, like Heidegger; and those who play, in some part, the role of archaeologist, who study the space in which thought deploys itself, and thus the conditions of this thought, its mode of constitution”.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the cumulative force of these remarks, in which Foucault insists that Nietzsche, as Derrida might have put it, “marks out the place and the age”<sup>19</sup>—our age—would be enough to establish his centrality to Foucault’s work. However, it is undoubtedly the case—and much more widely recognised—that Nietzsche informs the works of Foucault’s “genealogical” period—*Discipline and Punish*, and *The Will to Knowledge*. The former is concerned to inscribe, in Nietzschean fashion, the formation of the “modern soul” within a genealogy of punishment, and thus in terms of the political investment of the body, whilst the latter advertises its Nietzschean filiation by its very title. As I have said above, the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, break with the original plan, set out in *The Will to Knowledge*, and in a certain sense abandon a genealogical method in favour of studying the “problematisation” of sexuality in antiquity, and in particular what Foucault calls “the arts of existence”, i.e. those “actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria”.<sup>20</sup> As tempting as it might be to construe this break from the original conception of *The History of Sexuality* as a break with Nietzsche, such a temptation should be avoided, since it is possible to construe the history of an art of self-fashioning in antiquity, from which philosophy itself arose, as Nietzschean in inspiration, recovering or excavating the “aesthetic meaning” of existence.

I am aware that these remarks are more likely to be taken as suggestive rather than conclusive, and unfortunately I do not have the space here to develop them further.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, by drawing attention to what I see as the constant presence of Nietzsche in Foucault's thought, I am aware that I might be thought to be suggesting that Foucault is Nietzsche's epigone. However, this would be to misconceive what is at issue here, which is not the tracing of influences and opinions, of what one thinker has taken from another, has used or abused, understood or misunderstood. Rather, what is at issue is the affirmation of the historical effectiveness of philosophy itself, which has from its inception with the Greeks, determined first the existence of the Occident and then the reality of the world itself.<sup>22</sup> Thus by stressing the importance of Nietzsche to Foucault, I am claiming that, for Foucault, Nietzsche's thought is central to any reflection on the historical and political situation of contemporary existence. Undoubtedly, this is how we should understand Foucault's affirmation, given here as an epigraph to this essay, that he is "simply Nietzschean", even when developing "anti-Nietzschean theses (which are nevertheless Nietzschean!)".<sup>23</sup>

Principally, the centrality of Nietzsche to any reflection on the historical and political situation arises in terms both of Nietzsche's challenge to transcendental philosophy (or more broadly, and to use a Nietzschean term, to "Platonism"), and also his attendant identification of the world as "will to power".<sup>24</sup> Certainly, in saying this I am making no claim to originality *per se*: with regard to Foucault's account of power Deleuze recognized the former's "profound Nietzscheanism",<sup>25</sup> whilst Negri has drawn attention to the Nietzschean roots of the concept of biopolitics.<sup>26</sup> However, what I am insisting on here is that through his relation to Nietzsche, Foucault is able to address the contemporary political predicament of modern humanity from the perspective of life itself, rather than from the perspectiveless perspective of the *cosmotheoros*—that disinterested observer—that is nothing other than the legacy of metaphysical thinking which lies at the root of the world-historical phenomenon of nihilism. And it is this which constitutes the philosophical rigour of his thinking of power and biopolitics.

## 2. FOUCAULT'S CONCEPTION OF POWER

### a. *What Power Is Not*

For Nietzsche to think the world non-metaphysically means to think it non-Platonically, since it is with Plato that there emerges that distinction between the apparent world and its truth, which is the essence of metaphysics. It is precisely this distinction that fatefully condemns humanity to nihilism, instituting a division between action and comprehension, *praxis* and *theoria*, which finally issues in an incapacity to act—that is to effectively shape and form life historically. In this sense, what I am here calling nihilism is understood in Nietzschean terms as the becoming *passive* of the human being. To overcome Platonism requires Nietzsche to think the world and what is, in terms of the will, which as will is intrinsically will to power. In other words, to think the world and what is as will to power is to understand the world from the perspective of life: it is to grasp the world immanently, since the world—and everything in it—as it imposes itself on us, as it affects us, appears as activity or force (and even passivity itself is understood as a modality of activity, that is as being merely re-active), and because in its turn a force insofar as it is active is immediately its expression, and nothing else.

In the lecture course from 1973-74, presented under the title *Psychiatric Power*, Foucault follows Nietzsche in asserting the primacy of power. Situating the lecture course in relation to *The History of Madness*, Foucault states what he now sees as the fundamental defect of that work, which was "still an analysis of representations".<sup>27</sup> Now, however, and surpassing the early work, it is a matter of seeing "if it is possible to make a radically different analysis", starting "from an apparatus of power", which would entail seeing to what extent such an apparatus produces "statements, discourses and consequently, all the forms of representation that may then derive from it".<sup>28</sup> And, at bottom, this means tracing, tracking, and delimiting the "will to truth". But, if there is indeed evident here that "profound Nietzscheanism" of which Deleuze spoke, it is necessary to ask how we are to understand that Nietzscheanism in its concretion—a question that, given what I have so far said we can understand to be asking how we are to understand Foucault's anti-platonic, anti-metaphysical, conception of power. Or, and to put the question in more positive terms: how does Foucault analyse power insofar as it is active?

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In *The Will to Knowledge* Foucault begins his analysis by contending that since the Middle Ages the West has predominantly understood power negatively. Power was characteristically seen as a “means of deduction” (Foucault, 136), domination and repression. This understanding of power was, Foucault says, developed in relation to the jurisdiction of the sovereign, and was modelled on Roman law, in particular the *patria potestas*, the patriarch’s ‘power over’, which accorded to the father of the Roman family the right to dispose of the life of his children and slaves. It was based on the principle that what the sovereign gave, he or she could take away. Figured forth in the prerogatives of royalty, power typically took the form of “a subtraction mechanism, a right to appropriate a portion of the wealth, a tax of products, goods and services, labour and blood, levied on the subjects” (Foucault, 136). Power, as Foucault says, in this instance was seen as a right of seizure, of ownership. It could be said, then, that according to this way of thinking, power was conceived of *principally* and *substantively*: power, which was a power to command, to demand and constrain, was an attribute or possession of the sovereign being. The sovereign disposed of his or her power in order to appropriate, to take from those other subjects, whom he or she effectively subjugated, those things that properly belonged to him or her. Power was, then, essentially disabling; it was, Foucault says, “anti-energy” (Foucault, 85).

However, Foucault goes on to argue that since the Classical Age, power has ceased to be typically exercised in this way. Rather than operating subtractively and negatively, power operates positively, affirmatively. As Foucault somewhat economically puts it: power no longer characteristically operates as the power to say ‘no’; it is not something that is “incapable of doing anything, except to render what it dominates incapable of doing anything” (Foucault, 85); instead, it is increasingly and more insistently *productive*, enabling, and generative. Power is dynamic. “Deduction”, as Foucault writes, “has tended to be no longer the major form of power but merely one element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize and organize the forces under it” (Foucault, 136), extracting time and labour from bodies, for example, rather than confiscating commodities and property.

Essentially the form that power took prior to the Classical Age was juridical, and according to Foucault, with one or two notable exceptions, the way in which power has been represented, and continues to be represented, is in accordance with this. As he says:

Whether one attributes to it the form of the prince who formulates rights, of the father who forbids, of the censor who enforces silence [... it is] centred on the statement of the law and the operation of taboos. All the modes of domination, submission, and subjugation are ultimately reduced to an effect of obedience (Foucault, 85).

At bottom, then, for Foucault, “despite the differences in epochs and objectivities, the representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy” and, as he says, “in political thought and analysis, we still have not yet cut off the head of the king” (Foucault, 88-9).

In *The Will to Knowledge* Foucault goes on to develop a detailed exposition of what he means by power. Turning towards an explicit and direct consideration of power in the second chapter of the fourth part of the book, Foucault begins once again, not by advancing a positive definition of power, but by situating what he means by negation, claiming that “the word *power* is apt to lead to a number of misunderstandings” (Foucault, 92), misunderstandings which, bearing on its identity, form and unity, concern its being. “By power”, he says:

I do not mean ‘Power’ as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens to a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose entire effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body. The analysis, made in terms of power, must not assume that the sovereignty of the state, the form of the law, or the over-all unity of a domination are given at the outset; rather, these are only the terminal forms power takes. (Foucault, 92)

In sum, then, for Foucault, power is not to be identified with a set of institutions which takes the form of legal—as opposed to illegal or non-legitimised violence—and that is given as a unified system of domination.

It is necessary to recognise in these negative formulations, which are as much a declaration of intent as a statement of facts, an anticipation of an alternative to the metaphysical determination of power that has predominated in political and philosophical thought. The metaphysical determination of power is a conception that thinks power negatively because it thinks it *principally* and *substantively*. Unable to see in power power's own active reality, it views it as the expression of some other, ontic, reality that lies behind it, controls it, and that is only able to use it as a means of appropriation, enforcing its power negatively. Power is traditionally thought to function negatively because it is in essence thought negatively. From a Foucauldian perspective, the paradox of the traditional, metaphysical, determination of power is that it issues in an abstract conception of power because it thinks power from a too concrete basis, as the expression or attribute of a substantial entity. By contrast, one might say, to adopt what is an admittedly un-Foucauldian register, that Foucault is concerned to develop a properly *ontological*, rather than ontic, analytics of power. And this will be an analysis that seeks to grasp power in terms of what *it can do*. To put it in Nietzschean terms, for Foucault it is a matter of viewing power from the perspective of its becoming. In this respect what is required, what Foucault seeks to develop, and what is already implicit in his analysis of the transformation in the mechanisms of power that I have outlined above, is a *de-substantivised* account of power.

#### *b. What Power Is*

In a short essay, entitled 'The Subject and Power', Foucault once more situates his account of power negatively, this time invoking, and opposing, the presupposition that "power is something that exists with its own distinct origin, basic nature, and manifestations."<sup>29</sup> The distrust, or suspension, of such an assumption requires that Foucault once more displace a series of metaphysical determinations. It is, he somewhat economically writes, necessary "to grant a certain privileged position to the question of the 'how'"<sup>30</sup> with regard to power. Certainly, this is not in order to eliminate the questions of 'what' and 'why', but rather in order to "imagine a power that unifies in itself a what, a why, and a how."<sup>31</sup> Of these three determinations of the being of power, what it is, why it is and how it is, essence or origin, cause, and actuality, it is the latter, its 'how' that predominates.

For Foucault, then, the being of power is to be grasped from out of its 'how', or more precisely, the 'how' of power presses to the fore in the determination of the being of power in so far as the 'what' and the 'why' and the 'how' are given together in the 'how' of power. For this reason, power is often identified with *force* by Foucault, in as much as force is effective, or active, and thus primarily determined in and by its 'how'. It is also for this reason that Foucault says that instead of being understood as the possession of a subject, disposing of it at will, power must be thought of as inherently relational, as a relation between forces or actions. This is because a force is known through its effects. That is, it is grasped through, and is nothing outside, of its being-at-work, and is thus inherently active. And because a force or an action is known—or perhaps even more strongly, simply is—only through its effects, it is known—or is—only through its power to affect other forces or actions (to which it is thus intrinsically related) and to be affected by other actions.

In brief, then, it can be said that for Foucault power manifests itself phenomenally. It is nothing other than its expression in the agonistic relations between forces or actions. Here it is necessary to recognise something of the circularity of Foucault's own endeavour, a circularity to which Foucault himself was not oblivious. As he remarks in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, the analysis of power that he develops involves "two endeavours that refer back to one another" (Foucault, 90): on the one hand, it is necessary to form "a different grid of historical decipherment" (Foucault, 90) by starting from a different theory of power, a theory that posits it in its tactical, strategic and technological variety; and simultaneously to advance towards a different conception of power through an examination of historical material. This circle is no sign of the invalidity of Foucault's work, but the mark of its profoundly historical character.

To return to the proclamation of the death of the king, or what elsewhere Foucault calls “the mutation of the mechanisms of power.” Like the death of God, the death of the king is for Foucault an event the significance of which we by and large remain unaware, even whilst it determines our very existence. In other words, we exist in a world in which power no longer functions in terms of monarchy, and yet, thinking merely of this as a transformation of the way in which political constitutions are organised, we fail to understand the essential nature of the political as such. Symptomatically, this in itself is indicative of the nihilism of contemporary politics, which thereby misunderstands the political ground of modern life, namely that power no longer operates substantively, and can no longer be understood substantively.

In relation to this, it is important to recognise the radicality of Foucault’s insights. By detaching the analysis of power from what earlier I called the substantive model, by de-substantivising power, and replacing it with the recognition that power is inherently dynamic, and nothing outside of its effects or affects, it is necessary to recognise that when Foucault addresses the transformations in the exercise of power, he is not speaking simply of a transformation of the mechanisms of power, in the sense that the way in which power operates is transformed but what power is remains essentially the same. Rather, he is speaking of a transformation of power itself, for in acting, power enacts itself: power empowers itself. That being the case, the history of power’s empowering itself, would also be the history of the West, and the transformation of power a transformation that reveals the historical bearing of the Occident, realising its inherent nihilism.

### 3. BIOPOWER

In the preceding section I sought to show the radicality of Foucault’s analysis of power, and argued that it is not possible to dissociate Foucault’s claims regarding power from his analysis of the historical modes and forms of power. For this reason it is a mistake to see in Foucault a sociology of power-relations in the modern world. Rather, Foucault’s “microphysics” of power is a philosophical concern with the becoming of power grasped in its concretion in various practices, which are, as power’s self-expression, the reality of power as such.

It is now necessary to turn to a consideration of the analysis of that modality of power that for Foucault typifies the post-Classical West, and in relation to which he proposed to situate his analysis of sexuality: biopower. Although Foucault situates the emergence of what he calls biopower in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it is, he claims, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that it becomes one of the basic manifestations and modalities of power within the political sphere, expressive of the essence of the modern age. With the term ‘biopower’ Foucault designates the set of mechanisms, techniques and technologies through which the basic biological features of the human species become the object of political strategies in modern Western societies. Biopower is, then, for Foucault the application of power to the human considered as a living being, the application of power to the human taken as a species being.

To gain a clearer appreciation of Foucault’s point, it is necessary to recall that prior to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* Foucault’s genealogies of the modern modalities of power had concentrated on identifying what he called, most notably in *Discipline and Punish*, “disciplinary technologies”.<sup>32</sup> These are techniques that emerge in seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe, and which are directed towards the individual human body understood as a machine, composed, or better, decomposable, into its various moving parts, which can then be rendered capable of performing work. According to Foucault, these technologies sought, through various regimens and measures, to rule a multiplicity of men, that is, to impose a particular mode of being on men, by dissolving that multiplicity in to individual bodies, and at the level of the individual body, optimize its capabilities, extorting from it various forces, increasing its utility and docility, and integrating it into systems of efficient and economic controls. Disciplinary techniques of power include all those apparatuses and institutions which ensure the distribution of individual bodies in space and time, and which organise around these bodies a whole field of visibility, ordering them or rendering them orderable, in institutions such as universities, secondary schools, military barracks, and workshops.

It is against and in relation to these disciplinary techniques that form an “anatomy-politics of the human body” (Foucault, 139), that the techniques and technologies of biopower are to be understood. Such techniques and technologies focused not on controlling and ordering the individual anatomical body, but rather on the knowledge, intervention and regulation of the species body, imbued as it is with “the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes” (Foucault, 139). Like disciplinary techniques and procedures, the technologies of biopower are addressed to a multiplicity, but they are addressed to that multiplicity in so far as it forms a global mass affected by the biological processes of life itself: birth and death, health and illness. To the techniques of discipline that came to hold sway over the human body and which are individualising are added the techniques and technologies of biopower which, on the contrary, but in a complimentary way, are massifying, directed towards humans in the genetic and species sense. As Foucault puts it, biopower involves:

A set of processes such as the ratio of births to deaths, the rate of reproduction, the fertility of the population and so-on. It is these processes—the birth rate, the mortality rate, longevity, and so-on— together with a whole series of economic and political problems which [...] become biopolitics’ first objects of knowledge and the targets it seeks to control.<sup>33</sup>

Biopower is thus tied to the emergence of the discipline of statistical demography, and there begins the quantification of the phenomena of birth-rate, longevity, the reproductive rates and fertility of a given population, its state of health, patterns of diet and habitation. Biopower is ontogenetic: it brings into being the phenomenon of population, rendering it visible and knowable, see-able and say-able.

It is in this respect that we begin to see most clearly the way in which biopower operates. The events with which biopower is concerned, over which it exercises its power, such as birth rates and life expectancy are phenomena that occur within a population over a certain period of time, which have to be studied over a certain period of time, and on which power can only intervene over a certain period of time. Consequently, when biopower acts it does so at a certain remove: it is concerned with phenomena which, taken in themselves, are aleatory and unpredictable, but which can be regulated at a general level. Through statistical forecasting and estimation, by establishing constants and trends, biopower avails itself of the means of intervening and, if not controlling absolutely, rendering a certain outcome more or less probable, more or less likely or unlikely: an increase in life expectancy, a lowering of mortality rates, a rise in birth-rates, and so-on.

In sum, both disciplinary technologies and the techniques and mechanisms of biopower are forms of power over the body. The former, disciplinary technologies, centre on the individual body: they treat it as a machine, considering it as a being consisting of parts, organized in a certain fashion, requiring energy in order to operate and capable of producing certain effects, that is, of working. Decomposing it into its parts, and subjecting them to training, to discipline, it seeks to render the body both docile and utile. Biopower, on the other hand, focuses on the body as the vehicle of species life. Given the nature of the phenomena with which it is concerned it is regulatory rather than disciplinary. It is:

a technology which brings together the mass effects characteristic of a population, which tries to control the series of random events that can occur in a living mass, a technology which tries to predict the probability of those events (by modifying it, if necessary), or at least to compensate for their effects. [It] is a technology which aims to establish a sort of homeostasis, not by training individuals, but by achieving an overall equilibrium that protects the security of the whole from internal dangers.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. BIOPOWER, LIFE, DEATH AND NIHILISM

In the 1975–76 lecture course ‘*Society Must be Defended*’, Foucault succinctly summarised the two-fold orientation of power that I have just outlined, declaring that:

To say that power took possession of life in the nineteenth century, or to say that power at least takes life under its care in the nineteenth century, is to say that it has, thanks to the play of technologies of discipline on the one hand and technologies of regulation on the other, succeeded in covering the whole surface that lies between the organic and the biological, between body and population.<sup>35</sup>

The point of Foucault's analysis has been understood in two ways. First, and as Foucault himself says, he sought to reverse the traditional understanding of modernity in which the exercise of power in both philosophical and political terms has been seen as overwhelmingly seeking to deny the reality of the body in favour of the soul, consciousness, ideality. In fact, as Foucault shows, nothing is more material, physical, corporeal, than the exercise of power in modernity. Second, the discovery of biopower and in particular biopolitics is taken to affirm that there is increasingly an identity between man as a political being and man as a living being: the furtherance of pure life has increasingly become the sole object and end of all politics. What I now want to show is how the bio-political affirmation of pure—or mere—life both transforms and reveals the historical being of the Occident. In order to do this I will turn to the matter that gave this essay its title, namely the question of the relation between life and death under the bio-political regime.

For Foucault, the emergence of biopower is instrumental to the development of capitalism. Crucially, what occurred in Western countries in the eighteenth century was, according to Foucault, “the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power” (Foucault, 141–42). Certainly, the biological had always exerted a pressure on the history of cultures and civilisations; but the drama of its history had always been a drama of death, a drama played out on its vastest stage through the forms of famine and epidemic. The economic developments of the early classical age allowed some relief from these threats, whilst the knowledge concerned with life, permitting a relative control over life and the aversion of the threat of death. The hold of death was checked. In the space opened-up power and knowledge were able to assume greater responsibility for life processes, and to undertake to modify and control them. “The fact of living”, Foucault writes, “was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge's field of control and power's sphere of intervention” (Foucault, 142). Knowledge-power became biopower: a series of mechanisms, techniques and technologies that transformed human life.

Whilst the great institutions of the state ensured the maintenance of the relations of production, biopolitics and anatomo-politics as *techniques of power* ensured the development of the economic processes and the forces that supported those processes. That is, if the disciplinary techniques that emerged in the classical age facilitated the insertion of bodies into the processes of industrial production, ordering and mechanising bodies, increasing their productivity, maximising their utility without at the same time making them harder to govern, then the techniques and technologies of biopower enabled the adjustment of the population to the same economic processes. However, where the focus of disciplinary techniques is to train the individual by working at the level of the body, the focus of biopower is upon regularising the basic phenomena affecting species life. In this sense, biopower is not only concerned with demographics, but also with a whole series of related phenomena which affect, or better incapacitate, individuals, rendering them incapable of productive activity, of labouring in order to obtain the basic conditions requisite for continuing to live, such as accidents, illnesses and old-age. Thus as an expression of biopower there is the wide-spread development of such measures as “insurance, individual and collective savings, and safety measures”,<sup>36</sup> all of which were not mere epiphenomena of capitalism, but intrinsic to its possibility.

It is in relation to the development of biopower and biopolitics that one must situate Marxism, and it is an index of both the greatness and the limitation of Marx that his thought can be so situated. The political project that is formulated by Marx challenges the general system of power, not by articulating a return to former rights, or by the ideal of the restoration of a Golden Age; nor so much by articulating the coming of a kingdom of the poor, but by demanding ‘life’, “understood as the basic needs, man's concrete essence, the realisation of his potential, a plenitude of the possible” (Foucault, 145). If this was a mark of Marx's greatness it is because it was

a concrete intervention within the field of forces that were coming to propel the political agenda of Western countries, since “life as a political object was taken at face value and turned back against the system that was bent on controlling it” (Foucault, 145). If it was a mark of Marx’s limitation it is because the political and strategic efficacy entailed a certain blindness to the basic dynamic that made it possible, Marx being unable to grasp the level at which history and the political was being effectively shaped.

As far as I am aware Foucault does not himself explicitly make this judgement about the limitations of Marx’s thought, or at least he does not do so in *The Will to Knowledge*. Whilst I think there are good grounds for supposing the claim to be warranted in terms of Foucault’s work I have not yet said enough to support my own making it. Before doing so, and in order to do so, it is necessary to remark that it is not a matter of making a judgement about the adequacy or inadequacy of Marx’s thought, since what is at issue is what Foucault called the *epistemic* conditions of that thought, that is, the “archaic level which makes possible both knowledge itself and the mode of being of what is to be known”.<sup>37</sup> It is the intrinsic epistemic finitude of thought that at once makes Marx’s discourse true, effective and limited. What is at issue in this limitation, then, is not a cognitive or philosophical inadequacy that could be overcome by thought alone. Rather, it is an historical limitation that binds Marx’s work to the fate of the political in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In order to draw this out, or at least provide the grounds that might justify such a judgement, it is necessary to turn once more to the question of life and death, this time less to situate what Foucault says about biopower and biopolitics, but to make clear the nature of the historical and political consequences that emerge from it.

Traditionally, power has always measured itself in relation to death. The ancient *patria potestas*, the power of the patriarch as a ‘power over’, was, Foucault observes, essentially the power to dispose of the life of his children and slaves, the power *to take life* or *let live*. So too in Plato, prior to the Roman formulation of the right of the despot to demand the life of his slaves and children, the individual was empowered, intellectually as well as politically, through a direct confrontation with death. In the *Phaedo* Socrates performs all the necessary religious observances prior to his execution, including the versification of Aesop’s fables, because his *daimon* had always instructed him to make music. Whilst he had thought philosophy the highest form of music, he is now not sure if he performs these religious duties because in death he is returned to the gods whose possession he is. For Socrates, then, in death we return to those whose subjects and possessions we are; the direct sovereignty of the state gives way to the direct sovereignty of the gods. Nevertheless, if in this sense death deprives us of power, in another sense, for Socrates, it does not: it is by confronting death that we are empowered, enjoying or coming to enjoy an authority over ourselves in the sense that we divest ourselves of the despotic authority of the body, and place the soul in charge of itself.

This “characteristic privilege” of “sovereign power to decide life and death”, as Foucault puts it, was greatly diminished by the classical theoreticians. No longer could the sovereign exercise his power in an absolute way; the right to decide life and death was hedged and qualified. Only when his or her life was in danger could the sovereign demand the life of his or her subjects. If he or she were threatened by external enemies then the sovereign could demand that those over whom he or she ruled risk their life in defence of the state. On the other hand, if the sovereign’s subjects directly threatened his or her life, or his or her laws, then he or she could rightfully demand their life: punishing them by execution. Diminished or undiminished, qualified or absolute, the right to life and the right to death are dissymmetrical: “the sovereign exercised his right of life only by exercising his right to kill or by refraining from killing” (Foucault, 136). The power over life is effective only through death.

As part of the mutation that Foucault describes in terms of the emergence of biopower, a power that is “bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them” (Foucault, 136), there is a shift in the exercise of power over death and life. Instead of death-dealing, power becomes life-administering. The social body has the right to ensure, maintain or develop its life, and where the sovereign, or sovereign state, demands death this is always a demand issued in terms of, or with the aim of, the furtherance of life.

What happens, then, when the furtherance of life becomes an end-in-itself? For Foucault there is a profound shift in the nature of the political projects of the Occident: “for millennia”, he remarks, “man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question” (Foucault, 143). As is well-known, for Aristotle, the end of politics is the good-life, but (and as has been pointed out by many thinkers, Arendt and Agamben among them) he distinguishes between simple, natural life and its good or goods, and political life and its good.<sup>38</sup> The good of simple, natural life concerns merely the pleasant, the good of political life concerns goodness and justice. The good of simple, natural life, that is, the pleasant, is a good shared by all animals; the good of political life, goodness as such, and justice, is peculiar to man, who is *zoon politikon*.

We can, then, answer the question about what happens when the furtherance of life becomes an end-in-itself, by way of another question: what happens when human life identifies the good-life with the prolongation of life itself? Or, and at the risk of piling question on question: what is the condition of the political when its condition, in the Foucauldian sense, is simply the furtherance of mere life? In short, the answer is that what happens to the political in these circumstances is that it falls out of its own essential element, and is incapable of maintaining itself as what it is. Foucault’s invocation of the Aristotelian definition of the human being as *zoon politikon* and its transformation is instructive. The Greeks, Aristotle among them, distinguished between the political life, which was concerned with a good that did not relate to necessity, but to freedom, and the life of the household, the *oikos*, in which the role of the *despotes* was to secure the necessities for the sustenance and reproduction of mere life. With the transformation of which Foucault speaks, the political declines into the merely economic: the sustenance of a life of freedom—both the precondition and the *telos* of the political for the Greeks—becomes supplanted by the *administration* of mere, biological, life.

Although to my knowledge Foucault rarely, if ever, speaks of or in terms of what, following Nietzsche, philosophy has designated as the nihilism of Occidental history, here we find something that it would not be wrong to designate by such a name, if it is right to maintain that the political, for the Greeks, was one of the highest ways of life (a *bioi* in the true sense of the word), grounded on and grounding human freedom. For this movement, this transformation, is nothing other than the devaluation of the highest values, and the expression of a political will that wills the end of politics. Such a will heralds the advent of what Nietzsche called the “last man”, that type of human who solely wills his own preservation, and thus wills not to will. Doubtless this is why Foucault is moved to conclude that what emerges from out of this transformation of politics, power, and the relation between power and life and death is “a kind of bestialization of man achieved through the most sophisticated political techniques.”<sup>39</sup> In a sense it would be to press a point, but in effect this is what constitutes the historical limitation of Marx’s work, for Marx is unable to see this devaluation of the political, and is not himself a political thinker, but an economic one.

I can underline this devaluation of politics, the nihilism of the fate of the political in the Occident, which Foucault’s work traces, by coming back, once more, to the question of life and death. As Arendt has pointed out, for the Greeks entry into the political realm required that one be prepared to put one’s life at stake; one attained to freedom by risking one’s life, first because, leaving the realm of the household in order to attend to the affairs of the city, was to leave behind that realm in which one secured the necessity requisite to survival, and secondly—and doubtless for associated reasons—too great an attachment to life was a sign of *slavishness*.<sup>40</sup> Might one not say, then, that what emerges from out of a politics that is concerned with the preservation of life is – and this is an inappropriate term, given what I have just said, but I can think of no other—a politics of *ressentiment*, a truly re-active politics (and thus not a politics at all).

It is only by recognising this that it is possible to understand the paradox of the biopolitical. As Foucault remarks, if since the classical age, the mechanisms of power of the West have undergone a profound modification, seeking to generate forces, make them grow and ordering them, rather than functioning negatively, as a power of deduction; if, moreover, power has, in the form of biopolitics, become life-administering, it is nevertheless the case that “wars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century, and all things being

equal, never before did regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations” (Foucault, 136-7). However, and as Foucault argues:

This formidable power of death—and this is perhaps what accounts for part of its force and the cynicism with which it has so greatly expanded its limits—now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations. 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 mobilised for purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity (Foucault, 137).

One must see here, in relation to this justification for war, not so much some flimsy ideological masking of real intentions, but the real motives themselves, that is, the truth of modern politics itself. A politics premised on the mere preservation of life—which I have called above a politics of *ressentiment*—must, necessarily, turn to slaughter and genocide, since mere self-preservation entails a community, a common being, that can only premise its identity, its being-in-common, on the reduction of everything alien or other either to itself, or alternatively seek its destruction. The self-preservation of life, which has become the political telos of modernity, must inevitably preclude any form of hetero-affectation, and thus it becomes self-stultifying.

It is for this reason that Foucault posits a connection between biopolitics, biopower and the holocaust, for as he remarks: “for the first time in history, the possibilities of the social sciences are made known, and at once it becomes possible both to protect life and to authorise a holocaust.”<sup>41</sup> It is in this sense that Foucault can say that what are often regarded as the two pathological forms of power in the twentieth century, Fascism and Stalinism, are, despite their historical uniqueness, “not quite original”, for they “used and extended mechanisms already present in most other societies [... and] in spite of their own internal madness, they used to a large extent, the ideas and the devices of our political rationality.”<sup>42</sup> Certainly I do not want to be understood to be claiming that Fascism and Stalinism are identical, or that the differences between them are irrelevant, nor do I want to be taken to be claiming that Foucault would himself have been dismissive of the differences between them. Rather, what I am claiming is that, on the one hand, Foucault’s genealogical attention to the effectiveness of power allows us to distinguish the historical specificity of modern genocide. For rather than simply distinguishing it by the quantity of those killed, and the means by which such quantities of people were killed, Foucault allows us to grasp the essential transformation at issue, namely the political and philosophical transformation of the relation to life itself. As he argues “if genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population (Foucault, 137). On the other hand—and I take this to be equally important—here we find Foucault expressly arguing that “our political rationality”—liberal governmentality—is not extrinsic to genocide, totalitarianism, or despotism. Biopolitics is, then, intrinsically related to *thanatopolitics*. This is in sharp contrast to Negri,<sup>43</sup> who argues that “thanatopolitics is neither an internal alternative” to biopolitics, nor “a biopolitical ambiguity”, but its exact opposite, “an authoritarian transcendence, an apparatus of corruption”.<sup>44</sup> If Negri can make such an affirmation it is not because he has misread Foucault: his reading of Foucault is, in many respects, insightful and acute, and worthy of attention. Rather, it is because he wants to claim that linking biopolitics to thanatopolitics as I have done here is to “*overestimate biopower whilst underestimating the possibility of resistance*”.<sup>45</sup> Yet, the possibility of resistance is, for Negri, to be found in the spontaneous production of subjectivity that results from biopolitics, a claim that itself fundamentally confuses praxis, practical activity, with production, and which, as I have argued above, reproduces the nihilism of biopolitics as it tries to evoke some means of combating it by collapsing the political into the economic.

As Foucault remarks, wars have never been as bloody as in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That this occurs against the horizon of the birth of biopolitics and biopower, a power and politics bent on securing the furtherance of life is, then, less of a paradox than it might seem, for it is the expression of the nihilism of such

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a politics, one in which massacres, far from being diminished, have simply become “vital” (Foucault, 137). One might say, then, that both Fascism and Stalinism are, despite their differences, both expressions of a politics of despotism, a politics in which modern democracy itself takes the form of the despotic. Moreover, if to speak of a transformation of power is to speak of a transformation of the way in which power empowers itself, we must recognise that this is an historical transformation that is essentially futural; the empowering of power is, fundamentally, the destining of the future, one in which the future of the human is at stake. It might seem that to conclude in this way is to conclude without offering any alternative, or any means of finding an alternative to biopolitics. And yet, before it is possible to find a cure, it is necessary to understand what it is that makes us ill.

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## NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, 'A Preface to Transgression' in *Aesthetics: Method and Epistemology*. Ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, Volume One. Middlesex: Penguin, 2000, 69 – 87.
2. Jacques Derrida has highlighted the role of death and finitude in Foucault's work. See Derrida, "To Do Justice to Freud" in *Resistances: Of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf, et al. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998) 70 – 118. Quoting Foucault from the *Birth of the Clinic*, Derrida writes that the "Original finitude [of modern man] is a finitude that no longer arises out of the infinity of a divine presence. It now unfolds 'in the void left by the absence of the gods'", 105. This account is profoundly consonant with the analysis of the contemporary experience of sexuality that Foucault provides in 'A Preface to Transgression', and it makes clear the connection between the 'death of God' and the emergence of the question of 'originary finitude'. It is important to preserve the connection, since as Foucault has said elsewhere the notion of the death of God is not specific to Nietzsche, but is also to be found in Hegel and Feuerbach. Thus he writes: "we must be careful, because the notion of the death of God does not have the same meaning in Hegel, Feuerbach and Nietzsche. For Hegel, Reason takes the place of God, and it is the human spirit that develops little by little; for Feuerbach, God is the illusion that alienates man, but once rid of this illusion, it is Man who comes to realise his liberty. Finally, for Nietzsche, the death of God signifies the end of metaphysics, but God is not replaced by man, and the space remains empty." Michel Foucault, 'Philosophy and the Death of God' in *Michel Foucault, Religion and Culture*. Ed. Jeremy R. Carrette. New York: Routledge, 1999, 85. Cited in Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, 'The Aesthetic and Ascetic Dimensions of an Ethics of Self-fashioning: Nietzsche and Foucault', *Parrhesia*, No. 2, 2007, 46.
3. Paul Rabinow, 'Series Preface' in *Michel Foucault: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology, Essential Works of Foucault 1954—1984, Vol. 2*. Ed. J. Faubion., Middlesex: Penguin, 2000, p. x.
4. This and all parenthetical references are taken from Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*. Trans. Robert Hurley. Middlesex: Penguin, 1998.
5. Michel Foucault, 'Preface to *The History of Sexuality, Volume Two*' in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley et al. Essential Works of Foucault 1954 – 1984, Vol. 1. Middlesex: Penguin, 2000, 204.
6. The transformation from the sovereign exercise of power over death, to the exercise of power in order to further life led Foucault to formulate the concepts of biopolitics, biopower and governmentality. These themes are important not only in the development of Foucault's work in the latter half of the 1970s, but have also been widely taken up by others. In addition to Giorgio Agamben, who has made use of the notion of biopolitics in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998, see also, inter alia, Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007; Maurizio Lazzarato 'From Biopower to Biopolitics'. Trans. Ivan A. Ramirez in *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 13, Foucault: Madness/Sexuality/Biopolitics*. For Foucault's development of these concepts see the lecture courses "Society Must be Defended": *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975 – 1976*. Trans. D. Macey. New York: Picador, 2003; *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978*. Trans. Graham Burchell. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007; *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978 – 1979*. Trans. Graham Burchell. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.
7. As I indicate later, Foucault does not often refer to nihilism himself. However, it is a central theme of his work as Milchman and Rosenberg have shown in their article 'The Aesthetic and Ascetic Dimension of Self-fashioning'.
8. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 4.
9. Antonio Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop: For A New Grammar of Politics*. Trans. Noura Wedell. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(c), 2007, 29.
10. Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop*, 33.
11. To quote here in full the relevant passage from Negri: "The danger is to read, at the heart of biopolitics, a kind of positivist vitalism (and/or materialist: in fact, we might very well be faced with what Marx called a 'sad materialism'). We see this, for example, in certain recent interpretations of the political centrality of life, which read the biopolitical as a kind of confused, dangerous, and even destructive magma. This indicates a tendency towards thanatopolitics, a politics of death, rather than towards a true political affirmation of life. The shift towards thanatopolitics is, in reality, permitted and even bolstered by the great ambiguity of the word *life* itself. Under the guise of a biopolitical reflection, what we have is rather a biological and naturalising understanding of life that strips it of all political power. Life is reduced, at best, to a heap of flesh and bones. Up to what point does Heideggerian ontology find an essential and tragic resource in this passage from the *Zoe* to the *Bios*?" *Ibid.* I do not have the opportunity here to analyse in detail Negri's account of biopolitics, which he sees as central to the development of what he, after others, calls 'postmodernity'. In sum, however, what I am suggesting in this essay, via my engagement with Foucault, is that ultimately, and despite its commitment to concrete historical analysis, Negri's account of the contemporary situation and its avowal of a genuine political affirmation of life is essentially voluntaristic.
12. Foucault refers, in *Discipline and Punish*, to that book as "a genealogy or an element in a genealogy of the modern 'soul'". Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. Middlesex: Penguin, 1977, 29. As Gary Gutting points out in the 'Introduction' to *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* there are three, generally accepted, periods to Foucault's work: "an archaeology of discourse in *The History of Madness, The Birth of the Clinic, The Order of Things*, and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*; a genealogy of power relations in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality I*; and a problematisation of ethics in *The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self*." *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 2.

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13. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*. Trans. Peter Preuss. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1980.
14. Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 8.
15. For such a tendency see, for example, H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow's presentation of Foucault in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, in which it is argued that Foucault follows Kant in attempting to determine the sources and legitimate uses of our concepts. This Kantianising tendency is also prevalent in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*: for example, in 'Queering Foucault and the Subject of Feminism', Jana Sawicki, referring to Amy Allen, describes Foucault's approach as "Kantian in spirit, but not in form" (387).
16. Michel Foucault, *The History of Madness*. Ed. Jean Khalfa; trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa. London: Routledge, 2006, p. xxx.
17. "Eh bien, Nietzsche a multiplié les gestes philosophiques. Il s'est intéressé à tout, à la littérature, à l'histoire, à la politique, etc. Il est allé chercher la philosophie partout. En cela, même si en certains domaines il reste homme du XIXe siècle, il a génialement devancé notre époque". Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, 'Michel Foucault et Gilles Deleuze veulent rendre à Nietzsche son vrai visage' in *Dits et écrits I, 1954–1975*. Ed. Daniel Defort and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 2001, 580.
18. "Mais, à propos de Nietzsche, nous pouvons revenir à votre question: pour lui, le philosophe était celui qui diagnostique l'état de la pensée. On peut d'ailleurs envisager deux sortes de philosophes, celui qui ouvre de nouveaux chemins à la pensée, comme Heidegger, et celui qui joue en quelque sorte le rôle d'archéologue, qui étudie l'espace dans lequel se déploie la pensée, ainsi que les conditions de cette pensée, son mode de constitution". Michel Foucault, 'Qu'est-ce qu'un philosophe?' in *Dits et écrits I, 1954–1975*, 581.
19. Jacques Derrida, "'To Do Justice to Freud': The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis", 126. Derrida's remark is made apropos of Foucault's relation to Heidegger.
20. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality 2*. Trans. Robert Hurley. Middlesex: Penguin, 1985, 10-11.
21. I hope to develop the thesis put forward here more extensively and more conclusively in a longer study devoted to Foucault's work.
22. To some this might seem a very un-Foucauldian assertion; to some it might even seem very un-Nietzschean. For example, in *The Philosophy of Michel Foucault* (London: Acumen, 2006), Todd May argues such a point. In the chapter on Foucault's genealogies, 'Genealogical Histories of Who We Are' May draws attention to Foucault's relation to Nietzsche, but then contrasts both Nietzschean and Foucauldian genealogy, understood as a refusal to seek the meaning of a phenomenon in its origin, with Heidegger's destructive return to the Greeks: "Genealogy does not search for an origin, a well-spring from which the practices one is investigating can be understood in their essence. For some who seek to understand particular practices, the key is to dig beneath all the historical transformations in order to discover the original character of the practice. Martin Heidegger, for instance, holds that in order to understand the question of Being we need to go back to its original asking, before it was buried under the weight of the metaphysical tradition. Genealogy rejects this approach" (64). Without doubt the issues are complex, and there is not the space to do them justice in a footnote. However, I would stress both that for Heidegger the meaning of being is time, and consequently the whole of his analysis of the meaning of the question of being is temporal, and historical, in character, and also that it is necessary to recall that for Nietzsche all philosophy—and that means Western thought as such—is Platonic, a proposition that is indubitable insofar as Nietzsche saw the historical significance of his own in terms of its overturning of Platonism. It is also necessary to recall—as I have already—that the development of Foucault's work, in which, one might say, Foucault comes progressively to discover the implications of his thought, leads him ultimately to an engagement with the thought and practices of the Greeks.
23. Michel Foucault, 'The Return of Morality' in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*. Ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman. London: Routledge, 1990, 251
24. See, for example, paragraph 1067 of *The Will to Power*: "And do you know what 'the world' is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end [...] a definite force, and not a space that might be 'empty' here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternal flooding back [...] *This world is the will to power—and nothing besides!*" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1968
25. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*. Trans. Séan Hand. London: Continuum, 1999, 60.
26. Negri writes: "Beyond our legitimate insistence on the origins of the concept of biopolitics in French poststructuralist thought, from this point of view it would be interesting to find a similar epistemological development in late nineteenth and early twentieth century German thought. Its fundamental figure would of course be Nietzsche. One should, in fact, analyze the whole Nietzschean effort to destroy positivist and vitalist teleology, and the way in which this same effort appears in the project of genealogy of morals." Antonio Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop*, 36. It is to be regretted that Negri did not say more about this, although I suspect were he to attempt to do so, he would be forced to reconsider his overall conception of biopolitics in the light of the phenomenon of contemporary nihilism.
27. Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-1974*, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, 2006, 13.
28. Foucault, *Psychiatric Power*, 13.
29. Michel Foucault, *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984, Vol. 3*. Ed. J. D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al.

Middlesex: Penguin, 2002, 336.

30. Foucault, *Power*, 336.

31. Foucault, *Power*, 336.

32. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Middlesex: Penguin, 1979.

33. Michel Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended", 243.

34. Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended", 249.

35. Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended" 253.

36. Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended", 244.

37. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Routledge, 1994, 54.

38. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 1 – 12 and Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998, in particular chapter two, 'The Public and the Private Realm', 22 – 78.

39. Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*. Vols 3 – 4. Paris : Gallimard, 1976, 719.

40. See Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

41. Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, 719.

42. Foucault, *Power*, 328.

43. This is also in contrast to Agamben who, in *Homo Sacer*, argues that biopower is an effect of sovereign power, which is characteristic of political modernity.

44. Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop*, 34.

45. Negri, *The Porcelain Workshop*, 56. Italics in the original.