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Abstract

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Security, Preservation, Enhancement

In an interview, “The Return of Morality,” Michel Foucault candidly suggests the extraordinary influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger on his thinking. Moreover, it is precisely reading them together that was the genuine stakes: “Nietzsche and Heidegger: that was a philosophical shock!” It is curious, despite this most overt of statements on a fundamental orientation to thinking, that so few commentators on Foucault have engaged explicitly with this genealogy. Given Foucault’s (again) stated reluctance to cite Heidegger at all and reference Nietzsche seldom, we need to conceive of a genealogical exploration implicitly rather than through overt reference. This paper aims at engaging Foucault’s 1978-79 *Collège de France* lecture series, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, in relation to a close reading of Heidegger’s 1943 lecture “The Word of Nietzsche: God is Dead.” In this lecture, Heidegger negotiates the biological in Nietzsche’s understanding of power, as well as a fundamental understanding of the essence of “subjectness” in secureness, in the sense of insuring oneself (*Sicherheit, Versicherung*). Our aim is to engage in a correlative reading of the Foucault text in terms of the pivotal understanding of the coincident emergence of biopower and what Foucault terms “apparatuses of security.”

It is in Nietzsche’s *Gay Science* of 1882 that he first mentions the “Death of God,” in a section titled “The Madman”:

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours and ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, “I seek God! I seek God!” As many of those who do not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Why, did he get lost? said one. Did he lose his way like a child? said another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? or emigrated? This they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his glances. “Whither is God?” he cried. “I shall tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers.

We need to understand this parable of the madman and the death of God within the broader Nietzschean context of the overturning of Platonism, which is perhaps best defined in the 1888 *Twilight of the Idols*, under the title “How the ‘Real World’ at last Became a Myth: History of an Error.” In six short paragraphs Nietzsche presents the precession of the overturning of Platonism. The final, culminating phase notes:

We have abolished the real world: what world is left? The apparent world perhaps? ... But no! *with the real world we have also abolished the apparent world!* (Mid-day; moment of the shortest shadow; end of the longest error; zenith of mankind; INCIPIIT ZARATHUSTRA (Here begins Zarathustra).)

“Book One” of Nietzsche’s incomplete *The Will to Power* is titled “European Nihilism.” The opening aphorism of its first section (from the Spring-Fall of 1887) states:

What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves.* The aim is lacking; “why?” finds no answer.

The Death of God, the overturning of Platonism is the overturning of the suprasensible, overturning of what are taken as the highest values, the good, the true and the beautiful. That death of the highest values suggests that the suprasensory world no longer exerts effective power. It is lifeless, dead. Life exists in the sensory realm, in an anti-Platonism. But for Nietzsche, as “History of an Error” from *Twilight of the Idols* suggests, nihilism, decomposition of the highest values, is essentially the intrinsic law of Western history. Despite the devaluation of the highest values, the world itself remains and becomes value-less and thereby pressing on toward the new positing of value. Nihilism, for Nietzsche thus has two meanings, two extremes: It is the devaluing of the highest value up until now and it is a counter-movement to devaluing, the revaluation of all values. A *yes* to new values, a positing of new values *is* nihilism. In its *yes*-saying, Nihilism seeks out not the lifeless supersensory but what is most alive. And what, for Nietzsche, is most alive, what is the essence of life? Nihilism seeks out what is most alive. Yet Nihilism is also the counter-turning movement to the positing of new values. What are values for Nietzsche? In *The Will to Power*, Book Three “Principles of a New Evaluation,” he notes (Aphorism 715):

The point-of-view of ‘value’ is the point-of-view constituting the preservation-enhancement conditions with respect to complex forms of relative duration of life within becoming.

In his 1943 lecture, “The Word of Nietzsche: God Is Dead,” Heidegger wants to emphasize that for Nietzsche value is not constituted in a ‘standpoint’ as in a subject or subjective-position, but rather in a focusing on a point that is in view, or what Heidegger suggests as “that upon which the eye is fixed” (71). Thus values—points of view—guide the seeing of complex forms of life. This is a view to life ruling in everything that lives. Life in its essence is value positing. But this value positing is two-fold. It is preservation-enhancement. The hyphenating preservation-enhancement suggests life is not simply its own preservation, a capacity of preserving what is. Life is enhancement of itself. Aphorism 715 continues:

‘Forms of domination’; the sphere of that which is dominated continually growing or periodically increasing and decreasing according to the favorability or unfavorability of circumstances (nourishment—).

Preserving implies and engages stability; enhancement implies and engages instability. This stability/instability constitutes the relative duration of what is alive. Becoming is the passing of something to something. This ‘becoming’ is for Nietzsche the will-to-power in all things. Value is value inasmuch as it counts, in intrinsic relation to quantity and number. We most often think will as a faculty of desire, as that which is constituted on what we somehow lack, and thereby attempt to make up a deficit with recourse to will, a striving after what we desire. In thinking of ‘will’ in this way, which is to say psychologically, we miss what is essential for Nietzsche. Heidegger emphasizes we need to understand this relation of will and power metaphysically, not psychologically, from out of the essence of metaphysics.

Will-to-power posits as value the preserving-securing of its own constancy and stability. This constancy-stability is a holding to be true as certainty. Truth is thus a necessary value. *The question of value is more fundamental than the question of certainty.* The essence of value is preservation-enhancement, more fundamental than the question of truth, opening the perspective for the characterization of normative structuring of value. What, though, constitutes preservation-securing? We will see Heidegger employ notions in a sense familiar or resonant with discussion in *Being and Time* on *Dasein*’s encounter of the surrounding world, but more so from *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* on the disinhibitor ring of an organism’s

encounter with its environment. Preservation of the level of power belonging to the will reached at any given time consists in the will's surrounding itself with an encircling sphere of that which it can reliably grasp at, each time, as something behind itself in order on the basis of it to contend for its own securing. This encircling sphere bounds off the constant reserve of what presences at the disposal of the will as available. We recognize in this notion of reserve what Heidegger will engage centrally some eight years later in the "Question Concerning Technology" as the standing reserve. What remains constitutes the setting in place of the constant reserve. Truth is thus what makes secure the constant reserve belonging to the surrounding sphere. Nietzsche calls this 'Being'. Valuing is the conditioning of truth. But will is preserving-enhancement, a stretching out beyond itself; power is empowering and over-powering. Hence, truth as preserving-securing is not the supreme value. The essence of art is the creating of possibilities for the will on the basis of which the will-to-power first frees itself to itself. This is not art as aesthetics but rather art is the essence of all willing opening up perspectives. Nietzsche notes in *The Will to Power*, aphorism 796:

The work of art, where it appears without an artist, e.g., a body, an organization (Prussian Officer Corp.; Jesuit Order). To what extent the artist is only a preliminary stage. The world as a work of art that gives birth to itself.

Nietzsche articulated the first value-principle of the metaphysics of the will-to-power in another form (Aphorism 822): "We possess art lest we perish of the truth." In his published four-year lecture course on Nietzsche, Heidegger commenced in the first volume with "Will-to-Power as Art," and it is in the third volume that he engages "Will-to-Power as Knowledge." He commences with the highest value, the supreme first principle of the will-to-power for Nietzsche.

I now want to introduce the work of Michel Foucault who outlines his notion of bio-power in the first volume of his proposed six-volume *History of Sexuality*, "The Will to Knowledge." One might in a crude way suggest Foucault reverses Heidegger's exposition of the highest principle of the will-to-power. He commences with will to knowledge and in the third volume of his history of sexuality, *The Care of the Self*, addresses will to power as art, the self as a work of art in a Nietzschean sense, misunderstood by many as an aesthetics of the self. In the brief account we have provided above of Nietzsche's understanding of will-to-power as essentially the highest valuing of the essence of life, what is most alive is the preserving-enhancing will in all beings as unconditional power. Heidegger emphasizes Nietzsche's nihilism as that which essentially is the metaphysics of metaphysics. Within the history of metaphysics, being in its self-concealing withdrawal is the Nothing as the essence of nihilism. Nihilism inaugurates metaphysics, which is why Nietzschean unconcealing of the essence of nihilism as the consummation of metaphysics shows the fundamental inception of metaphysics and the reach of nihilism. Heidegger concludes his lecture on Nietzsche's death of God by suggesting that we may no longer have an ear to hear the cry of the madman from Nietzsche's *Gay Science*, the one who seeks God, who says we have killed him. Nietzsche characterizes him as de-ranged, dislodged. Heidegger names him as the one who has not forgotten thinking. He concludes his lecture:

And the ear of our thinking, does it still not hear the cry? It refuses while it does not think. Thinking begins only when we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary to thought.

We might suggest that from his first publication, *Madness and Civilization*, there is something essential in Foucault's research that concerns an attunement to the ear of that Heideggerian

thought, a thought on the de-ranged opening to an essentially Nietzschean thought on power, truth and subjectivity. When, in the early 1970s Foucault started to concern himself with the question of power, we recognize the difficulty not so much in talking about it—but rather in saying what it is. It is not a substance. It is not possessed or held or seized. Power is known or knowable by its effects, by its resistances. It comes from below. It acts corporeally. It produces rather than coerces or inhibits. It produces forms of knowing and subjects who know. Its ontology is well understood in relation to Nietzsche's will to power in all things as preservation-enhancement, whose modern forms constitute the essence of will as valuing positing of life, what Foucault names 'biopower'. If sovereign power was figured by Foucault as the right to kill, the biopolitical is its overturning:

The setting up in the course of the classical age, of this great bipolar technology—
anatomic and biological, individualizing and specifying, directed toward the
performance of the body, with attention to the processes of life—characterized a
power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life
through and through. (139)

In Part Five of *The Will to Knowledge*, "Right of Death and Power over Life," Foucault traces out what will come to preoccupy his *Collège de France* lecture courses for the next three to four years, the transformations of the European understanding of sovereignty, the juridical, and the government of the State during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In effect, Foucault is engaging with the political history of the precession of the overturning of Platonism, or the account within the legislative domains of power and knowledge as the conduct of conduct of individuals and populations, of the spread of nihilism as an affirmation of life as value positing—and the emergence of the impetus for the normative structuring of value as the essence of truth. We need to understand the fundamental transformation in the shift from 'right', as a suprasensible idea, to power as that which concerns the highest value given to the preservation-enhancement of life. In his 1977-78 course at the *Collège de France*, *Security, Territory Population*, Foucault introduces three key notions that coincide with the latter part of the eighteenth century: firstly, the invention of population as a biopolitical entity. For the first time the human is thought as species, whose *nature* is discerned or understood quantitatively, through statistical measure, defining population at once normatively and essentially as value. Secondly, coincident with this horizon of disclosure of the human as species, is a fundamental shift in the governmentality of the state, from the exacting disciplinary mechanisms of *Raison d'État* to what Foucault calls "apparatuses of security." By "security" Foucault means the manner whereby for the first time the question of government becomes a question of how a future is to be strategically planned, precisely on the basis of statistical measure and on the freedom of the market from sovereign intervention, which is to say, fundamentally on the point-of-view on the increase or decrease of life itself whose essential value is preservation-enhancement in will-to-power. Thirdly, this inviolable freedom of the market constitutes the new problematic of governmentality of the state, whereby the question for the next two hundred years became and still remains the question as to whether there is too much government (as with disciplinary welfare) or too little government (as with liberalism's security).

It is in his 1978-79 course, *The Birth of Biopolitics* that Foucault traces in detail the emergence of twentieth century liberalism, initially through an account of the emergence of Ordo-liberalism in post-war Germany and, further, the influence of Ordo-liberalism on the somewhat independent development of Chicago School neo-liberalism in the United States. Curiously, if not ironically, it happens in Freiburg, at the University of Freiburg, the same one where Heidegger lectured, at the time Heidegger was (briefly) Rector. And it crucially involved Husserl. Foucault does not mention Heidegger at all, particularly as Heidegger would have been

shunned by those in the early 1930s who were already planning the structure for the German economy when the war was concluded. For the Ordo-liberals there was no fundamental distinction to be made between the welfare economics of National Socialism, Soviet Communism, British welfare democracy and the New Deal economics in the United States. All governmentality grounded on welfare planning leads to fascism. This was their fundamental warning. Hence the emphasis given by Ordo-liberalism to the individual as its own enterprise. Economic governmentality consisted in no more than ensuring that any individual was in the position to engage in the market, to be part of the game. The market itself was to be unregulated. What Foucault emphasizes with Germany at the end of the war is the peculiar if unique situation where the very definition imposed on the State by the defeating powers coincided precisely with the definition of the State understood by Ordo-liberalism. Germany was to be a State without its autonomous governmental structure. What this meant for Ordo-liberalism was that the precise definition of the German State was thus its economic structure, the autonomy of the market. The State became an effect of its economic structure rather than its economic structure being defined by the State. How do we understand this analysis of the emergence of neo-liberalism in post-war Europe and the United States in Nietzschean and Heideggerian terms? I will conclude with a quote from Heidegger's 1943 lecture on Nietzsche, a year before he was to be shipped off to sandbagging duties on the Rhine for total war effort, and coincident with the advanced planning of the Ordo-liberals for establishing a post-war German economy:

Into the position of the vanished authority of God and of the teaching of the office of the Church steps the authority of conscience, obtrudes the authority of reason. Against these the social instinct rises up. The flight from the world into the suprasensory is replaced by historical progress. The otherworldly goal of everlasting bliss is transformed into the earthly happiness of the greatest number. The careful maintenance of the cult of religion is relaxed through enthusiasm for the creating of culture or the spreading of civilization. Creativity, previously the unique property of the biblical god, becomes the distinctive mark of human activity. Human creativity finally passes over into business enterprise. (64)