FOUCAULT'S FOUNDATIONLESS DEMOCRATIC THEORY

Kelly A. Carter, B.A.

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APPROVED:

Richard S. Ruderman, Major Professor
Steven P. Forde, Committee Member and Program
    Coordinator
John Booth, Committee Member
James Meernik, Chair of the Department of
    Political Science
Sandra L. Terrell, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse
    School of Graduate Studies

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I examine a key shift in Michel Foucault's political philosophy from a position in which he was a staunch anti-humanist, to a final position in which he advocated not only the ability of the subject to influence his political condition, but also the individual freedoms assured by a democratic form of government. I begin by summarizing his overall critique of the post-Enlightenment West, and then explain how his observation of the Iranian Revolution served as a key turning point concerning his attitude towards the subject. Next, I elaborate on the direction of Foucault's late writings and examine how his new conceptualization of the subject leads him to embrace a democratic political system albeit free from Enlightenment philosophical foundations. I conclude by critiquing Foucault's foundationless democratic theory on the basis that it would ultimately undermine the individual freedoms and aesthetic development that he seeks to protect.

Introduction

Michel Foucault does not maintain a steady philosophical argument throughout writings. Eric Paras summarizes the status of Foucault's work quite well:

> Nothing could be more unreasonable than the attempt to flatten down Foucault's thought into a single, coherent project. What we see over the course of Foucault's career is not the consistent advocacy of a pointed philosophical message…but rather a succession of near-independent probings into questions that, for the moment, had captured the philosopher's imagination (2006, 152).

As I delved into the body of Foucault's work, I found this statement to be very accurate and very useful when trying to reconcile the numerous contradictions that I encountered when comparing Foucault's earlier works with his later ones. Perhaps the most drastic difference in Foucualt's thought was his attitude towards human rights and individual freedom. Formerly, a staunch anti-humanist who ascribed all human thought and actions as predetermined by discourse, Foucault's later writings promoted the ideal of a self-determining subject and the importance of human rights and freedom.

The turning point for Foucault concerning his attitude towards human rights was the Iranian Revolution. His writings during this period and until the end of his career shifted away from his anti-humanist stance towards a position that valued the importance of the subject in at least partially determining his own thoughts and actions. Foucault used the term "political spirituality" to describe the Iranian people's desire to rid their nation of the Shah's corrupt Western regime and establish a new political system based on Islamic law. In this essay, I will define political spirituality and explain how Foucault believes that this concept could constitute an alternative to modern, Enlightenment-based political theory in the West. Political spirituality, a term that Foucault used only twice in his writings and only once in his correspondence on the Iranian revolution, captures the direction of his later work very well. I contend that political spirituality is similar to the "technologies of the self" (*technê peri ton*

bion) that Foucault elaborated on in his final two volumes of The History of Sexuality and in his lectures at the College de France in the early 1980's. What both concepts refer to

> are those intentional and voluntary 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 (Foucault 1985, 10-11).

Taken in this context, one must not view the term "spirituality" as a necessarily religious concept. Although the political spirituality of the Iranians was made possible through a common belief in Shi'ism, and the Greek "technologies of the self" were part of the Delphic command to "care for the self" (*epimelea heautou*), Foucault's interest in the concept lies in the individual ability to resist the systems of power that act within society, and re-create oneself according to personal aesthetic values. Political spirituality is an *askesis*, or a constant work upon the self to make one open to one's own version of the truth and turn one's life into a work of art. This process has the same function as religious revelation only without the metaphysical ideals that hinder creativity and serve as the justification for repressive political regimes.

Foucault's shift in attention from the modes of discourse to the individual as a self-determining force in society consequently has a direct impact on his attitude towards the political regime. Whereas in earlier works, Foucault had embraced elements of Marxism and arguably anarchism, his newly developed concern for human rights, especially his advocacy of individual freedom in political society, placed him, by implication, in the camp of Liberalism. Foucault remained silent about the structure of the political regime that would ensure the respect for human rights necessary for the pursuit of an aesthetically pleasing life. It is only from his embrace of individual freedom and his desire for individuals to use this freedom to create an individually pleasing aesthetics that I conclude that Foucault must have logically supported democracy as a desirable political system in the post-modern West. However, despite his startling reversal concerning individual human rights and individual freedom, his

tacit embrace of democracy did not stem from an adoption of the Natural Rights based Liberal philosophy that laid the foundation for the democratic political systems under which the West currently lives. For Foucault, the modern concern for human rights and for securing the greatest economic and physical good of the population has justified a universal pre-conditioning that prepares each individual for a life of economic efficiency at the expense of individual creativity. Foucault advocated a political system in which the individual would be free from the influence of repressive Western institutions designed to protect these natural human rights in order to allow each individual to pursue a personal art of living. Picket argues, "He [Foucault] shares with the Enlightenment the goals of liberation and autonomy, but rejects the traditional philosophical approaches to secure those aims because he thinks that they support the very elements of society that obstruct freedom" (1997, 922). I agree with this assessment and attempt to sketch the general democratic alternative that Foucault appears to advocate. What I call Foucault's "foundationless democratic theory" would provide the conditions under which the individual would be free to determine his own path to happiness without the burden of the negative Enlightenment philosophy, which was intended as a hedge against fortune and imperfect human nature.

My thesis, then, is twofold. First, I propose that the term "political spirituality" which Foucault used in his Iran correspondence, embodies the same concept as the "technologies of the self" defined in Foucault's late writings on Western sexuality and lectures at the College de France. Second, I argue that Foucault's desire for a political system that ensures individual freedom without metaphysical foundations is ultimately untenable without the self-constraint imposed on the general populace by both the diversion of ambition out of the political arena and into the economic arena, and by the freedom from extreme poverty gained from the resulting economic development. To support these claims, I will trace Foucault's political philosophy from its most simple and elemental features up to his more complex observations that lead to the more general conclusions that I have just stated. I will begin by

explaining Foucault's critique of Western political philosophy. Second, I will explain Foucault's interest

in the Iranian Revolution and how this event constituted a turning point in Foucault's career. Third, I

will elaborate on the definition of political spirituality by comparing this concept with Foucault's more

complex treatment of Greek and Roman arts of living. Finally, I will conclude by arguing that the

logical conclusion of Foucault's late philosophy necessarily embraces Liberal democracy, yet without

the foundation of Natural Right. I will critique Foucault's dismissal of Natural Right on the basis of the

practical observation that cut adrift, and left to their own devices, most humans will not embrace an

aesthetically pleasing art of living, and through folly or avarice, cause more damage to freedom that

good. Natural Right, then, serves as the necessary guardian of the freedom essential for the individual to

manifest the fruits of his self-critiques in the political arena.

Foucault's Critique of the West

Foucault dismisses the idea that there is a body of knowledge that is universally true for all

people of each historical epoch; rather, knowledge and notions of truth are produced by these systems of

power that dominate society.

> The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power:
> contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the
> reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have
> succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by
> virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each
> society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is the types of discourse
> which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable
> one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the
> techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those
> who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault 1980b, 131).

Foucault uses Kant's description of the Enlightenment to illustrate this point more clearly. Kant believed

that enlightenment was a process through which the rational individual could remove himself from the

pollution of social convention, prejudice, or well-meaning error that had shaped most political and moral

thought for most of human history, and discover the true knowledge that stood pure and whole outside of the conventional society (Foucault 1984b, 34). Foucault dismisses the idea of enlightenment as a "way out" or exit from the world. For him, there is no true knowledge that stands outside the realm of what is created and enforced by the systems of power that operate within each society. Various factors shape each society and change its forms of discourse so that, from one epoch to the next, the dominant systems of power hold dramatically different notions of what constitutes true knowledge. Therefore, there is no such thing as "true knowledge" in the Kantian sense, but only what Foucault calls "power/knowledge," the lines of discourse that give the mere title of "truth" to whatever knowledge happens to lend legitimacy to the dominant powers. Truth and Power are inextricably bound together to such an extent that even "the least glimmer of truth is conditioned by politics" (Foucault 1978, 294).

Foucault employs what he calls the "genealogical method" to identify these relationships between power relations and the regimes of truth that have evolved in the West since the Enlightenment. Since the factors that have affected the evolution of modern social practices are diverse and difficult to identify, Foucault argues that the researcher must examine a wide variety of historical sources, just as an individual would examine his family tree in order to determine how certain genetic features might have influenced present physical features, to clearly determine the current characteristics and evolutionary process of the topic in question. In place of physical traits and genetic features, which are the objects of real genealogical analyses, Foucault examines the modes of discourse, the writings, sayings, and other documentation, that have been left behind from different historical epochs by intellectuals or specialists within certain professions, which describe and explain the procedures through which truth is separated from error. Foucault examines these writings, often very obscure and seemingly trivial writings, to determine how and when these large-scale and small-scale manifestations of power that have shaped present society occurred. The writings that Foucault focuses his attention on are usually documents that

contain information that has either been explicitly rejected from "legitimate" discourses due to their opposition to existing systems of power, or that have been simply forgotten due to fact that they record minor events that are usually of little general interest, such as the institution of a new local policy or the testimony of a particular condemned criminal (1980a, 83).

Much of Foucault's genealogical analyses are centered on identifying the ways in which modern post-Enlightenment Western society exercises power through modes of scientific discourse (1984b, 43). Foucault recognizes the vast influence that Enlightenment philosophy has had on the West and seeks to identify the exact points where powers have used this philosophy to repress its population. Enlightenment ideology rejected the extremely brutal modes of power practiced by the Church and by monarchies in favor of a political system based on the natural rights of equality and freedom which are discernable by sheer human rationality. However, Foucault argues that these ideals merely masked more subtle "technologies of subjugation," exercised by the scientific disciplines to maximize the "accumulations of men and the accumulation of capital" that were essential to maintaining economic prosperity in the Enlightenment era (1977, 220-1). The Enlightenment produced a society in which universal peace and prosperity became realistic goals; however, these goals could only be realized through an incredible increase in technological capability and through a wide spread conditioning of each member of the population to conform to behavioral patterns that maximize their contributions to the capital economic system.

> What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down, and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy,' which was also a 'mechanics of power,' was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others' bodies, not only so that they may do as one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies (Foucault 1977, 138).

The creation of this modern Western political system whose goal was to transform each member of the population into a docile body, capable of being molded into the most efficient and productive unit, was not the product of a universal decree by a powerful sovereign. It instead resulted from an accumulation of minor changes in the various institutions that control human behavior, such as the clinic, the prison, marriage …etc. For example, concerning punishment for criminal offences, "it became understood that it was more efficient and profitable in terms of the economy of power to place individuals under surveillance than to subject them to some exemplary penalty" (Foucault 1980a, 38). The "spectacle of the scaffold", which was costly to duplicate and inefficient because only one or a few criminals were punished at a time, was replaced by the penal institution which allowed for a greater surveillance and identification of criminals. Foucault examines numerous other aspects of society in which scientific disciplines enforce repressive technologies upon each individual to ensure maximum efficiency and docility. Human rights, the concern for which justified many of these new repressive technologies, is seen as merely another illusion that disguised the fact that each individual was a wholly interchangeable speaker of systems of thought that transcended them (Paras 2006, 35). Therefore, Enlightenment era elites had not become more civilized or caring concerning the welfare of society, they had merely discovered more subtle methods for oppressing the lower classes that were much more efficient (Afary and Anderson 2005, 15).

It is important to note that Foucault employs the genealogical method merely as a means to determine *what* factors influence society and *how* this influence is exercised and how they have evolved over time; he does not claim to make personal value judgments concerning the justice or morality of these power relations. Therefore, the genealogical method is in essence a critique of one's own society and not a valuation or re-valuation. Although many philosophical inquiries, from Plato to Locke, are

also critiques of society as such, the Foucaultian critique differs in that it does not seek to establish a new universal political or social paradigm of thought. Foucault claims,

> Criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. In that sense, this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal in not that of making a metaphysics possible: it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method (1984b, 46).

As indicated by this statement, the critique was initially intended as a method through which the individual could merely identify the powers that acted upon one's body and that determined each aspect of one's life.

However, Foucault later broadened the concept of the critique from a mere identification of the powers that pre-conditions individuals for the purpose of understanding, to a process through which the individual can identify and engage in *struggle* against these repressive powers. Through his examinations and his critiques of Western institutions, Foucault later claims that he establishes a "critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings" (1984b, 47). This statement marks a dramatic shift in the way Foucault considers the status of the individual in relation to modes of discourse and power relations present in society. Until the end of the 1970s, especially before the Iranian Revolution, Foucault had considered discourse and the powers that enforce the "truths" allowed by these discourses as the inescapable and the pre-determining conditions that mold each individual. By claiming that his studies are meant to describe the methods by which the individual might actually critique and resist repressive powers, he shifts from a position in which the individual is completely pre-destined by the modes of discourse and power relations that dominate society, to a position in which the individual is able to go beyond the limits imposed upon him through a steady critical work upon the self. This critical process is ongoing and not the attempt to reach a final state of understanding or a political ideal. Not

only must the individual struggle to resist and alter the political conditions under which various institutions/disciplines exercise power upon him, he must also continuously work upon himself through a constant critique of society as a whole and through a critique of his personal actions. This is so that he might identify and alter the ways in which he has been conditioned by society to conduct himself in a certain manner both in interactions with other individuals and with himself. The critique, then, enables one to identify the boundaries that relations of power have set and indicates the points at which the repressed might begin to challenge and re-shape these relations.

Foucault's main critique of the modern West, then, is that through its attempt to rationalize and structure each element of society, its has developed the ability, through advanced technologies of subjugation, which include hierarchical organization, surveillance, incarceration, and normalization of behavior, to repress the individual to such a degree that resistance to the dominant powers and the self-critique that facilitates human creativity have been diminished to a minuscule level. Western institutions justify this repression through the Enlightenment belief that all men have natural rights and that the best way to ensure these rights is to establish a political/economic system that guarantees overall peace and prosperity. Foucault views the repressive methods with which Western society has driven towards these goals as damaging to the human will since it is only through struggle that men might experience a sense of meaning and exercise creativity. Instead of creating a society that is humane and allows for the greatest individual good, as the Enlightenment philosophers claimed, the modern project has traded a classical system in which power was exercised intermittently on a public level for a new system in which power is exercised continuously and on a local scale (Bevir 1999, 69). Whereas dominant powers repressed individuals in both the pre-modern and modern eras, at least the generations of men that existed prior to the growth of modern political systems found a depth of soul and an outlet for creativity as a consequence of their repression. The modern project has created a population of homogenized

automatons, bent on accumulating as much capital as possible and this strictly hedonistic attitude reduces human creativity to a low status, similar to that of beasts that tend not to think past momentary desire and self-preservation. It is in this sense that Foucault's work is very similar to that of Nietzsche.

Nietzsche valorized struggle against the limitations that Western morality placed upon the human will. He was the first to use the genealogical method to uncover the manner in which western morality, which is based on a distinction between good and evil, has been artificially created from a mixture of Socratic philosophy and Judeo-Christian beliefs in an express attempt to diminish the dominance of the "good" aristocratic men in favor of the weak plebs. He demonstrates that the plebian denial of "evil" in the pursuit of good is a manufactured morality and that it dangerously limits the human will by forcing it to value the weak and lowly characteristics of man over the most noble.

The danger man faces from this limitation of his will is a descent into nihilism, "a conviction of an absolute untenability of existence when it comes to the highest values one recognizes" (Nietzsche 1968, 9). It is a condition in which the impetus for struggle and self-creation is eliminated and existence is reduced to bland and hopeless repetition of work and the pursuit of petty entertainments leading to a false sense of happiness without the potential for a return to greatness (Nietzsche 1982, 129-30). Nietzsche states, "the 'tame man,' the hopelessly mediocre and insipid man, has already learned to feel himself as the goal and zenith, as the meaning of history, as 'higher man.' " (1989, 43). The nihilistic man not only lives in a state of petty existence, but ironically believes that he personifies the pinnacle of social existence.

Nietzsche's answer to this challenge is to encourage individuals to establish a passion for greatness without the need for divine justification (Thiele 1990, 909). This heroic will, the Overman, embodies struggle for its own sake and finds satisfaction from self-overcoming, which is also a form of resistance against societal forces that seek to repress the will to power. This cycle of self-overcoming is

10

self-perpetuating and cannot come to a natural end since "because his victories are self-overcomings, his opposition is never vanquished" (Thiele 1990, 912). Through exercising the will to power, the individual experiences a perpetual struggle against internal forces that justify a much higher and richer existence.

Like, Nietzsche, Foucault's project is also centered around a valorization of struggle and a call to the individual to resist repression through a continual process of self-overcoming and transformation. One main difference between Foucault and Nietzsche, however, is that whereas Nietzsche's project was anti-political and aristocratic in nature, Foucault believed that the individual's struggle against repression was inseparable from politics and that repression and resistance against repression are merely moves in the same political game. Furthermore, although both philosophers believed in developing an existence that was a work of art and aesthetically pleasing, Foucault, towards the end of his career, did not share Nietzsche's disgust with democracy and the emphasis on human rights that it promoted. For Foucualt, this self-overcoming, at least in the modern West, could only occur within the context of a free democratic society where the individual would have the political power to ensure the conditions that permit struggle against other political powers. The self-critique, then, is not only the way in which the individual might identify the repressive powers that act upon his and reinvent himself to overcome these powers, but is also the way in which one must influence the political realm to make this continual reinvention possible.

The Iranian Revolution as a Turning Point

It is only after having explained Foucault's critique of the West, that one can realize the reasons for his interest in the Iranian Revolution and how this event was a turning point in Foucault's career. Foucault concluded that the West had developed a political regime of truth that was so technologically advanced and brutally efficient in the projection of power over its population, that the possibility for

independent critique of modern society and the manifestation of human creativity, born out of internal and external suffering and struggle, could not originate from within this population. Since the entirety of Europe, North America, and other western satellites were deeply entrenched within a regime of power that was conditioned to produce "docile bodies" similar to Nietzsche's disquieting description of the Last Man, Foucault looked towards the East for a new philosophical inspiration. Foucault stated in an interview conducted in 1978, "if a new philosophy of the future exists, it must be born outside of Europe or equally born in consequence of meetings and impacts between Europe and non-Europe" (1999, 113). It was only at the intersection between these two halves of humanity that a renewed desire for struggle and political change, both between governing disciplines and within oneself, could be introduced into western society.

I believe that Foucault recognized the possibility for a re-introduction of struggle and artful living into the West during the Iranian Revolution. This is especially true since the Iranian opposition to Western government occurred at a time when many observers in the West, especially Foucault, believed that Marxist philosophy was losing its legitimacy since it produced political systems that were highly authoritarian and that "today are condemned and ought to be discarded" (2005e, 185). Although one might argue that between 1978 and 1991 the Cold War between capitalist and communist nations remained intense, the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* in 1973 and the apparent failure of Mao's Cultural Revolution during the same decade had taken the wind out of the sails of the communist intellectual movement in Western Europe and had left capitalism as the projected global victor. Liberal democracy and capitalist economics constituted an apparently unstoppable force that would eventually ensure peace and prosperity for all nations. However, the Iranians broke this "optimistic" outlook and began a new chapter in the history of the West by rejecting, almost universally, these forces of modernity previously though unstoppable in favor of a *religious* alternative. This

religious reaction upset the linear Hegelian timeline of Europe and its relentless progress away from religion towards modernity (Almond 2004, 19). The Iranians piqued Foucault's professional interest, as well as that of many others around the world, by rejecting Western modernity, not out of a regressive fear, but out of a desire to create a *progressive* regime embodied in a religious state.

Foucault was among the first to recognize the significance of the Iranian Revolution and immediately upon his arrival in Iran as a special correspondent for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della sera*, he realized that his western colleagues had grossly misdiagnosed the nature of this political event.

> When I left Paris, I was told over and over again 'Iran is going through a crisis of modernization. An arrogant monarch, clumsy and authoritarian, is attempting to compete with the industrialized nations and to keep his eyes fixed on the year 2000, but the traditional society, for its part, cannot and does not want to follow. Wounded and hurt, it comes to a halt. It folds itself back onto its own past and, in the name of millenarian beliefs, it seeks shelter among a retrograde clergy' (Foucault 2005b, 194)

It did not take Foucault long to conclude that a new type of revolution was occurring in Iran. Other revolts against Western domination had occurred, for example, within Vietnam and Cambodia during the same decade. Foucault, however, did not believe that these were similar to the Iranian revolution since in their aftermath highly authoritarian societies developed within which "freedom, a classless society, a non-alienating society, were absent" (2005e, 185; Afary and Anderson 2005, 75).

Although his fellow Westerners were correct in recognizing that the Iranians chafed at the idea of having modernization forced upon them, they were incorrect in assigning to the causes of the revolution a popular ignorance, sense of weakness, and servile obedience to conservative religious elites. Foucault continued,

> I then felt that I had understood that recent events did not signify a shrinking back in the face of modernization by extremely retrograde elements, but the rejection, by a whole culture and a whole people, of a *modernization* that is itself an *archaism.* (2005b, 195)

Foucault believed that the Iranians rejected the modern regime of the Shah precisely because it was *not* a step forward for their society, but rather a step backwards: a farcical attempt to mimic the oppressive

and corrupt institutions that the West had already worn out. The people had long considered the Shah's regime illegitimate and corrupt, but the intensity of their hatred did not come to a peak until late 1978, when spontaneous demonstrations against the Shah sprung up in every corner of the nation. Foucault observed that the people largely resisted the Shah's oppressive reaction to these demonstrations without access to weapons, with their bare hands, relying in large part upon an astounding unity in purpose and a universal 'madness' that made the people fearless when faced, unarmed, with one of the best funded and equipped militaries in the world (2005a, 191). He perceived the people's common goal as twofold: the expulsion of the Shah and his western-style regime, and the establishment of an Islamic Republic. It was this choice in favor of the religious alternative and the astounding success that the unarmed people had against the Shah's repressive regime that became the focus of Foucault's journalistic inquiries during the Iranian Revolution.

Foucault attributed the Iranian people's victory to their collective experience of grassroots religious/political organization and in a shared body of inspirational symbolism both derived from their common belief in Shi'a Islam, the nation's pre-dominant religion whose peculiar institutions and symbolism gave its people "infinite resources to resist state power" (2005d, 208). The political and spiritual tools afforded to the people by their faith inspired them to fearlessly expose themselves to the gun barrels of the Shah's army and remain steadfast in their determination to eliminate the Shah's regime. Foucault used the term "political spirituality" to describe the mindset of the Iranian people as they worked for a religious-based political system by undermining the technologies of repression employed by the Shah. Although he only used this term once in his articles on Iran, the intersection of the exercise of political power with that of spiritual transformation remained a dominant theme in his writings and lectures for the remainder of his career, and an understanding of Foucault's interpretation

of political spirituality as manifested during the Iranian Revolution is essential to a comprehensive understanding of his work as a whole.

The extent of the people's distaste for and opposition to Western modernity and the Shah's official government, which symbolized the introduction of the corrupt and despotic West into their lives, is made evident through Foucault's depiction of the aftermath of a great earthquake that struck the region ten years earlier and completely destroyed the town of Ferdows.

> On this ruined land, two rival towns were born, as if in the Shah's Iran the same misfortune could not give rise to the same renewal. On one side, there was the town of administration, the Ministry of Housing, and the notables. But a little further away, the artisans and the farmers rebuilt their own town, in opposition to all these official plans. Under the direction of a cleric, they collected the funds, built and dug with their own hands, laid out canals and wells, and constructed a mosque. On the first day they planted a green flag. The new village is called Islamiyeh. Facing the government and against it, Islam: already ten years old (Foucault 2005a, 189-190).

The divide between the people and the government was deep enough to inspire a popular desire rebuild a new town without official aid. Rather than use government funds, technology, and professional manpower to rebuild their town with relative ease, the people of Ferdows dug with their bare hands, raised their own funds, and founded a new town based on Islam and in opposition to the shah. This event clearly demonstrated not only the Iranian people's *desire* to act independently from the Shah and the West, but also their physical *ability* to do so. Islamiyeh is a microcosm of what is possible when a whole people are united in a common political purpose and inspired by a common spirituality. Their reaction to the earthquake was not only a collective opposition to a corrupt political regime, but also the manifestation of each individual's desire for a political system in which religious principles would guide administration of the city and that would guide each person within that city in the administration of themselves. What was in question during the Iranian Revolution was whether or not the small-scale manifestation of political spirituality present within the people at Islamiyeh could repeat itself on a much larger scale.

Foucault's depiction of this deep divide in Iranian society is intended to underscore the differences that would affect the political events of the entire nation over next year. Foucault began his writings on Iran with the account of a great natural disaster that destroyed a city yet inspired the people to rebuild a new city completely free from the corruption and despotic control that the people associated with the modern West. Foucault compares the rumble from the regime's tanks mobilized against the people in Djaleh Square to that of a different great earthquake; one that would cause the people to rebuild an entire nation in the same manner as the people of Islamiyeh.

> Who will rebuild Tabas today? Who will rebuild Iran after the earthquake of Friday, September 8, right under the treads of the tanks? The fragile political edifice has not yet fallen to the ground, but it is irreparably cracked from top to bottom (Foucault 2005a, 190).

It was evident that the people rejected Western modernity, despite the relative prosperity and comfort that it could provide, in favor of a system in which they could have good government in tandem with a spiritual existence. Although this desire for a political spirituality was not new to humanity, or even the West, the Iranians had numerous unique social resources at their disposal to make their goals a reality. In his proceeding articles, Foucault identified several specific aspects present in Shi'a Islam that enabled the people to manifest the same spirit present within the people of Islamiyeh and depose the shah's Western regime.

The foremost advantage that the Iranians possessed was the Shiite requirement for active effort on behalf of its adherents to strive for fair and just government.

> Around 90 percent of the Iranians are Shi'ites. They await the return of the Twelfth Imam, who will create the reign of the true order of Islam in earth. While this creed does not announce each day that the great event will occur tomorrow, neither does it accept indefinitely all the misery of the world. When I met Ayatollah Shariatmadari (he is undoubtedly the highest spiritual authority in Iran today), one of the first sentences he uttered to me was: 'We are waiting for the Mahdi, but each day we fight for a good government.' Shi'ism, in the face of the established powers, arms the faithful with an unremitting restlessness. It breathes into them an ardor wherein the political and the religious lie side by side (Foucault 2005b, 201).

This trait is abruptly different from post-Enlightenment Christianity, which has placed at the forefront of its doctrine concerning political matters the command to "render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (Matt. 22:21, KJV) and to "let every soul be subject unto the higher powers," (Romans 13:1, KJV). Although these doctrines concerning relations to secular government have always been important elements in Christian doctrine, in the pre-modern era there remained within the Christian community a potential for great religious revolt against established political orders. Therefore, the combination of religious fervor and political action, that Foucault ascribes to Shi'ism and to the East is not entirely unknown to the West. In fact, Foucault declares that the voices of the mullahs who supported the revolution must have been "as terrible as must have been Savonarola in Florence, the voices of the Anabaptists in Munster, or those of the Presbyterians at the time of Cromwell…" (2005c, 201). It was only after the first great revolutions of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, that the West developed a culture that valued peaceful domestic operation, at least amongst its majority population, and submission to government in exchange for material comfort. Although there have at times been mass protests, isolated acts of violence, and even full scale war when threatened by external enemies, the great mass of Westerners have become content with the fruits of the Enlightenment, namely peace and prosperity, and have lost their will for great struggle, even against the most oppressive of regimes and especially in the name of religion. The Shi'ite imperative to actively struggle for a better political situation on earth in accordance with the precepts of Islam, lays the foundation for a fanatical struggle against injustice and corrupt government that is commonly identified with the modern.

Another characteristic of Shi'ism that Foucault believed provided the Iranians with the ability to counter Western power was the absence of a clear hierarchy in religious structure.

> Among the Shi'ite clergy, religious authority is not determined by a hierarchy. One follows only the one to whom one wants to listen. The Grand Ayatollahs of the moment, those who, in facing the king, his police, and the army, have just caused an entire people

to come out into the streets, were not enthroned by anybody. They were *listened* to (Foucault 2005c, 202).

Although there was a certain degree of hierarchy present in the body of intellectual clerics, the Ayatollahs Khomeini and Shariatmadari held pre-eminence among the people at the time of the revolution, these positions were based on ability and popular acclamation rather than on a rigid permanent rank ordering as there is in the Catholic Church. This lack of hierarchy allows the people to act independently and on a local level as was demonstrated at Islamiyeh and in the spontaneous demonstrations that erupted all over Iran during the revolution. The function of the Grand Ayatollahs and the lower level clerics was to unite the people under a common set of principles, applicable to the moment and very simple in nature. Since the people were free from a massive hierarchical structure both tactically, on the ground during the revolution, and in the form of a rigid metaphysical doctrine that would limit their willingness to act in a flexible manner, they were able to effectively counter the Shah and his narrow minded response to their revolt.

This absence of a clear hierarchy is also important because is denotes an absence of the notion of political sovereignty that the West has embraced since the Middle Ages. Western political philosophy is in essence a history of the succeeding regimes of truth that have held control over and shaped society as a whole. Each Western regime of truth has been enforced by a political sovereign that has claimed to hold a monopoly on the revelation of truth to society. The sovereign can take the form of a monarch, a scientific discourse, or a set of religious doctrines, but in each case, it enforces a version of truth upon an entire population and shapes the way that each individual relates to each other and themselves. Only these regimes, which simultaneously held power and a body of discourse to support their interests, could pretend to claim to know what real truth was and what knowledge was important for the individual to learn. Foucault does not claim that only one regime of truth exists at any given time. There are always competing regimes of truth, such as between secular and religious authorities that vie for dominance in

society. The important factor for Foucault is the amount of power that each competing regime of truth is able to exercise on a given population. In Iran, the competition for legitimacy and political power was held between the Shi'a community and the Shah's western government that promoted the codified and sovereign-based notion of truth that has been the mark of the West for centuries. For Foucault, Shi'ism operates under a completely different regime of truth than the Western sovereign-based model.

> As for Shi'ite doctrine, there is the principle that truth was not completed and sealed by the last prophet. After Muhammad, another cycle of revelation begins, the unfinished cycle of the imams, who, through their words, their example, as well as their martyrdom, carry a light, always the same and always changing. It is this light that is capable of illuminating the law from the inside. The latter is made not only to be conserved, but also to release over time the spiritual meaning that it holds. Although invisible before his promised return, the Twelfth Imam is neither radically nor fatally absent. It is the people themselves who make him come back, insofar as the truth to which they awaken further enlightens them (Foucault 2005d, 205).

Shi'a Islam neither binds its followers to an unchanging metaphysics nor does it stifle individual spiritual enlightenment by commanding servile obedience to the will of a sovereign. The broken line of the imams symbolizes the ability and responsibility of the people to determine their own path to truth guided by, but not dependent on, the teachings and commands of religious and secular leaders. Each Shi'a is responsible for his own enlightenment, which is continually shaped by the words and actions of Muhammad and the line of imams, as well as the ever-changing political conditions that spur reaction. This freedom from religious and political sovereignty enables Shi'as to interpret their own version of truth as a consequence of personal reflection and a consideration of tactical necessity. Thus, the comparison to a light or flame, which is always *essentially* the same, but also constantly flickers and bends according to physical conditions.

Foucault's interest in a community that holds such a "loose" attitude towards truth is not surprising since it is very similar to Foucault's own attitude towards truth. The political advantage that such an attitude affords is a useful flexibility in administration and in opposition to internal and external

threats. Sovereignty, which was a product of modern western political theory, is what enables the

repression of the people in the name of health and maximized productivity. The lack of codified,

universal rules would enable a political condition that is not primarily negative and juridical, but rather

technical and positive (Foucault 1980b, 121).

The Iranian Revolution was a turning point for Foucault because, for him, it demonstrated the

ability of the political subject to actually resist the discourses and powers that he had previously

supposed completely determined human existence. However, it is important to note that Foucault had

been criticized for having a limited understanding of Islam and of Iranian politics in general and for

misinterpreting events that occurred during the Iranian Revolution. His critics accuse him of having

been seduced by the slogans of an aspiring dictator, Khomeini, and for oversimplifying the vast

differences within the Iranian population concerning Islam and their goals for the revolution. Maxime

Rodinson argues,

> A very great thinker, Michel Foucault, part of a line of radically dissident thought, placed
> excessive hopes in the Iranian Revolution. The great gaps in his knowledge of Islamic
> history enabled him to transfigure the events in Iran, to accept for the most part the semi-
> theoretical suggestions of his Iranian friends, and to extrapolate from this by imagining
> an end of history that would make up for disappointments in Europe and elsewhere
> (2005, 270).

Another of Foucault's critics accused him of ignoring the logical violent repercussions of Islamic

"spirituality." "Atoussah H" the pen name for a leftist Iranian woman living in exile in Paris (Afary and

Anderson 2005, 91), argues,

> Saudi Arabia drinks from the wellspring of Islam. Hands and heads fall, for thieves and
> lovers. It seems that for the Western Left, which lacks humanism, Islam is desirable…for
> other people... The Western liberal left needs to know that Islamic law can become a dead
> weight on societies hungering for change. The Left should not let itself be seduced by a
> cure that is perhaps worse than the disease (2005, 209).

Foucault's critics charge that his high hopes for an alternative for the repressive western political and social practices prompted him to promote ideas based on a misinterpretation of events resulting from misinformation and lack of historical research.

Despite his possible misunderstandings of Islam and Iranian politics, I believe it is important to attempt to understand Foucault's philosophy on his own terms. Although his conclusions might have resulted from a misinterpretation of Islam, the reasoning behind this misinterpretation is essential for understanding Foucault's subsequent philosophic writings and for adequately critiquing this philosophy. Foucault concluded, as a consequence of his interpretation of Shi'ism and the actions of the Iranians against the Shah, that subjects were at least partially self-determining and could resist repressive Western power structures. Foucault also noticed many similarities between this Eastern alternative and the way that the West used to address the interpretation of truth, personal ethics, and political action. After his return from Iran, Foucault underwent a long-term examination of ancient Greek, Roman, and early Christian texts to determine how and when the West deviated from its Eastern roots, which became the bases for his final lectures at the College de France and his final volumes concerning the history of sexuality.

<center>Political Spirituality and the Technologies of the Self</center>

To come to a clearer understanding of "political spirituality" one must first re-examine the term "spirituality" by itself in comparison with Foucault's later works. For Foucault, spirituality is opposed to modern philosophy and modern morality in that it does not seek to impose strict adherence to a moral code on each individual. This term does not necessarily refer to a set of religious principles or adherence to a way of life in accordance with the will of a deity. Although in the case of the Iranian Revolution Foucault considered Shi'ism the main cause of the spiritual resistance by the Iranian people to the

Shah's despotic political regime, the importance of spirituality lies in the individual process through which a person continuously determines personal conditions for the realization of truth.

Spirituality, then, is much more flexible concerning self-transformation and realization of truth than is philosophy.

> We will call 'philosophy' the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth. If we call this 'philosophy', then I think we could call 'spirituality' the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth (Foucault 2001, 15).

Modern philosophy has become a process through which the goal of the individual is to reach a final condition where one will be able to examine and come to a realization of the truth. This process is linear in nature and has a definite end in reaching a final state in which one lives in accordance with universally applicable truth. Philosophy is guided by the principle that one must use reason to accumulate a body of concrete facts about oneself and one's environment to determine the best course of personal and public action. In the West, this search for truth has led to the development of a series of formal procedures and codes according to which each person must abide to be considered moral or within the bounds of truth. Such is the nature of the modern scientific method and judicial law.

Foucault contrasts this "Code Morality" with that of the Classical Greeks and Romans, both of which were not primarily guided by a set moral code, but rather by the injunction to "take care of thyself" (1986, 45). The emphasis under Greek and Roman morality was not to strictly follow positive laws and moral commands, but to train oneself to be able to resist and become master over temptations and passion.

> Although the necessity of respecting the law and the customs – the *nomoi*- was very often underscored, more important than the content of the law and its conditions of application was the attitude that caused one to respect them. The accent was placed on the relationship with the self that enabled a person to keep from being carried away by the appetites and pleasures, to maintain a mastery and superiority over them, to keep his

senses in a state of tranquility, to achieve a mode of being that could be defined by the full enjoyment of oneself, or the perfect supremacy of oneself over oneself (Foucault 1985, 31).

For the Greeks, this ability to maintain complete control over one's actions and emotions required a continual training through which one would always be prepared to face any temptation, unfortunate event, and even death with moderation or composure. This self-imposed moderation was not a preemptive straightjacketing of the subject by disciplines, but rather the way for the individual to lead the most free and happy life possible. Freedom from physical appetites most adequately preserved health, provided for an efficient household, and ensured a proper relation between men and boys, each to ensure the proper function of the individual and the city (see Foucault 1985, 97-8, 153, 203, 206-7). This training, or *askesis*, was ongoing, without a definite end or a set formula for the self- realization of an aesthetic ideal, and was never exactly the same for any two people.

> The individual did not make himself into an ethical subject by universalizing the principles that informed his action; on the contrary, he did so by means of an attitude and a quest that individualized his action, modulated it, and perhaps even gave him a special brilliance by virtue of the rational and deliberate structure his action manifested (Foucault 1985, 62).

The product of aesthetic living was a beautiful life which would be fulfilling for the individual and which would leave behind a beautiful memory for all others unable to duplicate this work.

However, for the Greeks, *askesis* was not merely a personal preparation to live an ethical private lifestyle, it was also intended as a preparation to serve the public. It is in this sense that Foucault combines the term "political" with spirituality to denote a condition that embraces both a personal transformation and an ability to affect one's relations with others. Foucault uses Plato's dialogue *Alcibiades* and Plutarch's description of the Spartans to illustrate the public nature of spirituality more clearly. In the Platonic dialogue, Socrates tells the young Alcibiades that he must first learn to take care and master himself before he can adequately take care of the city later in his life (Foucault 2001, 494).

In order to bring about the harmony and stability that is the mark of the perfectly regulated city, one must first undergo the necessary training to ensure harmony and stability within one's own soul. This *askesis* can only be achieved through an education, through which the individual might learn from an early age the art, *technê*, of taking care of one's self. Socrates points out to Alcibiades that he was deficient in this education, especially when compared with the Spartans, due to his double misfortune of being an Athenian and being the ward of Pericles. This would imply that the individual needs a certain amount of guidance from other, wiser individuals, the laws, or from the gods to develop an aesthetic existence beneficial to both the individual and the city.

Plutarch describes the Spartan attitude towards education and governance that Socrates claims is so deficient in Athens. The Spartan Andraxandridas explained to a foreigner that they entrust their ample fertile lands to the care of Helots so that they can take care of themselves (Foucault 2001, 31). The Spartans have created a system where they have the freedom from menial labor necessary to undergo a continual training to both improve themselves and protect the city. Their laws have provided both and education in moderate living and have granted them with the physical ability to undergo this spiritual mode of life. The mutually reciprocal relationship between training of the self and rule of the city is evident in both of these examples. In order to effectively rule the city, one must first know how to take care of oneself, and to ensure the freedom necessary to take care of oneself, the city must be strong enough to provide the proper education for its citizens.

Foucault was by no means sympathetic to the entire Greek philosophical project. In fact, he directly refuted the idea that he was looking for an alternative to Western modernity through a return to Greek philosophy (Foucault 1984a, 343). The *askesis* that the Greeks required each individual to undergo was intended to assist in the realization of a metaphysical aesthetic ideal, a "best" way to live. However, Foucault was very interested in the concept of spirituality as a continual *askesis* of the self,

and believed that this could apply in the modern era as an alternative to the Cartesian model that

required that one "capture" knowledge and use it to construct and enforce a strict moral code that each

individual must follow. This continual training would enable the individual to identify the points at

which dominating powers exerted control upon him and the points at which he was inadequate to

combat these powers. This recognition or confession of inadequacy would lead to a personal

transformation that would enable to the individual to develop the intellectual tools necessary to combat

and change political power.

Political spirituality is similar to religion in the sense that it requires a confession of one's true

nature and one's deficiencies. Spirituality also enables a personal conversion into an individual who is

open to enlightenment, or the realization of truth. However, rather than attributing this spiritual process

to divine inspiration or the "indwelling of the holy spirit," Foucault attributes these spiritual qualities to

the self. Therefore, the self replaces the belief in a sovereign divinity as the source of all truth. For

Foucault, the problem for the modern West is how to overcome the Code Morality that has been

dominant since the elaboration of the arts of living through Christian confession during the second

century A.D., and return to a mode of existence similar to (but not exactly the same as) that of the

Classical Greeks and Romans.

Foucault's Foundationless Democratic Theory

The question for Foucault remains: How to return to a life guided by an art of living determined

by each individual subject as opposed to a scientific life, regulated by hard irrefutable rules?

Unfortunately, he never directly answers this question in his remaining publications. Perhaps the reason

for this silence is that the spiritual process must be different for each individual and must come as a

result of each person's private quest for aesthetic living. Foucault keeps in line with his disdain for firm

metaphysical foundations in political theory by refusing to provide a rigid framework, which future thinkers might be tempted to follow instead of developing their own flexible, situation specific, political and ethical models. However, despite Foucault's silence on this matter, one is able to determine what type of political regime would enable the individual to practice a political spirituality. I contend that, for Foucault, the only post-modern political alternative that the West could follow is a continuation of liberal democracy, yet under different theoretical foundations.

The case for a "democratic" Foucault has been made by several scholars and has been supported for various reasons (see Pickett 1997; Thiele 1990; Hooke 1987). This claim has been disputed by other authors who insist that Foucault has as much in common with Marxism and Nietzschean elitism as with democracy (see Johnson 1991, 582). However, I believe it is clear from Foucault's statements concerning the importance of freedom and human rights, and his identification of power, not economic production, as the primary determining social force, that by 1978 he had moved beyond a serious consideration of Marxism as a viable future political guide (see for example Thiele 1991, 586; Foucault 2005e, 185). For Foucault, liberal democracy is the only viable political possibility for Western nations in the near future since this is the only political system in which the individual might have sufficient personal freedom to effectively resist and change predominant power relations. Democracy is a "perpetuation and amelioration of the conditions that make struggle itself possible" (Thiele 1990, 918) since democratic liberties not only allow for the individual freedom to organize protest marches and vote against undesirable policies, they also more importantly allow the individual to engage power structures on a discursive level where the processes that separate truth from error are established.

The pro-democratic reading of Foucault is opposed to the teachings of Nietzsche and his qualms about the effects of democracy on the human spirit and the creation of the infamous Last Man. For Nietzsche, democracy re-enforces a mode of thought that makes creativity and struggle against systems

of power impossible because the great human spirits capable of creation are leveled by the democratic demand for equality and conformity amongst individuals. The democratic individual would then slip into an existence of complacency and passive acceptance of the conditions imposed upon him by the system. Foucault, however, views democracy as a political system that actually encourages struggle. Democracy for Foucault provides the necessary conditions, such as freedom and equality amongst citizens, which make the opportunities for political struggle more numerous and more successful (see Pickett 1997, 923-4; Thiele 1990, 922-3). Also, since the spell of absolute truth has been broken in Western society, he would claim that democracy would give a greater number of intellectuals the freedom to struggle against and create new regimes of truth, applicable at the local level or on an individual basis. In Foucault's democracy, each person would have the ability to determine what is true for himself. The individual would not be bound by the strict moral codes and negative sovereign powers that have been the mark of Western government for centuries and consequently, would then have the freedom to attempt to manifest one's own aesthetic ideal both in private life and on the political level (see Bevir 1999, 75-76). According to Bevir, Foucault argues that not only must a good society merely tolerate dissent and resistance to power, a good society must also encourage the different interpretations of aesthetic existence that arise between individuals (1999, 74). Democracy, then, encourages struggle because it ensures the freedom necessary for effective resistance at the local/grassroots level of political life against repressive powers and provides the individual with the opportunity to create new lines of discourse that re-invent the manner in which society as a whole considers what constitutes acceptable knowledge. Foucault' dispute with modern Liberal democracy, then, is not necessarily based on a concern for individual freedom. Both Foucault and the modern philosophers share this concern. Foucault's critique is targeted at the Enlightenment philosophy that provides the foundation and

justification for repressive social structures that he believes merely pay lip service to the importance of freedom while subtly manipulating each individual into a tool of the state (see Pickett 1997, 922).

The prerequisite for Foucault's new foundationless democratic theory is the expulsion of the ideal that political theory must be grounded in the recognition of natural human rights and that these rights must be ensured by sovereign law. Foucault sees sovereign law as a holdover from the Middle Ages when monarchy arose as an institution that could put an end to feudal squabbles and petty conflicts (1980b, 121).

> Sovereign, law, and prohibition formed a system of representation of power which has extended during the subsequent era by the theories of right: political theory has never ceased to be obsessed with the person of the sovereign…What we need, however, is a political philosophy that isn't erected around the problem of sovereignty, nor therefore around the problems of law and prohibition. We need to cut off the king's head: in political theory that has still to be done (Foucault 1980b, 121)

Sovereign law consisted of a system in which laws were increasingly codified resulting in a judicial apparatus that had the negative function of identifying and punishing deviation from a written code. As a result of these clearly defined laws and enforcement mechanisms, the West has created a political condition in which peace and prosperity have been secured for much of its population. However, these benefits have only been able to exist because disciplines have implemented systems of power that include hierarchical organization, advanced technologies of surveillance and examination, and the assurance of a generalized mindset amongst the population. The disciplines have not only exercised external power on each individual, but they have also created a system in which the individual is trained to abide by a normalized behavior. These "technologies of the self", including the shame one feels for having engaged in "deviant" sexual activity or the increased concern for personal hygiene and heath, through which the individual is conditioned to confess his deviations from the moral code and act in such a manner as to maximize his economic efficiency, are exactly what Foucault seeks to combat. He does not stand in opposition to all manifestations of power since power is an inevitable element in

28

human society. In fact, he recognizes the creative function of power in defining the parameters of human existence. However, Foucault does challenge the repressive violence and hegemony of ideas that exists within modern Enlightenment-based systems of power.

Foucault draws a distinction in his later works, then, between the systems of power that create and diffuse a body of accepted knowledge and truth throughout society and systems that violently repress all opposition to dominant bodies of power/knowledge. For Foucault, power is an inescapable element in human society. In this case, he appears to believe that he escapes reference to a metaphysical ideal in that power is always in a state of flux. Opposition to power always exists and alters the dominant systems in a continual process, similar to the Hegelian dialectic, but in a multi-faceted, random, and non-progressive manner and without the hope for a final stage of economic development. Given the existence and deterministic nature of power, Foucault believes that the individual has the ability to at least partially resist the systems of power that dominate society and work for a change in the political conditions that promote popular notions of truth.

> The essential problem for the intellectual is not to criticize the ideological contents supposedly linked to science, or to ensure that his own scientific practice is accompanied by a correct ideology, but that of ascertaining the possibility of a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousnesses – or what's in their heads – but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth. It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time (Foucault 1980b, 133)

Those individuals, intellectuals, who have the ability to influence the systems that produce truth, must have the freedom from modern hegemonic powers that maintain and enforce the status quo. Bevir argues that Foucault draws a distinction between power and violence. The latter preemptively defines the actions all individuals must perform and enforces these actions through a severe restriction of freedom while the former leaves open the possibility for free action and resistance (1999, 73). For Foucault, Modern democratic theory has justified a political system under which deviation from the code is

punished with violent repression. He believes that democracy must operate without physical and psychological methods of coercion, and must allow sufficient freedom for peaceful dissent. Foucault recognizes the inescapability of power but insists that the individual have sufficient freedom from violent manipulation to affect some measure of change in the political system.

For Foucault, opposition to powerful Western modes of subjugation is possible if a new philosophy replaces the Platonic/Christian search for universal political and ethical ideals, including the medieval invention of sovereign law and the Enlightenment belief in natural human rights. Foucault's post-modern democracy must not be based on metaphysical principles. Rather, Foucault calls for a foundationless democracy that would transcend the negative function of the current system, under which the individual would define his own justification for existence in a continual process of self-examination and self-critique. This ongoing process, this political spirituality, replaces the Western emphasis on metaphysical ideals and transcends the code morality that has been the guiding ethical force in the West for centuries. This political condition is necessarily without any ethical foundation, so that the individual might have the freedom to develop a *personal* regime of truth under which he would work to live aesthetically.

A Defense of the Enlightenment

Foucault's belief that a political spirituality is the next step in the ontology of power for the West has a few appealing characteristics. Having the freedom to resist repression and to live an aesthetically pleasing life under one's own regime of truth and one's own ethical standard is an extremely interesting proposition. Certainly, common sense indicates that scientific discourse cannot define the *whole* truth concerning human behavior nor can it serve as the ultimate touchstone for determining proper governmental structure. Therefore, Foucault's belief that the subject can resist the ethical conditioning

forced upon him by a scientific regime of truth that cows humans into a bland, safe, and efficient existence is a profitable contribution to modern political philosophy. However, to claim that Western society must reject Enlightenment philosophy, especially the Natural Right doctrine, as a basis for proper government and individual freedom is to reject a fundamental concept that is an essential foundation for successful democracy.

Foucault's argument against Natural Right is that it has been the justification for repressive disciplinary techniques, such as the prison and the clinic, that claim to protect human rights yet actually serve to limit individual freedom. His solution is to allow each individual to practice an art of living, a political spirituality, in which one would self-justify actions and create an individually oriented set of ethical values through which they could affect political society. However, the common recognition and respect for the Natural Rights doctrine is the firm foundation that binds each citizen together in a mutual respect for *others'* freedom, especially their rights to acquire and maintain sufficient private property to facilitate happiness. The ability of the individual to both discern what an aesthetic life requires and actually have the ability to pursue this mode of life both depend heavily on the freedom political repression and economic privation that is ensured by a government established in accordance with Enlightenment philosophy.

John Locke explains the Enlightenment emphasis on mutual recognition of natural rights within civil society in his *Two Treatises of Government*. Locke claims that man must enter into civil society to escape the violence arising from competition over scarce resources found in the state of nature (1988, 330-332). In this condition, every man has an equally legitimate claim to authority and, hence, an equal claim to the use of violence to obtain essential, scarce resources. However, no man can adequately secure either his physical safety or personal happiness, which are two natural human desires, due to the physical threats posed by other men in this competition over scarce resources. Although Natural Law

requires respect for others' and reciprocal jurisdiction in the state of nature, there is no guarantee that each individual will abide by this natural law since scarcity will eventually coerce individuals to use violence to obtain the goods necessary for the preservation of their own life. To more adequately secure life and happiness, each individual man, then, gives up his natural claim to absolute freedom and enters into a social contract with other men so that each might more successfully provide for each goal within civil society. The end of civil society, including the institutions that shape and limit human behavior found within this society, is to preserve the security and enjoyment of private property, which through labor brings an end to scarcity and allows each individual to live together in a relative state of prosperity and peace (Locke 1988, 350-353).

This social contract requires the universal recognition that each man is equal to all others in that each has the same natural desire for life and happiness and that each must have sufficient freedom to pursue these goals (Locke 1988, 350-353). The fact that the right to freedom is natural indicates that it is above the decisions of individual humans, and that any violation of this natural law, or the positive laws that are directly derived by this natural right, would be unjust, "God and Nature never allowing a man to abandon himself, as to neglect his own preservation" (Locke 1988, 380, 168). Therefore, civil society must enforce the common recognition that each man is equal and free by nature through laws and a judicial system, and not by faith that individuals will have the intellectual ability and leisure time to discern for themselves exactly what actions are aesthetic. Locke claims,

> The greatest part of mankind want leisure or capacity for demonstration… And you may as soon hope to have all the day-labourers and tradesmen, and spinsters and dairy-maids, perfect mathematicians, as to have them perfect in ethics this way (quoted in Strauss 1965, 225-6).

Clearly, the bulk of the population will not respond to complex rational arguments in order to give up its natural claims to freedom. Institutions are required to enforce this view on most people to gain compliance and the mutual benefits gained by participation in civil society. However, aside from this

threat arising from those that do not have the ability to educate themselves in high ethics, there is no

guarantee that even the "perfect mathematicians" and all other rational individuals will exercise the

voluntary will, to surrender any natural or conventional advantage and live according to unwritten

aesthetic values. Therefore, laws must serve as both a guarantee for the physical enforcement of natural

human rights within society and as an education for each citizen in the value of respecting these natural

rights. To ensure this enforcement and education in natural human rights, the government must be an

impartial judge concerning what is ethically correct. Locke argues, "For where there is an Authority, a

Power on Earth, from which relief can be had by appeal, there the continuance of the State of War is

excluded, and the controversie is decided by that power" (1988, 282). Since each individual cannot be a

fair and impartial judge concerning his own natural desires, an independent sovereign body of law and

the institutions required to enforce this law on each citizen equally, must exist to maintain the social

contract. Locke continues to argue that the alternative to a secular sovereign judge is merely an appeal to

heaven, as was the case for the Israelite Jephthah (Judg. 11:27, NRSV), to which any party in the state of

nature has an equal claim to make (Locke 1988, 282). It is only through physical enforcement of

impartial laws and an education in the ideals of natural equality and freedom, that each individual gains

the capacity and security to undergo labor, enter into contracts, and pursue other economic activities that

channel competition to provide for the common good and individual happiness.

Deprived of the theoretical foundation that civil society must judicially enforce limitations on

universal individual freedom and educate its citizens in the value of respecting these rights, then despite

the high-level of economic prosperity and freedom from competition over scarce resources that the West

currently enjoys, modern society would necessarily be plunged back into the state of nature. In this

condition, violence becomes merely a matter of ability and not ethics because, "If our principles have no

other support than our blind preferences, everything a man is willing to dare will be permissible"

(Strauss 1965, 4-5). Foucault appears to either ignore or completely miss the inability or unwillingness of most men to either comprehend or live according to aesthetic ideals and cites the Iranian Revolution as an example of what a people can achieve given the desire to live an aesthetically pleasing life. The fact that the Iranians were momentarily successful against a *semi*-western regime was evidence enough for him that the chains placed on society as a safeguard against disorder were finally ready to be taken off and replaced with an honor system, under which each individual's personal aesthetics would spontaneously lead to a recognition of others' freedom. We have the boon of hindsight to realize that the Iranian Revolution, while astonishingly successful and, for Foucault, inspirational, soon resulted in violent theocratic rule by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Khomeini, who Foucault believed would fade into obscurity after his role as symbolic leader was completed (2005d, 204), left a legacy of bloodshed, including that of his revolutionary courts. The abilities of certain charismatic and resourceful individuals such as Khomeini, to manipulate a population un-bound by stable sovereign law, indicates that Foucault's rejection of Western political theory is grounded in over-optimism concerning mankind's ability to abide peacefully without the aid of negative reinforcement.

Certainly, the ancient Greeks, from whom Foucault borrows his positive regard for personal aesthetics and the art of living, faced similar threats from wealthy, charismatic, and ambitious individuals. Though the Greeks believed the aesthetic ideal was accomplished by living moderately, not all individuals abided by this ideal. Alcibiades, to turn Foucault's example against him, to whom Socrates explained the importance of the arts of living, was the single greatest threat to the Athenian democracy precisely because he disregarded the moderate life. This threat did not arise, however, from a lack of laws in Athens promoting moderation, because the Athenians and other Greek cities had viable legal systems through which they sought to limit certain kinds of behavior. The threat from individuals such as Alcibiades arose from the lack of an education that each person was equal and free by nature,

hence Socrates' critique of Athenian education and Alcibiades' personal training under Pericles. Without this crucial piece of political education, which Foucault characterizes as repressive, aspirations to tyranny were only limited by one's lack of resources and not necessarily through aesthetics. Although the philosophical impetus to live moderately remained constant amongst much of Western society until, perhaps, Machiavelli, the politically ambitious individuals who usually controlled society did not necessarily reflect this ideal in their actions.

Given Foucault's argument that freedom to engage in self-critique (*askesis*) and struggle against repressive political power is an essential element for society, then, despite Foucault's objections, I argue that Enlightenment philosophy actually remains as the most effective existing method in existence for securing a political system that facilitates these conditions. The institutions for which the Natural Right doctrine has served as a justification, such as the capital economy and federal political system, are effective barriers against privation and ambition, which are the two factors that constitute the most drastic threats to freedom. Both allow for the exhaustion of ambition in both the economic and political arenas, while simultaneously providing for the greatest economic good of the population. In a capital economy the most capable individuals will more likely divert their talents into the economic sector, in order to generate the greatest amount of capital for themselves, rather than pursue political honors, which would be limited in scope by the various checks and balances included in the Federal system. Furthermore, as a result of this diversion of talents into the economic sector, the remainder of society benefits from an increased standard of living, higher employment, and an overall relief from the struggle over scarce resources. It is through the ability to freely pursue private property that the "Quarrelsome and Contentious" are kept in check (Locke 1988, 290) and those, such as Foucault, who desire to pursue aesthetics, have the ability to do so.

Foucault's objection to this political arrangement is the limiting effect that he perceives material comfort and extremely subtle and powerful pre-conditioning have on the creative ability of the individual. However, Foucault did eventually argue that the individual was at least partially self-determining and able to overcome these technologies of repression. Once Foucault made this admission, then his argument against the Enlightenment lost its potency. Since he argues that the subject is potentially self-determining despite the repressive mechanisms enforced by the modern political system, then the modern system remains as desirable now as it was for the Enlightenment philosophers. Not only does this system protect each individual from the violence and privation of the state of nature, but it also still allows for the possibility of an aesthetic life. Foucault might be correct in asserting that capitalist economics and democracy have a limiting effect on individual creativity. However, this limitation applies to the bulk of the population who would not have the means, either through overwork or a natural inability, to develop an aesthetically pleasing life anyways. Despite Foucault's nostalgic gaze towards Classical Greece and Rome as an era in which people were less influenced by pervasive sovereign power, I am inclined to believe that the People, or the Plebs, never lived an aesthetically ideal existence, even in pre-Enlightenment society. This pleasant and privileged lifestyle was reserved for the minority who possessed the material and the intellectual capacity to recognize the merits of aesthetics. The fact that Foucault, and for that matter any intelligent modern individual, can appreciate the value of aesthetics, leads one to believe that the potential for greatness and brilliant creativity that philosophers have attributed as the products of great struggle, is not completely destroyed by the modern political system. Also, since aesthetic living is a matter of education and freedom from privation and violence, then the modern system secures adequate conditions within which the individual might develop such a political existence.

I agree with Foucault's claim that one must continually examine oneself and strive to reflect these self-reflections in the political arena; however, the political and economic implications of the Natural Rights doctrine must remain as the guarantors of individual freedom against those who cannot or will not attempt a similar pursuit of an aesthetic mode of life. Modern education and judicial law, rather than serving as tools to limit all members of society, provide a template upon which talented individuals might design a personal aesthetics that others could emulate. Natural Right, then, does not inhibit the ability of the individual to examine himself, resist repressive powers, and implement creative alternatives to existing political powers. Rather than being a subtle tyrant as Foucault argues, Natural Right secures the conditions under which the individual has sufficient freedom to construct a political spirituality, while remaining safe from those who would pursue their own interests at the expense of others' freedom.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have examined a substantial shift in Michel Foucault' s political philosophy. In his early writings, Foucault dismissed the ability of the subject to resist the repressive political mechanisms enforced by the modes of scientific discourse that have dominated post-Enlightenment society. After the Iranian Revolution, however, Foucault promoted the idea that the subject was, in fact, capable of resistance and able to influence the formation of new political relationships. Although his conclusions might have been based on a faulty understanding of Islam and Iranian politics, Foucault interpreted the Iranian Revolution as an indicator that the subject was, in fact, able to successfully challenge the highly repressive modes of post-Enlightenment scientific discourse. He used the term "political spirituality" to describe this new attitude towards the subject and, I have argued, this term is

synonymous with the Greek term *askesis*, which denotes a continual work on the self to achieve an aesthetic existence on both a private and public level and was a key concept in Foucault's later writings.

Foucault's modified position concerning the subject and aesthetics has had a profound impact on his political theory. His embrace of a self-determining subject and the importance of the aesthetic process in influencing political discourse necessitate a protection of individual freedom within the political system. In the late Twentieth century, only Liberal democracy ensured any semblance of the freedom necessary to develop a private and public aesthetics of existence and Foucault did indeed embrace democracy as a desirable political system. However, Foucault accepted democracy only on the condition that the Enlightenment emphasis on natural human rights and judicial enforcement of these rights would be eliminated or at least relaxed. Free from the limitations forced upon the subject by dogmatic and repressive disciplines that have determined political discourse for the past few centuries, Foucault believed each individual would be free to work on their own personal aesthetics and attempt to influence the political system.

In response to this foundationless democratic theory, I have argued that Foucault's position is untenable and ultimately counter-productive. Foucault is correct in claiming that the current system does promote institutions that exercise vast control and limit creativity within the general population; however, promoting a democracy in which the people are not hindered by any theoretical restraints on political and ethical action places mankind back into the state of nature. I contend that the modern political system does currently allow an outlet for the development of a personal aesthetics and does enable the subject to project these ideas into the public sphere. This is true since the limitations on freedom that Foucault claims inhibit individual creativity, actually potentially assist aesthetic creativity due to the protection from violence and privation that the system affords to modern individuals. If there has been any democratic leveling as, for example, de Tocqueville and Nietzsche claim, then the remedy

for this undesirable condition definitely does not consist in weakening or eliminating social restrictions in the hopes that humans will find brilliant yet peaceful outlets for their suppressed creativity, as Foucault would claim.

Foucault's switch from a position in which he was pessimistic about the subject's ability to influence their political situation, into an overly optimistic champion of individual freedom and the aesthetic subject is remarkable. The fact that an acclaimed author and philosopher would undergo this level of extreme change in his thought over such a short period should arouse much debate over the reasons behind such a change and the merits of the resulting argument. Recently published translations of Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution into English will hopefully promote further examination into Foucault's embrace of a partially self-determining political subject and his defense of public aesthetics. The value of this essay, I hope, rests in the elaboration of a concept (political spirituality) that has remained unclear for many scholars over the past quarter century, and in the more general defense of our much harried Western political institutions at a time when many across the globe have begun to openly and violently question their justice and effectiveness in providing for the "good life."

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