HEAVEN ON EARTH: THE TOTAL STATE

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By 1922, a certain notion of Empire was already clear for Carl Schmitt when he remarked of the European state that "[t]he machine now runs by itself."[1] What he was describing was the increasing embeddedness of the state within society—the "total state," whose rejection of transcendent sovereignty would see its concerns spreading more profoundly within the earthly affairs of society than ever before. Today, with the global triumph of liberal society, the notion of an immanent, "self-propelling machine" could, to a certain extent, be said to underlie many of our perceptions of contemporaneity: technology (progress), society (integration), and not least of all, politics (consensus). As Giorgio Agamben has argued, this eclipse of immanence over transcendence within the organization of Western society was something set in motion centuries ago.[2] Yet, while such an understanding can explain many facets of the development of the state, the division of public and private realms, the rise and hegemony of capitalism, etc., it does not directly account for the equally linear growth and dispersion of mechanisms of control and domination that Michel Foucault has eloquently described in his studies of governmentality.

Seemingly, thus, one could posit that we have in fact two parallel genealogies that were both born out of the same rupture in the late sixteenth century: that of an enlightened society exploring a universe without transcendence; one grounded in the newfound immanence of all worldly possibilities—sciences, arts, and human production; and that of political prognosis, the rise of apparatuses of control, discipline, and what Foucault would call mechanisms of security, both seeming to advance in reciprocity and unison. While both of these lineages are fairly uncontroversial in themselves, I would like to put forth the provocation here that the relationship between the two is bound by a certain anxiety new to human history that was produced by the slow erosion of any possible transcendent horizon—the elimination of the prospect not only of a divine plane of existence, but indeed of any constituent *other*, exteriority and difference to human existence. In this way, I want to postulate that the history of governmentality that Foucault articulates, its various mechanisms and apparatuses of control, regularization, security, and biopower, constitute a singular, negative response to the angst of a world maddeningly immanent to itself—a totality slowly losing site of its exterior in its efforts to maintain purchase on that which constitutes its ever-expanding interior. The state, from its birth in the late sixteenth century until today, with its obsessive and ever-totalizing attempts to gain mastery over the vastness of uncertainty of life, will be the motor behind this history.

Until the sixteenth century, within the eschatological framework of time that the Catholic Church provided, the history of human expectation and anticipation could be assured a sense of consistency, however uncertain the End of the World would prove to be. In this way, the Catholic Church maintained a kind of monopoly on the future and thus on the lives of those under its temporal sway. As an institution whose truth is predicated on the arrival of the apocalypse, the Church had to constantly integrate the future within its structuring of time. Its substantive existence as a worldly institution was based entirely on its perpetual indeterminacy with regard to the concrete End of the World: It had to constantly posit the possibility of this event, while never confirming its arrival. As a result, the production of all visions of the future was a task solely administered by the Church. By the early sixteenth century the Reformation would give birth to a war whose momentary peace with the signing of the Peace of Augsburg would grant for the first time the earthly activity of "politics" the power to now decide the fate previously determined by the heavens. For the first time in Christian history, peace was to be both the goal and responsibility of the modern states, whose birth was confirmed nearly a century later.

In contrast to most positivist accounts of the Renaissance, with no eschatological horizon, a terrifying liberation of worldly uncertainty was unleashed across Europe. All forms of astrological and apocalyptic presentiment beset a society deprived of its divine destiny. In this vacuum, the absolutist state began to recover control over the future relinquished by the Church, vehemently setting itself against any and all forms of prophecy and divination, monopolizing this task as its own.

Having, in this way secularized the future, time, under state rule, became the linear object of prognosis. As Reinhardt Koselleck tells us, political calculation together with humanist sobriety delineated the axes of a new, secular future. With its zealous disavowal of religious prophetic indeterminacy, the state employed rational political forecasting, giving both cadence and possibility to uncertain future events: the future became the domain of probability, and salvation, its knowledge. Koselleck enunciates the relationship between prognosis and the early state:

> Rational prognosis assigns itself to intrinsic possibilities, but through this produces an excess of potential controls on the world. Time is always reflected in a surprising fashion in the prognosis; the constant similitude of eschatological expectation is dissolved by the continued novelty of time running away with itself and prognostic attempts to contain it. In terms of temporal structure, then, prognosis can be seen to be the integrating factor of the state that transgresses the limited future of the world to which it has been entrusted.[3]

In short, the state enters a period of "open historicity," of indefinite permanence in which it has neither origin, nor end. Instead, it exists by the necessity and urgency of a future with no particular hope, in which the state exists to perpetually save itself. *Raison d'État,*[4] that most tautological of self-manifestations, comes to drive the apparatus of absolutist governments to permanent self-awareness in relation to the threat of external competition and the burden of unlimited peace. Against this ominous horizon, the state will arm a vast new apparatus with the political technique of "statistics," charging itself with the task of the perpetual collection and monitoring of state knowledge.

Foucault's work in *Security, Territory, Population* presents a genealogy of the modern state emerging from this condition, which reveals a history dominated by the perpetual accumulation of mechanisms and apparatuses of control that corresponds with the ever-increasing uncertainty haunting the state. Just as political prognoses would continuously expose possible futures, they would equally disclose potential threats arising from both outside and from within the state—war and sedition. His discussion of the concept of *Polizeiwissenschaft*, or the science of the police, which emerged in response to this, brings to light a certain crucial advancement in the history of modern state power no longer preoccupied by the heavenly assurances of eschatology. The seventeenth-century German police state would primarily operate by the reciprocal interaction between sovereign authority and police discipline, functioning by measures of brutal repression and prohibition. By the eighteenth century, the increasing importance of the market in the interests of maintaining international peace would bring about a critical set of reforms to the state instigated by the physiocrats. With

1. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 48.
2. See Giorgio Agamben, *Il Regno e la Gloria: Per una genealogia teologica dell'economia e del governo. Homo sacer, II, 2* (Milan: Neri Pozza, 2007).

their insistence on a laissez-faire approach to government, the state would concern itself with the management of evermore-earthly matters surrounding the development of capitalism and its requirements of free circulation. These reforms, far from supplanting the presence of the police, saw in fact the augmentation of their disciplinary apparatuses by new set of more sophisticated and diffuse mechanisms of regulation. This new framework of security would operate at a much finer scale, penetrating far deeper into the population—the new *subject-object* of government, whose shifting composition produced endless phenomena to be monitored by the state. Between both disciplinary mechanisms and apparatuses of regulation, a new totality of state control would span from the minute interstices of life to the general conduct of the population in relation to its external forces. However, by the nineteenth century, the state would further expand its interests, shifting its concern from the economic competition between states to that between individuals. With this, the liberal ideal of "civil society" would emerge, which coincided with the multiplication of security apparatuses, intensifying their effect in proportion to the expansion of the increasingly globalized economic space. This new conception of control, because it appealed to contingencies and phenomena of reality, became recognized simply *as nature*, thus rendering it at once pervasive and invisible.

It is clear that the liberal turn arrived not in opposition to the absolutist state, but rather as a reform from within it. It is thus not surprising to note that such an "opening-up" of state practices of monitoring and control coincided with their intensification, which was precisely proportional to the distribution of rights and freedoms promised by liberal politics, and made possible only by the liberation of governments from monarchical administration. As such, the dismantling of police that took place should be seen as more of an institutional displacement of its functions. Now, state knowledge would be provided by a decentralization of police, and their displacement across new forms of institutional administration: economic practice, population management, law, and the elimination of disorder.

With the birth of liberalism in Europe, the state and its growing purchase on civil society increasingly presented itself as a universality capable of knowing and ordering everything within its grasp. It seemed that with the rise of the Third Estate in France and its identity of the nation (bourgeois society) and the state, followed by Napoleon's imperial disposition and the creation of a capitalist-driven European alliance, the immanence of the liberal state had achieved a kind of epistemological zenith.[5] Its perpetual references to nature gave further credence to the state as a sort of secularized kingdom, a realization of what is naturally immanent to mankind. Yet in proportion to the retreat of transcendence within the state, there has consistently been reciprocal intensification and sophistications of state control, colonizing ever finer, microscopic levels of control. With the birth of nineteenth-century biopolitics and its radical developments over the course of the twentieth century, the state's concern has been to render its actions invisible: through the very acts of monitoring, policing, and managing, the state at once must depoliticize its own activities while also providing material evidence of the "naturalness" and completeness of the society it purports to endorse. It is this same politics which aims to represent the entire social order as a closed, universal, "self-propelling machine" with no exterior. Seen in light of its obsessive, yet increasingly diffuse practices of control, contemporary neoliberalism is rather a negatively totalizing politics—a politics that seeks not to exist while simultaneously proffering the claim that it is all that exists.

3. Reinhardt Koselleck, *Futures Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 19.
4. *Raison d'État*, or "state reason," is both the essence of the state itself as well as the art of knowledge of its affairs. See Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). In particular, lectures from March 8, 1978; March 15, 1978; and March 22, 1978.
5. This claim of course acknowledges that even if European states would officially remain administered by one form of monarchy or another until late in the nineteenth century, this particular period marked a certain qualitative triumph for liberal society.