

# Perpetual Cold War: Michel Foucault and the Conditions of Philosophy

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## 1. Cold War Philosophy and the Philosophy of the Cold War

How are we supposed to conceive of the relationship between “philosophy” and the “Cold War”—two categories that appear to belong to quite distinct orders of human experience. One of them is either an institutionalized academic discipline or a more general intellectual discourse that exceeds its institutionalized forms; whereas the other is a concrete historical formation (albeit with contested boundaries) that is often treated as an object of various academic discourses. Even a cursory overview of the relevant literature will show that until now the relationship between them has been defined almost exclusively from the perspective of “history”

rather than that of “philosophy.” In other words, the goal for many has been the historicization of philosophy, an attempt to show that its apparently abstract discourse, to the degree that it was institutionalized as an academic discipline, is in reality directly shaped by the geopolitics of the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> The fact that academic institutions and academic discourses did come into contact with the global politics of the Cold War has long been recognized by historians, especially those working in the field of intellectual history. As a result, it is now quite common for us today to speak about the “military-industrial-academic complex” as an undeniable historical fact bequeathed to us by the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> While other disciplines within the university might have had more obvious ties with reigning ideologies, it now appears that philosophy itself was not so innocent after all.

There is, however, another quite obvious possible connection between philosophy and the Cold War that moves in the opposite direction. If we consider the basic fact that an academic discourse has the power to capture almost any object in its web of inquiries, we should also raise the following question: What happens when philosophy takes the Cold War as its object? This question is somewhat embarrassing for the simple reason that it is not entirely clear to us why philosophy would try to appropriate an object that traditionally has belonged to the domains of a whole series of other academic fields (history, political theory, economics, international relations, etc.). After all, what could philosophy do with this specific object that appears to be so inappropriate for its traditional concerns? The project that I would like to outline here, however, poses the latter, more embarrassing, question: not the question of how the Cold War influenced the formation of philosophy departments in the Western world, but the more elusive question of what philosophy as a form of theoretical reflection could do today with an entity like the Cold War? To put it differently, I would like to raise the question if there is, in fact, such a thing as a “philosophy of the Cold War”?

In the midst of these speculations, therefore, two terms emerge whose relationship needs to be clarified: on the one hand, we can speak of a “Cold War Philosophy” that is, on the other hand, opposed to something that we could call “the philosophy of the Cold War.” What concerns me here, however, is the precise point where “Cold War philosophy” intersects with this other intellectual tradition that we just called “the philosophy of the Cold War.” The expression “Cold War philosophy” seems to evoke a specific moment in the history of philosophy: it appears to be the natural name to designate the group of philosophical works that happen to have been produced during the decades of the Cold War. This purely historical determination, however, does not tell us anything about the actual content of these works. More specifically, it does not in any way indicate whether these philosophical

works have anything to do with the Cold War beyond a mere historical coincidence. So, it is necessary to insist here on a stronger interpretation of the expression “Cold War philosophy”: we have to assume that in certain cases we might be able to establish a connection between the historical milieu and the actual thinking done in the name of philosophy during these decades. Let us then call “Cold War philosophy” the kind of philosophy that was written *under the conditions of the Cold War*. Of course, these historical conditions do not fully determine the ideas produced by philosophy, but they do produce visible effects in the works of the philosophers.

At the same time, philosophical works produced by so-called “continental philosophers” during the Cold War should suffice to convince us that this philosophy found it eminently important to reflect upon the political and cultural realities of its historical present. Yet, it is also safe to say that in most cases the philosophical confrontation with the Cold War (as opposed to that within the Cold War) has remained a secondary issue. No doubt, especially in the wake of May '68, the political critique of capitalism has been a crucial strain in continental philosophy. So, it is not difficult to find reflections on the USSR, the United States, capitalism, communism, the arms race, nuclear war (to mention only a few possible topics here) in the works of these philosophers. But this kind of historical reflection, nevertheless, often (but certainly not always) bypassed the problem of the Cold War as a historically specific global formation. This is why it appears now that there does exist an as yet unexamined archive of the philosophical engagements with the Cold War, and one of the possible tasks for the intellectual historian today could be to provide a systemic presentation of these often underappreciated passages in otherwise quite closely read works of philosophy.

But this way of formulating the problem already changes our focus from “Cold War philosophy” to “the philosophy of the Cold War.” Arguably, we could understand this latter term as a subcategory of a larger field or a specific current within a much larger stream of philosophical reflection: we could treat the problem of the philosophy of the Cold War as a specific episode (or series of episodes) in the history of the philosophy of war.<sup>3</sup> The concept of war, needless to say, has not been alien to philosophy. In other words, our second category (“the philosophy of the Cold War”) can be contextualized not only in terms of the Cold War but also in terms of a much broader philosophical tradition (as one particular form of engaging war philosophically). This tradition, of course, stretches beyond the temporal limits of the Cold War—it precedes it by millennia and will most likely outlive it as well. In this sense, we could speak of a philosophy of the Cold War (or, maybe even, a philosophy of a lower case “cold war”) whenever theoretical reflections on the concept of war consider the extreme or special situation in which war cannot be

waged by traditional military means due to an overwhelming balance of powers.<sup>4</sup> In other words, we come across a philosophy of the cold war whenever we encounter the theoretical possibility of a war that is, strictly speaking, not a war—a war that tries to achieve its goals without war-like measures. The intellectual chimera of this war that must be conducted by supposedly “non-military” means has haunted Western political theory for a long time now.

In fact, as I would like to eventually argue, we could consider this specific philosophy of war to be a quintessential element of all theories of modernity—even if this fact has gone mostly unnoticed so far. If we take seriously the historical fact that the Cold War coincided with the closure of the age of classic modernity, we might be able to argue that there is more than just an accidental connection between the two historical formations. Seen from this perspective, the Cold War might appear to have been something like the “logical” conclusion of Western modernity (in the sense that the “logic of modernity” reached one of its absurd conclusions in it). Consequently, we could argue that the “philosophy of the Cold War” is the inverse or underside of every theory of modernity. What the historical record will show is that we encounter a philosophy of the Cold War every time modernity is forced to reflect on itself.

So, what happens to our image of modernity if it is approached through this specific lens? Modern philosophies of history tended to presuppose the ontological primacy of negativity from which they derived a particular vision of the ends of history. For the sake of simplicity, we could identify two extreme positions: the Hobbesian model (which imagines the human condition to be a perpetual war that can be contained only by absolute sovereignty) and the Kantian model (according to which perpetual war actually leads to perpetual peace under a global constitutional federation of free states). Thus, the term “perpetual Cold War” is used here with a very specific meaning in mind. First and foremost, it is intended to be a Kantian pun. Kant’s mistake was not simply that he predicted perpetual peace instead of the perpetual war that seems to be our historical reality.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the point that apparently eluded him was that in a state of “perpetual peace” peace and war become indistinguishable. The only way to inhabit the space of perpetual peace is to reactivate the zone of indistinction between war and peace. In other words, what Kant did not fully foresee was that a contractually generated perpetual peace is, in reality, a perpetual war that encounters an internal blockage and, therefore, cannot be explicitly fought as an actual war: it is a perpetual non-war that produces displaced conflicts that periodically erupt in widely dispersed locations. This war, that has taken the logic of war to its absurd conclusion, is not perpetual peace, nor perpetual war, but the kind of perpetual war that is not a war, in other words: a

perpetual cold war. The question, therefore, that emerges here is whether we could in fact define the age of modernity as a perpetual cold war in this particular sense?

## 2. Foucault and the Cold War

In what follows here, the focus of my argument will be a specific point of intersection between Cold War philosophy and the philosophy of the Cold War. I will try to show that we could easily read Michel Foucault's works precisely in these terms: his philosophy is conditioned by the Cold War, and this conditioning becomes an object of philosophical reflection precisely when Foucault himself formulates a theory of the Cold War. In order to unpack this claim, one of the most useful starting points will be Foucault's theory of war as it was outlined in his 1975-1976 lectures, *"Society Must Be Defended."* This particular set of lectures will be very important for our arguments for two main reasons:

1. First and foremost because Foucault here formulates something like a genealogy of his own genealogical method itself. To put it differently, Foucault tries to account for *the historical conditions of his own philosophy itself*. This point needs to be emphasized because it is almost universally avoided, neglected, or forgotten in discussions of the significance of this particular series of lectures.

2. But tracing the history of the genealogical method leads him to a theory of war. In other words, this meta-genealogy is also a philosophy of war that conceives of power itself in terms of a "perpetual cold war."

We should, of course, also keep in mind that Foucault eventually abandoned war as the basic interpretive model for the operations of power. Foucault's theory of war is, therefore, often presented as a mere episode in his intellectual development that might provide some crucial insights into his growth as a thinker but has no real significance for our understanding of his general project. After all, the project of formulating a theory of power based on war was abandoned by Foucault by 1978.<sup>6</sup> What kind of conclusions can we draw on the basis of this aborted project that seems to have preoccupied him for about three years of his life? Even if we accept the general consensus that we should not try to make too much of this particular episode, could we not see in this attempt to theorize power through war a historical symptom of sorts?

In order to answer these questions, I would like to recount here three crucial moments from the argument of *"Society Must Be Defended."* First, I will briefly revisit Foucault's famous reversal of Clausewitz; then, I will present his reading of Hobbes

(which could be also described as a genuine reversal); and, finally, I will examine his account of the historical emergence of the discourse of “perpetual war” as race war. In short, what I would like to show is that (1) while the reversal of Clausewitz discovers a perpetual war behind social relations, (2) Foucault’s reading of Hobbes puts forth the thesis that Hobbes used the fiction of what we could call a “perpetual cold war” (which is not Foucault’s term) to combat an emerging political discourse that was predicated upon the assumption that we will find a perpetual war behind social relations. (3) This pitting of a perpetual cold war against a real perpetual war, then, is historicized in Foucault’s account of the emergence of the discourse of race war.

I. *Reversing Clausewitz*: From the very first moments of the very first lecture of the academic year, Foucault immediately ties the concept of genealogy to the problem of war. In his opening lecture, the genealogical method is defined in the following terms: “If you like, we can give the name ‘genealogy’ to this coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics”<sup>7</sup>. While the references to war in this particular sentence remain oblique, in light of what is to come in later lectures we can paraphrase Foucault in more direct terms: genealogy is the counter-memory of specific struggles (actual historical wars) that is going to be put to tactical use in the present (in the war that constitutes our present moment). Genealogy is a memory of war that itself acts like a weapon in another war. And this methodological shift towards “war” is presented here as a critique of the “economism” so prevalent in theories of power (both in the classical liberal juridical model as well as the Marxist theory of power). What Foucault suggests here is that beyond this “economism,” we should be able to discover a new set of terms for the analysis of power: conflict, confrontation, and war.

Hence Foucault’s infamous reversal of Clausewitz: “Power is war, the continuation of war by other means.”<sup>8</sup> As Foucault explains, this reversal implies three things—all three of which, we might add, take us closer not only to a theory of war but also to a theory of the Cold War itself. The three points can be reduced to three essential theses:

1. *Power is a Perpetual Silent War*: Foucault’s point is that, according to this specific discourse that he is analyzing here, every power relation has a concrete historical foundation. To be more precise, every power relation was established by a concrete relationship of forces in a war at a given historical moment. So, when a recognizable political power takes over, this power does not simply establish peace but continues to write the history of this foundational war: “According to this hypothesis, the role of political power is perpetually to use a sort of silent war to

reinscribe that relationship of force, and to reinscribe it in institutions, economic inequalities, language, and even the bodies of individuals" (p.16). Politics itself is the continuation of war by other means.

*2. Under these circumstances peace becomes undistinguishable from war.* It follows then from the previous point that the dividing line between war and peace is by definition blurred: "We are always writing the history of the same war, even when we are writing the history of peace and its institutions" (p.16). And, as Foucault puts it, political struggles within peacetime must be interpreted as "so many episodes, fragmentations, and displacements of the war itself" (p.16). To put it differently, politics in peace time is really displaced war.

*3. But the priority of war is still maintained:* The fact that war cannot be separated from peace, however, does not mean that the two terms are in fact identical. Foucault insists on the fact that war still enjoys a certain logical priority in relation to peace. As he puts, it "[t]he final decision can come only from war" (p.16). In fact, Foucault speaks here of the "last battle" that would "suspend the exercise of power as continuous warfare" (p.16). It is only war (the last battle) that can put an end to the logic of war: we are dealing with a genuine *perpetual* war since the very being of power is constituted by it.

The three theses together outline a new political ontology of war: war is ontologically prior to politics and remains a permanent operating principle of power even in peace time. This definition, therefore, imagines a perpetual war that is not necessarily manifested as a war but can be reactivated as an actual battle if the historical circumstances allow it. One of the most important consequences of this reversal of Clausewitz, therefore, is something like what we could call a certain "ontologization of war": war is now imagined to be a constitutive component of the social. Thus, taken out of context, this theory of war seems to suggest that we are dealing with a general description of power that might appear to be ahistorical in nature. To put it differently, war might appear here as a transcendental "condition of impossibility" of the social: an enabling condition that nevertheless constantly threatens the normal mechanisms of power. This is why we should now turn to Foucault's reversal of Hobbes to give some historical substance to this argument.

*II. Reversing Hobbes:* In the case of Hobbes, the reversal brought about by Foucault is of a different nature. Here what Foucault intends to show is that our common understanding of Hobbes is completely wrong: "Although it seems to be proclaiming that war is everywhere from start to finish, Hobbes's discourse is in fact saying the opposite" (p.98). The general understanding of Hobbes holds that he is the quintessential thinker of war, since he postulates an original state of warfare in

the “state of nature” that gives rise to the State and continues to threaten the State even after its establishment. But, according to Foucault, what a close reading of Hobbes shows is that his theory of war is, on the one hand, not a theory of actual or real battles, and, on the other, it is an attempt to dehistoricize war in order to depoliticize history.

As Foucault argues, in *Leviathan* Hobbes claims that the source of perpetual warfare in the state of nature is actually equality. In other words, although this might sound counterintuitive for us today, Hobbes’s point is that equality gives rise to war, while difference is responsible for the establishment of peace. In the state of nature, equality manifests itself as the relative similarity of every human being. The important point that needs to be emphasized here is that equality is understood by Hobbes as the anarchy of minor differences. Speaking the language of the Cold War, we could say that Foucault discovers a classic formulation of the “logic of deterrence” in Hobbes’s argument. If power relations would be obviously differentiated (if the stronger would be simply obviously stronger than the weak), the war of the state of nature would come to an end: either because the strong would simply defeat the weak, or because the weak would simply give up even before the battle begins. But since equality renders the differences in power quite small, the weaker party does not give up in advance. On the one hand, the weak man knows that he is not far from being as strong as his neighbor, so he does not abandon all thought of war; on the other hand, the strong man knows that the weaker might in the end outsmart him, so he tries to avoid war. In Foucault’s reading, the logic of deterrence is elevated to something like an anthropological principle (p.91).

Thus, and this is the surprising reversal that Foucault accomplishes, we see that according to Hobbes’s argument the primitive war of the state of nature is actually not a war at all. To put it differently, the state of nature is *a war-like state in which no real battles can take place*. Actual battles are replaced by representations, manifestations, signs, and deception. Foucault, thus, compares Hobbes’s state of nature to a “theater” where representations are exchanged in a state of mutual fear without any foreseeable future resolution. As he puts it, although this state of affairs is a “state of war,” “we are not really involved in a war” (p.92). As a result, this state of war without a war is really a form of unending diplomacy between rivals who are equals: “So, for Hobbes, it does not all begin with war” (93). What these arguments suggest is that the infamous Hobbsean “state of nature” is, in fact, a philosophical anticipation of the Cold War itself. On an ontological level, the state of nature is not the state of a “perpetual war” but that of a “perpetual cold war.”

So, the next question for Foucault concerns the emergence of the State out of the generalized conditions of this war without war. If the state of nature cannot be



described as a genuine war, the usual understanding of Hobbes's account of the emergence of the State must also be rethought. As Foucault puts it, "this state—and it is not a battle or a direct clash of forces, but a certain state of the interplay of representations—is not a stage that man will abandon forever once the State is born; it is in fact a sort of permanent backdrop which cannot not function [...] once there is nothing to provide security, to establish differences, and finally to give strength to one side and not the other" (p.93). Foucault briefly surveys Hobbes's accounts of "commonwealth by institution" and "commonwealth by acquisition" (which can give rise to three different forms of sovereignty), in order to show that in all these forms of the State we find the same series: "will, fear, and sovereignty" (p.96). What this analysis aims to show is that "[s]overeignty is always shaped from below" (p.96), by the weak and not by the strong. To put it differently, Hobbes's argument actually claims that "the mechanism that applies to [those] who have been defeated [and, thereby, have become subjects to a new sovereignty] is the same mechanism that we find in the state of nature" (p.97). The perpetual cold war of the state of nature remains the operative principle of the social even under the rule of sovereignty has been established. In this account, therefore, social order itself emerges as the negation of war, but only in the sense that society is a suspended war that exists in the state of a perpetual cold war.

Thus, as Foucault concludes, neither the state of nature nor the constitution of sovereignty has anything to do with war in Hobbes. With his theory of war that at first appears to have universalized the principle of war (both as the very condition of the emergence of the state and a perpetual threat to it), Hobbes tried to eliminate the historical reality of war from his account of sovereignty (p.97). To put it differently, the real message of Hobbes's account is that it is not really war that gives birth to the State, and it is not really war that is transcribed in the relation of sovereignty. And Foucault very clearly identifies Hobbes's enemy here: with this elimination of actual war from his account of the rise of sovereignty, Hobbes is opposing the emerging discourse of "political historicism" (p.11) (which is the historical precursor of Foucault's genealogical method itself). In Foucault's reading, therefore, Hobbes tries to attribute ontological priority not to war itself, but to a specific form of war that is, strictly speaking, not a war at all (but unending diplomacy). We could paraphrase this argument by saying that, according to Foucault, in Hobbes' discourse it is a perpetual cold war (rather than war) that enjoys priority. It seems now that Hobbes's strategy is best described as the ontologization of the logic of the Cold War.

*III. The Discourse of Perpetual War.* As we have seen, in his readings of Clausewitz and Hobbes, Foucault opposes the discourse of perpetual war to that of

a perpetual cold war. In this war between different discourses of war, Foucault himself comes down on the side of the kind of political historicism that assumes that power is defined as a real perpetual war in opposition to the Hobbsean discourse of perpetual cold war. In fact, in light of this discussion, it now appears that Foucault's meta-genealogy establishes a clear link between the political historicism of perpetual war and Foucault's own method of genealogical analysis. Hence the significance of Foucault's analysis of the historical emergence of the discourse of perpetual war in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. For it appears that Foucault discovered something in this genealogy that he found disturbing. At least, this is what John Protevi suggests when he writes that Foucault abandoned his interest in war "perhaps in dismay at discovering in his genealogical investigation a deep relation between the war model and state racism" (p.540).<sup>9</sup> Within the context of our own inquiries, we could paraphrase the description of this disturbing discovery in the following terms: what Foucault discovered was that the emergence of the discourse of perpetual war as race war was the historical condition of *both* Foucault's own genealogical method *and* the State's appropriation of this discourse for biopolitical purposes. To put it differently, Foucault's historical analysis seems to suggest that this discourse acted as the historical condition of both Cold War discourses and Foucault's genealogical critique of these Cold War discourses.

As Foucault makes it abundantly clear, therefore, the reversal of Clausewitz's famous dictum is an attempt to undo the reversal that Clausewitz himself perpetrated on an earlier discourse. So, the true question is what principle did Clausewitz himself invert in the first place? Long before Clausewitz's proposition that "war is the continuation of politics by other means," another thesis, according to which it is actually politics that is the continuation of war, was already in circulation since the 17<sup>th</sup> century (p.47). It is the history of this particular discourse that preoccupies Foucault for most of his lectures. What is striking is that Foucault's descriptions of this discourse show eerie similarities with his own genealogical method itself.

In order to account for the emergence of this discourse, Foucault provides us with a quick history of war (p.48). During the Middle Ages, the State acquired monopoly over war, a development that put an end to a more diffuse distribution of war over the social (e.g., in the form of "private warfare"). As a result, war was eliminated from the social body and pushed to the peripheries (as something that existed only in opposition to the State). The state monopoly over war led to the professionalization and institutionalization of war, and the "army" as a permanent institution was born. By the end of the Middle Ages, this development led to a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the State with its military institutions replaced

day-to-day and generalized practices of war; on the other hand, a society was born that was perpetually traversed by relations of war (p.49). This point is significant because here Foucault seems to suggest that the war model is more than an epistemological model for the interpretation of power: in these arguments, it appears that society is in fact (in an ontological sense) permanently saturated by war and war-like relations.

The historical emergence of this paradox (according to which war is simultaneously centralized and confined to the margins of the social) coincides with the birth of a new discourse, what Foucault calls “the first historico-political discourse on society” (49). This discourse that emerged in the wake of the civil wars and religious wars of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was also a discourse on war as a permanent social relationship, as the ineradicable basis of all relations and institutions of power. The important point for us is that Foucault clearly sees that this was an ambiguous discourse that was put to use by bourgeois revolutions and popular struggles just as much as the aristocratic resistance to them. In other words, the actual political use of the discourse depended on a number of historical circumstances and no specific political position could be assigned to it in an a priori fashion.

We could formalize Foucault’s description of this discourse in relation to war by highlighting the following points:

1. *The birth of the State must be accounted for in terms of war.* “the law is not born of nature [...] [but] real battles, victories, massacres, conquests which can be dated” (p.50).

2. *War continues to exert its force even after the emergence of the State.* “society, law, and State are [not] like armistices that put an end to wars,” and “beneath the law, war continues to rage in all mechanisms of power” (p.50).

3. *Peace is war.* “In the smallest of its cogs, peace is waging a secret war” (p.50). This secret war is available to us through acts of interpretation that prove that “peace is coded war” (p.51). As a result, there is no such thing as a neutral subject: we are all participants in war.

4. *The war-like relation that defines the law leads to a binary division of society.* With this discourse, a new binary conception of society emerges that is articulated as having a specific history. There are two groups or armies in a war against each other.

5. *This is a permanent war.* The foundational war that established the present, therefore, is not over. This war is a “permanent war” (p.51).

The points enumerated here are mostly repetitions of what we have already seen in connection with the reversal of Clausewitz: what is new is the emphasis on

the binary division of society at the heart of this discourse. This strictly dual logic will be of special relevance for Foucault since, historically speaking, this perpetual war was theorized as a "race war" (p.60). To put it differently, this permanent foundational war takes a concrete form: its binary mode is that of a race war.

It is necessary to emphasize here that "race war" first emerges in Foucault's account as a fundamentally positive (revolutionary) concept in that it opposes sovereignty. In this context, "race" did not designate a biological but a historico-political divide (p.77). What we call "racism" today is only one specific episode in the history of this discourse: modern biological racism emerged at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a reworking of the discourse of race war for the purposes of social conservatism and colonial domination. But originally, this discourse of race war functioned as a "counter-history" (p.66) in the sense that, with the emergence of this new discourse in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, history was no longer in the service of the discourse of sovereignty. In fact, it was a complete antithesis of the history of sovereignty. In the end, we can say that this discourse produced a counter-history of war (p.72), and its goal was to uncover a hidden war behind the normal functioning of society in order to declare war on power.

Furthermore, Foucault ties the emergence of this discourse to the birth of modern society's historical consciousness in general. It appears to have defined the basic logic of both revolutionary and anti-revolutionary discourses: "The idea of revolution, which runs through the entire political workings of the West and the entire history of the West for more than two hundred years, and whose origins and content are still, as it happens, very enigmatic, cannot, in my view, be dissociated from the emergence and existence of this practice of counterhistory" (p.78). The appropriation of the discourse of perpetual war by biological racism allows a number of significant transformations to take place: as war becomes now a struggle for existence in the sense of biological survival (the Manichean battle between forces of light and forces of darkness becomes that of biological racism) the quintessential duality of the discourse is displaced in the sense that it is externalized (war no longer divides society into two internal camps since the new enemy threatens society as such). Due to this biological threat to society, the State itself is transformed from being a tool used by one race against the other into the protector of the purity of the unified race (p.81). Biological racism, therefore, constitutes an anti-revolutionary discourse in the sense that it turns this weapon against those who invented it: although at its origin it was a weapon in the struggle against sovereignty, in its racist form it is now a weapon to preserve the sovereignty of the State. Sovereignty was able to reutilize "race struggle" for its own strategy against the original discourse of perpetual war.

As we can see, Foucault's genealogy of the war model reaches here a conclusion that might in fact account for the need to abandon the war model (as Protevi suggested). On the one hand, Foucault describes this discourse on war as the "first historico-political discourse on society" (p.49) that provides "an explanation from below" and "develops completely within the historical dimension" (p.55). Without going into further detail here, we can say that it is this series of descriptions that suggest that Foucault perceived in the revolutionary usage of this discourse a precursor of his own genealogical method. On the other hand, however, Foucault's discussions of the historical appropriations of this revolutionary tool by anti-revolutionary forces (most notably: sovereignty, biological racism, and biopower) suggest that today the discourse of perpetual war can also appear as the primary enemy of this genealogy. The genealogy of genealogy might have been a self-consuming exercise that undermined genealogy itself. The situation appears to be difficult if not impossible: how can the genealogist recover and reactivate the hidden history of a concrete war, if power has already legitimized itself in relation to permanent war? Is there a way of using war against war itself? Does it make sense to wage war on war? Or is the necessary next step to simply separate the war model from the genealogical method by producing a genealogy without war?

In what sense can we, then, speak of a philosophy of the Cold War in Foucault's works? As we have seen, Foucault, himself a Cold War philosopher, discovered in Hobbes a philosophy of the cold war that ontologized a figure of the cold war as the fundamental and persistent condition of society. According to this eccentric reading, Hobbes did not argue that war can account for the emergence of sovereignty. To the contrary, what Foucault shows is that according to Hobbes it is a permanent cold war that provides the backdrop for the constitution of sovereignty. To the degree that he sought to formulate a theory of war that goes against Hobbes, we could describe Foucault's project itself as a resistance to the ontologization of this cold war: in opposition to Hobbes, Foucault uncovers another discourse on war that ontologizes war itself (rather than a cold war). In addition, his account of the history of this discourse establishes a number of potential links with his contemporary situation. One way of describing Foucault's genealogical project is to say that the task it sets for itself is *to resist the ontologization of the cold war in the service of sovereignty* in order *to combat the appropriation of the discourse of permanent war by Cold War discourses*. Maybe this is the project that we could describe as Foucault's war on the Cold War.

### 3. Reading the Cold War in the Age of Biopower

Regardless of how the war model fared during the rest of Foucault's career, let us now return briefly to our opening question concerning a possible definition of modernity itself in terms of a perpetual war in order to draw a few methodological conclusions (that point in the direction of a new genealogy of the Cold War). Here there are two points that might be worth raising: the first concerns biopower and biopolitics as some of the primary concepts inherited from Foucault for the self-understanding of our own historical moment; while the second has to do with the hermeneutical method of what is left of genealogy in this age.

Needless to say, Foucault's contemporary relevance is mostly justified by reference to the current actuality of his work on biopower and neoliberalism.<sup>10</sup> As we have seen before, we could even entertain the argument that the war model (and the political threat that it revealed to the genealogical method itself) had to be abandoned in favor of these new reflections on governmentality.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the theory of war remains legible on the margins of these later reflections as well, even if they no longer seem to occupy the center of attention. As one quick example, I would like to quote at some length here the concluding chapter of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, which is really something like ground zero for the Foucauldian theorization of biopower:

Yet wars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century, and all things being equal, never before did regimes visit such holocausts on their own populations. But this formidable power of death—and this is perhaps what accounts for part of its force and the cynicism with which it has so greatly expanded its limits—now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations. Wars are no longer waged in the name of a sovereign who must be defended; they are waged on behalf of the existence of everyone; entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed. And through a turn that closes the circle, as the technology of wars has caused them to tend increasingly toward all-out destruction, the decision that initiates them and the one that terminates them are in fact increasingly informed by the naked question of survival. The atomic situation is now at the end

point of this process: the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual's continued existence. The principle underlying the tactics of battle—that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living—has become the principle that defines the strategy of states. But the existence in question is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty; at stake is the biological existence of a population. If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population.<sup>12</sup>

This passage is notable for at least two reasons. First, it calls attention to a paradox that was already clearly recognized by Foucault while he was delivering his lectures on the war model. Simply put, this is the paradox of war in the age of biopower. In an age when power justifies itself by reference to life (when power allegedly aims to “make live and let die”), it becomes difficult to justify war (which, by its very nature, appears to be closer to the classic sovereign right “to take life or let live”). As Foucault argues, this precisely is the function of modern racism: *racism is the ideology that justifies war in the age of biopower*. In fact, this is precisely the point captured in the title of the lectures “*Society Must Be Defended*”: in the age of biopower, war is justified as long as it is a war on the biological threat to society represented by a racial other.

But we should also note that the unfolding of this paradox is immediately tied to the historical condition of the Cold War. The birth of atomic war appears here as the technological threshold that had to be crossed for biopower to be able to manage this paradox. Foucault's concern here is no longer that “total war” can devastate entire sections of human society. Rather, the point about the Cold War is that this was the first historical moment when the idea of the “extinction” of the human race became a real possibility and, thus, a central concern organizing political life (a veritable “last battle” that is no longer eschatological but apocalyptic). In face of an absolute threat, biopower could legitimize various forms of genocide, since the totality of biological life was now at stake in this new kind of war. Arguably, then, what Foucault shows is that the Cold War was not only incidental to the development of biopower, but that it was the main terrain that allowed it to establish its field of influence on a global scale.

In light of this description, then, we can also argue that the age of biopower is precisely the age when war and life fully coincide—life becomes a perpetual cold war. The point is that even when every day activities are performed that seemingly

have nothing to do with a slowly unfolding global war, the subjects of a cold war (just as the subjects of the Cold War were) are nevertheless interpellated by power as combatants in this war. One of the effects of the Cold War is a potentially total militarization of culture: according to this logic, there is no domain of the social that cannot be called upon to contribute to this war that, on the home front, mostly proceeds by non-military means. Where proxy wars break out, however, the military machinery is ready to put all its might behind the right cause, provided that biopower rushes to its rescue by providing the right kind of justification for violating its own alleged principles.

Yet, as we have seen, this situation has also posed for Foucault a serious challenge to the genealogical method itself: genealogy as the extension of the discourse of perpetual war became the point of convergence between Cold War biopower and the Foucauldian critique of this power. In a similar fashion, we could also argue that the generalization of the logic of war that characterizes the Cold War leads to a specific complication, a genuine methodological perplexity. For if it is true that with the Cold War we entered a historical domain in which life and war fully coincide (in other words, if literally every aspect of our lives is touched by this new global war), then we have to suspect that with the Cold War war itself has become unrepresentable.

The representational paradox of the Cold War could be delineated in the following terms: 1. If everything is war, then any representation of life (no matter how mundane and how removed from the battlefield it might be) is already a representation of this war even if there is no explicit reference to war. In this sense, today *war is always represented*. 2. But when we encounter an actual representation of war in the classic sense as organized military conflict, we must now be suspicious that this particular representation is an ideological construct that in fact tries to deny the generalized logic of war by masking the connections between military action and everyday social interactions. To the degree that it does not make the essential move of our age visible, to the degree that it hides the fact that war today is waged in the totality of what we consider to be normal or peacetime society, a direct representation of war now hides the real problem: the generalization of war to non-military situations. In this sense, however, *war is never represented*.

This representational paradox suggests that today we are in need of new hermeneutic strategies to be able to address what has been called by several commentators the current state of "global civil war."<sup>13</sup> We should be careful with projecting the same war behind the representation of any social relation: if everything participates in this global war that is justified partially by racial ideologies, we can reduce every act of cultural interpretation to the discovery of this one single



problem. But, this appears to be a dubious exercise, since it won't allow us to articulate the specific mechanisms of this general militarization of life supplemented by discourses of racism. Rather, in order to render cultural criticism a meaningful exercise, we also need to look for instances when life and war do not fully coincide. The two tasks of cultural criticism converge here. The interpretive move that shows that what appears to be mere life is in fact war remains an important step of ideology critique. But it must be complemented by a second move: it must also show that there are moments when war and life do not fully coincide. These are the moments when it becomes possible to discern that the total colonization of life by war is incomplete and is, therefore, in need of an ideological supplement to cover over these gaps.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the following works: John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston: University of Illinois Press, 2001); George A. Reisch, *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Tobin Siebers, *Cold War Criticism and the Politics of Skepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Russell T. McCutcheon, "'Just Follow the Money': The Cold War, the Humanistic Study of Religion, and the Fallacy of Insufficient Cynicism," *Culture & Religion* 5.1 (2004): 41–69.

<sup>2</sup> See, Henry A. Giroux, *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Since one of the most immediate historical effects of the Cold War was the destabilization of traditional distinctions between "war" and "peace," it might be possible that in this context the expressions "philosophy of war" and "philosophy of piece" are no longer appropriate. As an example, we could cite here the way the concept of "interregnum" has reemerged in philosophical discussions of modernity. See, Zygmunt Bauman, "Times of Interregnum," *Ethics and Global Politics* 5.1 (2012): pp. 49-56.

<sup>4</sup> In this context, the term "Cold War" could be treated as the proper name of a historical period, whereas "cold war" would be the name of a specific type of war that can have different historical manifestations. In this regard, the philosophy of the cold war would be a more generic discourse than the philosophy of the Cold War.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *Kant: Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 93-130. For a recent discussion of perpetual war as our current historical condition, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> John Protevi outlines this history in the following terms: 1. The problem of war as an epistemological model for the understanding of power first appears in *Discipline and Punish* published in 1975; in his 1975-1976 lectures, "*Society Must Be Defended*," Foucault provides a genealogical investigation of this epistemological model; in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* published in 1976, Foucault moves away from treating war as an epistemological method toward a more practical usage that

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treats war as a “strategy’ for integrating a differential field of power relations”; and, finally, in the 1977-1978 lectures, *Security, Territory, Population*, war is replaced by “governmentality” as the model of social relations. See, Protevi, “War,” in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 540. Marcelo Hoffman provides a broader timeline for Foucault’s engagements of the idea war as he dates this interest back to Foucault’s earlier work on Nietzsche (like the 1971 essay “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”). See, Marcelo Hoffman, “Foucault’s Politics and Bellicosity as a Matrix for Power Relations,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33.6 (2007): 758.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*,” *Lectures at the College De France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*,” *Lectures at the College De France, 1975-1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 15. Further references to this text will be cited in parentheses.

<sup>9</sup> Marcelo Hoffman reached similar conclusions about Foucault’s theory of war: “He not only suggested that the revolutionary discourse of warlike struggle runs the acute danger of having itself taken over by the state. His point was far more precise: a discourse of warlike struggle *is* now a *state* discourse. Indeed, Foucault’s point was that the original target of this whole discourse, the state, now enunciates it. Consequently, he implied that the application of war as a ‘grid’ for political relations no longer amounts to the creative, revolutionary act it once was for Boulainvilliers and other 18th-century noble historians.” See, Marcelo Hoffman, “Foucault’s Politics and Bellicosity as a Matrix for Power Relations,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33.6 (2007), p. 775.

<sup>10</sup> For a brief and useful overview, see Jeffrey Nealon, *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and Its Intensifications Since 1984* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Of course, a number of corrections have been already proposed to correct the mistakes of this Foucauldian model. The best-known argument today might be Achille Mbembe’s concept of “necropolitics,” which in the present context could be described as an attempt to return the Foucauldian theory of biopower to a theory of war. See, Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, transl. Steven Corcoran (Durham: Duke UP, 2019).

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), 136-137.

<sup>13</sup> For a historical overview of the current proliferation of civil wars, see David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History In Ideas* (New York: Vintage, 2018).