

ARTICLE

Ambivalent Modernities: Foucault's Iranian Writings Reconsidered

Corey McCall, Elmira College

ABSTRACT: This essay reconsiders Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution in the context of his thought during 1977-1979. The essay defends three related claims: (1) Foucault does not turn away from power toward ethics as many scholars have claimed, (2) Careful interpretation of the texts on the Iranian Revolution will help us to better understand Foucault's essays and lecture courses from this period (in particular, the relationship between political spirituality and counter-conduct), and (3) During this period Foucault is working on conceptualizing modernity as a multivalent set of practices—some that reinforce power relations and some that resist them.

Keywords: Iran, political spirituality, pastoral power, governmentality, modernity.

Recent interpreters of Foucault have sought to situate his thought during the late 1970s in the context of his work on neoliberalism in *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Indeed, some have gone so far as to argue that Foucault retracts much of his previous work on power in favor of an articulation of an individual ethics.¹ Interpreters detect the beginning of a turn away from power and an orientation toward the ethical concerns that will occupy him in his final writings during this period. I argue that if we attend to his texts on the Iranian Revolution from 1978-1979, a more complex and interesting picture emerges. Foucault is not renouncing power; on the contrary, he is trying to reconceive his conception of power as struggle to a conception of power as the conducting of conduct.

We will only understand Foucault's dispatches and essays on the Iranian Revolution once we connect them with Foucault's writings and lecture courses from this period. While some commentators have pointed out the shortcomings of Foucault's various analyses of this event, the present essay seeks to place Foucault's writings on the Iranian Revolution within

¹ Examples include Alain Beaulieu, "Toward a Liberal Utopia: The Connection Between Foucault's Reporting on the Iranian Revolution and the Ethical Turn," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36(7) 801-818; Andrew Dilts, "From 'Entrepreneur of the Self' to 'Care of the Self': Neoliberal Governmentality and Foucault's Ethics," *Foucault Studies*, No. 12, 130-146, October 2011; and Eric Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (NY: Other Press, 2006). I engage Beaulieu's claims in first section of this paper; I have previously reviewed the Paras volume and discussed my concerns with his reading of Foucault's later writings on ethics in a review entitle "Foucault Among the Humanists": <http://www.othervoices.org/3.1/cmccall/index.php>.

the context of his own work during the years 1977-1979, especially as concerns *Security, Territory, Population*. Unlike some other recent work on this aspect of Foucault's corpus, mine is not an exercise in finger-pointing, telling us with the benefit of hindsight what Foucault got wrong and misunderstood about Iranian society and politics.² While we need to acknowledge that Foucault's views on Iran may have been misguided, rather than focusing solely on where he went wrong, we should also ask how these writings illuminate Foucault's work during this period. I argue that we see him working out a theory of multiple modernities or multiple projects of modernity, none of which is univocally modern. Thus we see the shah attempting to institute a form of modernity that harkens back to Atatürk and even to ancient Persia. Arrayed against the shah, one finds an archaic Shi'ite conception of modernity that embraces modern technology in order to institute a utopian theocracy based upon a spiritualized past. Modernity becomes a multivalent set of practices, beliefs, and institutions often at odds with one another rather than a simple, univocal concept.

This essay defends three interrelated claims:

1. A polemical claim: Scholars who have found in Foucault's work of this period an anticipation of the ethical turn in the later works should reconsider their claims. Readings that claim that Foucault is laying the groundwork for what turns out to be his final turn toward an ethics of individual autonomy, disregard the continuity between these writings and work on ethics. This polemical aim is the focus of the first part of the essay. Instead of a bridge between power and ethics, what we find in these texts is a sustained discussion of power and modernity that is worth reading in its own right.

2. A claim about Foucault and modernity: In texts from this period, Foucault is working through conceptions of modernity and begins to develop a concept of modernity as multiple practices, similar to the conception of modernity that anthropologist Talal Asad employs in his anthropology of the secular:

It is right to say that "modernity" is neither a totally coherent object nor a clearly bounded one, and that many of its elements originate in relations with the histories of peoples outside Europe. Modernity is a project—or rather, a series of interlinked projects—that certain people in power seek to achieve.³

² Of course, I am referring to Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson's introduction and first five chapters of their anthology *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1-162. I am not the first to note that Afary and Anderson have misrepresented the key tenets of Foucault's thought. For an even-handed review of the main issues, see Richard Lynch's review of Afary and Anderson's book in *Foucault Studies*, no. 4 (2007), 169-176 (<http://www.michel-foucault.com/links/lynch.pdf>). Lynch's summation: "They provide a very valuable service in contextualizing Foucault's essays with respect to Iranian history and politics, as well as Islamic tradition; their insightful and sharp criticisms of those essays are well made. Their attempt to explain Foucault's critical failure, however, is unfortunately blunted by an inadequate reading of Foucault's other works."

³ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 13.

As we shall see, Foucault understands the revolt of conduct that came to be known as the Iranian Revolution in part as a revolt against the shah's secular modernizing project. The Shi'ite revolutionary groups—led by the Ayatollah Khomeini—that eventually seized power in Iran, revolted against the shah's modernization projects and his attempt to render the state legible (this last concept is borrowed from the work of James C. Scott; I argue that his work on modern forms of authoritarian government is useful for understanding Foucault's writings on Iran). One of the reasons that he turns to Iran during this period is because he attempts to formulate a discourse of modernity that is polyvalent: modernities expressed in multiple practices that reinforce existing power relations and those that contest them.

3. Finally, an interpretive claim: careful reading of Foucault's Iranian texts will help us better understand what he does in contemporaneous essays and lecture courses. In particular, I focus on what I call his genealogy of biopower in *Security, Territory, Population*, but also the relationship between the concept of political spirituality and the analysis of pastoral power in this work. This will help us to see that Foucault's Iranian writings do not amount to simple nostalgia for a medieval past.

1. Foucault's Iranian Writings and the Putative Ethical Turn

During the late 1970s, curious terms begin to crop up in Foucault's texts and lectures, terms such as "revolt," "masses," and "political spirituality."⁴ There seems to be little precedent for such terminology, which would seem more at home in the Marxist analyses that Foucault found so suspicious.⁵ Indeed, Foucault refers to Marx directly in an interview given in March 1979:

People always quote Marx and the opium of the people. The sentence that immediately preceded that statement and which is never quoted says that religion is the spirit of a world without spirit. Let's say, then, that Islam, in that year of 1978, was not the opium of the people precisely because it was the spirit of a world without spirit.⁶

For Foucault, this means that what was at stake in Iran was a revolt of subjectivity, a revolt that cannot be explained solely in economic terms. Clearly, one of Foucault's aims in these texts is to situate his analyses of the Iranian Revolution relative to Marxist thought on revolt. The "soul of the uprising" consisted in the realization among the revolutionary Shi'ites that

⁴ I have begun to analyze Foucault's use of the term 'revolt' and its cognates Foucault's work during this period. For example, see "Foucault, Iran, and the Question of Religious Revolt," *International Studies in Philosophy*, 40:1 (2008), 89-100. There have been relatively few studies of the role of the term 'political spirituality' in Foucault's corpus. A notable exception includes Michiel Leezenberg, "Power and Political Spirituality: Michel Foucault on the Islamic Revolution," in J. Neubauer, *Cultural History After Foucault* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1999), 63-80.

⁵ While it is generally true that Foucault sought to distance himself from Marx's thought, it was much more ideology critique and the various scientific pretensions in Marx's thought that he found problematic.

⁶ Michel Foucault, "Iran: the Spirit of a World without Spirit," in Afary and Anderson, 255.

they had to change themselves—it was religion that provided this promise of a radical transformation of one’s relation to oneself, the state, the world, and the Divine.⁷

In a general sense, these novel terms are part of Foucault’s reworking of his theory of power, from a conception of power and resistance understood in terms of transgression and prohibition, to one that was creative and generative of identities and subjectivities. This much is clear. Foucault reworks his theory of power during this period, but some interpreters have seen in this a complete rejection of the analytics of power in favor of an ethical project that was to occupy him during his final years. I find this unconvincing; rather than a turn away from power and toward ethics, I concur with Jeffrey Nealon’s recent work. Foucault’s work during the period from 1977-1979 is not a bridge toward his later writings on ethics and care of the self, but rather an analysis of power and its place in modernity worthy of careful study.

Instead, Foucault rethinks power relations and how to conceptualize them; he is certainly not leaving his analytics of power behind. From the early 1970s, Foucault grapples with the nature of power relations. This labor bore its initial fruit in *Discipline and Punish*, and his work during this period can largely be seen as an attempt to rethink power: first as disciplinary power and subsequently as biopower. The initial conception of power, the juridical mode that had been tied to the sovereign’s “No”, was contrasted with disciplinary power and subsequently with biopower.⁸ This leads ultimately to the final work of this period, when Foucault begins to re-conceptualize the ethics of critique and self-constitution in the ancient world and early Christianity in terms of pastoral power. One of the key reasons that Foucault’s dispatches and essays on the Iranian Revolution merit analysis is because they mark his attempt to apply his emerging ideas on the relationship between religion and politics, but also between religion and revolt to the events in Iran.

I am certainly not the first to make the claim that Foucault’s Iranian writings shed light on his work of this period. The remainder of this section evaluates a representative example of such an interpretation, one in which there is much to recommend.

In a recent essay for *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Alain Beaulieu provides an insightful analysis of Foucault’s writings on the Iranian Revolution.⁹ Beaulieu’s study turns on Foucault’s analyses of liberal subjectivity in *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*. He therefore situates Foucault’s reporting on the Iranian Revolution in the context of his work on neo-liberalism in *Security, Territory, Population* and *The Birth of Biopolitics*. This is then used as a means to diagnose a shift in Foucault’s work from a concern with power in a collective and institutional sense, to the ethical and individualistic concerns of Foucault’s final writings. Specifically, Beaulieu focuses on the concept of political spirituality as a secularization of the Shi’ite conception of spirituality:

In one of his articles on the Iranian Revolution, called “What are the Iranians dreaming about?,” Foucault came to this rather strange and provocative assertion: “For the people

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ I return to Foucault’s typology of power relations in the subsequent section. At this point, it suffices to note that these types of power are not mutually exclusive.

⁹ Alain Beaulieu, “Towards a Liberal Utopia: The Connections Between Foucault’s Reporting on the Iranian Revolution and the Ethical Turn,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 36:7, 801-818.

who inhabit this land, what is the point of searching, even at the cost of their own lives, for this thing whose possibility we have forgotten since the Renaissance and the great crisis of Christianity, a *political spirituality*." In the Shi'ite tradition, 'spirituality' certainly has a religious meaning that Foucault chose to ignore here by assimilating spirituality to a mere transformation of self and others.¹⁰

Foucault finds the concept of political spirituality helpful in defining religion, but it leads him to define religion in narrow political terms. As a result, Foucault remains blind to the charismatic dimension of Shi'ism as embodied in the figure of the Ayatollah Khomeini. As Beaulieu correctly notes, he was also incapable of seeing the deeper religious significance of spirituality as it was expressed in the Shi'ite tradition in particular. I concur with Beaulieu's analysis of political spirituality (that Foucault stresses the political dimension and neglects the spiritual), but I believe that Beaulieu is too hasty in identifying a shift in Foucault's thought from power to ethics and construing this ethical agency in liberal terms. Although there is a shift in emphasis between on the one hand the mid-1970s lectures on Iran and the contemporaneous lecture courses, and the final two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* on the other, this does not represent a denial of power in favor of ethics. Elsewhere in his essay, Beaulieu claims that we can find evidence for a turn away from the agonistic model of power relations to a liberal model. While I agree that there is strong evidence for the claim that Foucault reconceives power as something other than agonistic, these texts do not provide evidence for a turn toward a liberal mode of self-governance. Beaulieu cites Foucault's dialogue with the Iranian writer Baqir Parham as evidence that Foucault has begun to conceive of political spirituality in terms of liberal self-fashioning:

Towards the end of (or right after) his coverage of the Iranian events, it became obvious to Foucault that, although revolutionary, the introduction of a spiritual dimension of practical life, is not a universal driving force of history. In that sense, Foucault's interest in multiple spiritual exercises developed within the Western tradition can be seen as part of the self-critique of his journalistic experience in Iran. The Iranian Revolution gave Foucault the opportunity he needed to see spirituality as a condition of revolutions to come; after his condemnation of the Khomeini regime, however, it became obvious that society does not need to regress to an age of spiritual leaders or create a new, identical era. Therein lies the importance of reading Foucault's texts on the Iranian Revolution and those of the Enlightenment in tandem. If there is any hope of reorganizing society, this transformative impulse will come from autonomous, yet singular, subjects able to select spiritual exercises and use those exercises to improve themselves.¹¹

Beaulieu claims that one of the main lessons drawn by Foucault from these events is that collective action in the form of political spirituality is misguided or at least unnecessary.¹² He eschews analysis of collective action in favor of an emphasis on the individual attempt at self-fashioning. In Beaulieu's reading, Foucault turns away from conceptualizing critique in terms

¹⁰ Beaulieu, 803.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 811.

¹² I return to this in the final section. What I wish to do here is clear the way for an alternative reading of Foucault's Iranian writings that brings modernity and power to the fore.

of collective action and towards an analysis of critique as the project of individual autonomy. I agree wholeheartedly with Beaulieu's claim that it is important to read Foucault's texts on the Iranian Revolutions alongside his texts on the Western Enlightenment. However, I shall argue in the final section of this paper that Foucault does not forsake collective action in his various writings on Kant and the Enlightenment; indeed, collective action remains a viable form of critique in these later essays as well.

Foucault's work on Iran represents an interrogation of the present in the same way that his writings on the Enlightenment represent an interrogation of the past. While it is typically true that journalism should not be assessed in the same manner one evaluates the claims of philosophical texts, Foucault's work presents something of an exception to this general rule. During the 1970s Foucault increasingly situated his own thought in relationship to the present, beginning in the early part of the decade with his involvement with the Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons and continuing through to his final writings. In "What is Enlightenment?" he proclaims that Kant's original 1784 question concerned the difference that the present makes with respect to the past, the difference between today and yesterday. This interrogation of the present, then, as presented in the work of authors such as Kant and Baudelaire, is the ethos of modernity.¹³ As Jeffrey Nealon notes, Foucault's 1984 text has been pivotal for those who wish to see Foucault's later texts as a return to the liberal (or neoliberal) self.¹⁴ Nealon reconstructs this common account of Foucault's later career—endorsed by Beaulieu among others—that typically proceed as follows: once Foucault realizes the manifest limitations of his account of power—that it seemingly leaves readers with no account of agency or a way out—he turns to a genealogy of the individual as an ethical subject, the project of the final two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. Nealon contests this reading by pointing out that the turn to Kant's short text on Enlightenment is hardly new, for Foucault discusses Kant's concept of Enlightenment as early as 1978 in a text on Canguilhem and in another text entitled "What is Critique?." These texts are both significant for understanding the context of Foucault's concept of Enlightenment and modernity more generally, as well as his specific concepts of power and political spirituality. While Foucault certainly describes the conditions of neoliberal subjectivity this does not amount to an endorsement of liberal modernity, as Beaulieu and others would have it. In order to see why we should hesitate before endorsing this view of Foucault's development, it is important to reconsider Foucault's analysis of modernity in his texts on Iran. The following section analyzes Foucault's conception of modernity and power relations in the Iranian writings before turning to some of the means by which this archaic modern regime was contested. The third section provides a context for Foucault's concept of political spirituality in the notions of pastoral power, conduct, and counter-conduct.

2. Political Spirituality: Against the Shah's Archaic Modernity

If we are to avoid reading Foucault's Iranian texts as a mistaken foray into revolutionary politics—a claim Foucault later rejects—we must determine how these writings further the devel-

¹³ Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow (NY: The New Press, 1997), 303-321.

¹⁴ Nealon, 20.

opment of Foucault's own views on power and modernity as a set of multivalent practices (admittedly this last feature is more a suggestion rather than a fully developed concept in Foucault's corpus). The remaining sections of this paper will provide a start. In this section, I examine the conception of power relations underlying Foucault's analysis of events in Iran, before providing the broader context in the following section. We cannot simply discuss power in an abstract way; instead, we must relate Foucault's analysis of power relations to his entire conceptual framework, which means situating his analysis of power relations to key terms found in the Iranian writings such as 'modernity' and 'political spirituality.' I begin this section with the concept of "modernity" before turning to power and concluding by relating these key concepts to Foucault's conception of resistance and political spirituality.

Initially, the term 'modernity' seems to play a different and ambiguous role in Foucault's Iranian writings than is the case in the essays on Kant and the Enlightenment, whether we are construing modernity in terms of governmentality in "What is Critique" or in terms of an ethos of modernity in "What is Enlightenment?." In *Corriere della sera* on October 1, 1978, Foucault accurately presents the last shah as a modernizing technocrat who continued the projects of his predecessors, beginning with his father Reza Shah's regime in 1925. The exemplar of modernization for both father and son was Atatürk's secular Turkish state. As we shall see in this section, Mohammad Reza Shah extended the roots of this project back to the ancient Persian state, a project that Foucault paradoxically terms 'archaic modernism.'¹⁵ "The shah's misfortune is to have espoused this archaism. His crime is to have maintained, through a corrupt and despotic system, that fragment of the past in a present that no longer wants it."¹⁶ Fashioning himself after the Turkish modernizer, Mohammad Reza Shah sought to modernize Iran by achieving three broad goals: nationalism, secularism, and modernization.¹⁷ According to Foucault, the Pahlavis were unable to accomplish the first two goals: the goal of nationalism was sacrificed before geopolitical realities (realities imposed by the English in the case of the father and the Americans in the case of the son), while secularism yielded before the realities of Shi'ism.¹⁸ This left only the objective of modernization:

Out of the whole Kemalist program, international politics and the international situation left to the Pahlavis only one bone to chew on, that of modernization. This modernization is now utterly rejected, not only because of the setbacks that have been experienced, but also because of its very principle. With the present agony of the regime, we witness the last moments of an episode that started almost sixty years ago, the attempt to modernize the Islamic countries in a European fashion. The shah still clings to this as if it were his sole *raison d'être*.

¹⁵ Indeed, the vexed history of the relationship between tradition and modernity in Iran extends back much further than Reza Khan. For an overview, see Nikkie R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, updated edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). In Chapter Three, Keddie details the various attempts made by the Qajar rulers to modernize, attempts that largely came at the expense of Iranian autonomy.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, "The Shah is a Hundred Years Behind the Times," in Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 195.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

I do not know if he is still looking forward to the year 2000, but I do know that his famous gaze dates from the 1920s.¹⁹

As Afary and Anderson note, the “famous gaze” at the end of this passage has two referents. It refers to the well-known “terrifying” gaze of Mohammad Reza Shah’s father, but it also refers to the disciplinary gaze that Foucault analyzes in *Discipline and Punish*. “A perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly.”²⁰ The shahs wanted to see and survey all. This gaze is key to the exercise of their authoritarian power, but it has both sovereign and disciplinary aspects. In pointing out the doomed modernizing aspirations of the Pahlavis and their mixed sovereign and disciplinary power apparatus, Foucault anticipates James C. Scott’s trenchant analysis of the failures of various modernizing schemes in places such as the Soviet Union, Brasilia, and Tanzania as well as Iran under the Pahlavis.²¹ In order to better understand Foucault’s specific claims about modernization under the Pahlavis, it will be useful to briefly examine James C. Scott’s analysis of modernizing projects in his seminal book *Seeing Like a State*.

Scott’s *Seeing Like a State* shows that this authoritarian high modernism is a feature of many societies outside of Western Europe, which are the primary focus of Foucault’s work. While Scott’s book contains few references to Foucault, his analysis has been read as extending and elaborating on Foucault’s conception of disciplinary power during the latter part of the 1970s.²² Indeed, in a footnote Scott directly acknowledges the significance of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* for understanding what he calls authoritarian high modernism.²³ Scott defines authoritarian high modernism in terms of various attempts to use statistical and geographical knowledge, not only to understand, but also to administratively transform nature into natural resources and people into disciplined subjects.²⁴

¹⁹ Ibid., 196-197.

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, translated by Alan Sheridan (NY: Vintage, 1977), 173. Cited in Afary and Anderson, 295, n. 28.

²¹ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

²² Recently political theorist Kevin A. Carson has taken up the question of the relationship between Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* and Scott’s *Seeing Like a State*. He concludes that there is evidence of a direct relationship between the two thinkers: “It’s not clear to what extent Scott’s concept of legibility is directly influenced by Michel Foucault’s analysis in *Discipline and Punish*. But it seems likely a significant influence is there. Scott cites the book several times in *Seeing Like a State*, including once in a manner that suggests a direct relationship to his own treatment of legibility [...] In any case, Foucault’s analysis in some passages is almost a word-for-word anticipation of Scott, to the extent of even using the term “legibility” in essentially the same sense.” (“Legibility and Control: Themes in the Work of James C. Scott,” *Center for a Stateless Society Paper No. 12* (Winter/Spring 2012))

²³ Scott, 378, n. 11. “What is new in high modernism, I believe, is not so much the aspirations for comprehensive planning. Many imperial and absolutist states have had similar aspirations. What are new are the administrative technology and social knowledge that make it plausible to imagine organizing an entire society in ways that only the barracks or the monastery had been organized before. In this respect, Michel Foucault’s argument, in *Discipline and Punish* [...] is persuasive.”

²⁴ This is not to deny the profound differences between Foucault’s project and Scott’s, however. The most significant difference lies in the role that central authority plays in Scott’s analysis. Whereas Foucault sees

Scott focuses on what Foucault would consider sovereign power. Thus, initially it would seem that Scott's analysis in *Seeing Like a State* would be incompatible with Foucault's work on disciplinary power and biopower. This certainly raises an interpretive difficulty, although it is one that rests on a misunderstanding of Foucault's thought. The apparent difficulty with reconciling Foucault's account of power with power as it was exercised by the Shah, lies in the fact that Pahlavis' regime marks a return to an atavistic form of sovereign power. On one reading, Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power precludes this mixing of modes, but this combination of sovereign and disciplinary power is a key feature of the Pahlavis' archaic modernism. Foucault is often read as if he is describing different epochs of power, proceeding from the epoch of sovereign, through the epoch of disciplinary power, and finally to that of biopower, but this is a common error. It is certainly true Foucault's analysis of power proceeds through three stages, but these stages are not incompatible with one another. Sovereign regimes may adopt various disciplinary or biopolitical tactics in addition to the tactics of sovereign power; advanced democratic societies may adopt sovereign tactics as well. An example of the latter would be the images of torture on the part of U.S. forces at Abu Ghraib in 2004, while the shah's authoritarian regime and its secret police certainly employed disciplinary tactics. In his discussion of torture in Iran under the shah, Darius Rejali demonstrates how the modernization project of the Pahlavis integrated disciplinary tactics; Rejali thus offers a demonstration of the ways in which agents of sovereign power can incorporate disciplinary measures yet continue to torture dissidents.²⁵ As Talal Asad has pointed out, this does not refute Foucault's various claims concerning the nature of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish*, but instead serves to show how power can adopt a variety of tactics:

Rejali believes that his book refutes what Foucault had to say about torture in *Discipline and Punish*. He maintains that torture does not give place to discipline in modern society, as Foucault claimed, but persists in a major way. But this belief arises from a misreading of Foucault, whose central concern was not with "torture" but with "power," and consequently with a contrast between sovereign power (which exhibits itself through theatrical displays of tortured bodies) and disciplinary power (which works through the normalization of bodies' everyday behavior).²⁶

With some notable exceptions, torture is inflicted on bodies away from the public eye, even under authoritarian regimes.²⁷ As Asad notes, modern torture typically seeks to extract information and the police carries this out; as a result, it is a function of policing and governmentality rather than the awe-inspiring spectacle of sovereign power. Foucault de-

disciplinary power becoming diffused throughout advanced societies, Scott sees the high modernist project as an attempt to assert centralized authority using modern disciplinary means. Despite these theoretical differences, this is precisely the situation in Iran under the Shah, which is why I discuss Scott here, despite his fundamental difference from Foucault on at least this question.

²⁵ Darius Rejali, *Torture and Modernity: Self, Society, and State in Modern Iran* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994).

²⁶ Talal Asad, "Reflections on Cruelty and Torture," *Formations of the Secular*, 104.

²⁷ In his recent work, Rejali seems to have taken this criticism to heart. His massive history of torture seeks to determine how and why various methods of "clean torture" were pioneered by democratic regimes. See *Torture and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

scribes the typical strategies of power, although these strategies are not all-encompassing, nor do they preclude the tactical appropriation and transformation of techniques typical of other strategic arrangements. Thus, there is no contradiction between an authoritarian government that uses its secret police to torture dissidents in secret while attempting to normalize everyday behavior.

Returning to Scott's analysis, modernist political projects such as the shah's, fail in large measure because they seek to determine the parameters of a society according to a uniform central plan, and such authoritarian centralization projects prompt various forms of passive and active resistance on the part of those subject to them. There are four elements necessary to these modernist centralization projects; all four must be present in order to qualify the project as high modernist in Scott's sense. The first element is "the administrative ordering of nature and society." Second is "high modernist ideology," the attempt to simplify and order the disorderly conditions on the ground into a streamlined, systematic form. Third: "an authoritarian state that is willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designs into being." Finally, "a prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans."²⁸ Proponents of high modernist projects deny the particularities of the site they seek to transform and deny that the desires of the populace have any bearing on these various projects. As a result, these projects invariably prompt resistance on the part of those affected; large-scale urban planning projects of the last century often fell under this category. For example, the architects of the high modernist capital of Brazil designed a city that would be coldly austere, but such a city is not a livable one. Resistance to these schemes manifests itself in various ways depending upon local circumstances. Next to Brasilia the various workers who were brought in to realize the modernizing vision of the architects erected an impromptu village in which to dwell.

Ultimately, governments devise these various schemes in order to make societies more legible and hence render individuals more knowable and therefore determinable. Legibility refers to the metaphorical seeing that a state undertakes in order to determine the identity of its citizens and those who dwell within its borders; in Iran, it refers to the shah's gaze. High-modernist projects seek to deny the vagaries of local knowledge in order to render individual subjects visible to the gaze of the state, or, more accurately, the functionaries who have been authorized to gather the knowledge and power on the state, or colonial power's behalf. Subjects become subjects of knowledge subject to state power, although they contest this subjection at every turn through a variety of techniques. From collectivized farms of the Soviet Union under Stalin to villagization in Tanzania, the agents of high modernism pursued similar aims: the rendering of clearly legible identities. Therefore a defining trait of modernity lies in its various attempts to refine these techniques by which individuals are rendered legible or identifiable by the state.

We can better understand what Scott means by legibility and its relevance to Foucault's Iranian writings by briefly considering a claim Edward Said makes in *Orientalism*. Said details the techniques employed by European colonial powers to render their colonial subjects legible as objects of knowledge and power. As Said notes:

²⁸ Scott, 4-5.

The Orientalist surveys the Orient from above, with the aim of getting hold of the whole sprawling panorama before him—culture, religion, mind, history, society. To do this he must see every detail through the device of a set of reductive categories (the Semites, the Muslim mind, the Orient, and so forth). Since these categories are primarily schematic and efficient ones, and since it is more or less assumed that no Oriental can know himself the way an Orientalist can, any vision of the Orient comes to rely for its coherence and force on the person, institution, or discourse whose property it is.²⁹

In his dialogue with Baqir Parham Foucault discusses these visions of a modern authoritarian society in terms that would likely be endorsed by both Scott and Said:

If we keep in mind the West, I think we should not forget two grand and painful experiences we had in our culture in the last two centuries: First, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, philosophers—or it is better to say, intellectuals in France, England, and Germany—attempted to rethink society anew, according to the vision and principles of good government as they perceived it. The impact of this type of thinking can be seen, to a great extent, in the revolutions and social and political changes in France, England, and Germany. In actuality, out of this philosophical vision—the vision of a non-alienated, clear, lucid, and balanced society—industrial capitalism emerged, that is, the harshest, most savage, most selfish, most dishonest, oppressive society one could possibly imagine.³⁰

Foucault's claims about philosophical utopias accord with Scott's analyses of high modernist attempts to actualize these utopian visions, although these attempts to realize a "clear" and "lucid" society—in Scott's terms, a "legible" society—tend to fail precisely due to the resistance they prompt in the subject populace. We shall return to the specific forms this resistance took in Iran once we have examined how the Pahlavis attempted to accomplish this authoritarian high modernist project; in Foucault's terms, a sovereign regime with disciplinary features implemented by SAVAK, the shah's notoriously brutal secret police.

The shah sought a modern, legible society in Scott's sense of the term, but this feature of the Shah's regime is clearly recognized by Foucault as well. If he could only render the complex welter of ethnic groups and identities that constitute Iranian society into a clearly legible society, his nation would at last be governable, but in Iran, this need to render one's society legible and thereby governable has a paradoxical aspect, as Foucault notes. Foucault's essay "What are the Iranians Dreaming About?" (first published in *Le Nouvel Oservateur* in October 1978 and included in Afary and Anderson's volume) includes a section entitled "The Inventors of the State." In it, Foucault makes the apparently outlandish claim that Persia invented the modern state: "With respect to this political will, however, there are two questions that concern me very deeply. One bears on Iran and its peculiar destiny. At the dawn of history, Persia invented the state and conferred its models on Islam. Its administrators staffed the caliphate. But from this same Islam, it derived a religion that gave to its people infinite resources to resist state power. In this will for an 'Islamic government,' should one see a reconciliation, a contradiction, or the threshold of something new?" He writes that he is uncomfort-

²⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (NY: Vintage, 1994), 239.

³⁰ Afary and Anderson, 184-185.

able understanding “Islamic government as an ‘idea’ or even as an ‘ideal.’ Rather,” he continues, “it impressed me in its effort to politicize structures that are inseparably social and religious in response to current problems. It also impressed me in its attempt to open a spiritual dimension in politics.”³¹ Islamic government of the kind advocated by Ayatollah Khomeini, understood as a particular attempt to spiritualize politics, is best seen as a response to this modernizing tendency on the part of the shah, a tendency that paradoxically extends to the dawn of Persian history. I begin with the claim about Persia as the origin of the state, before turning to Foucault’s specific claims concerning Khomeini’s Islamic government.

Foucault’s claim concerning the putative Persian origins of the modern state can be taken in two ways, one straightforward and the second ironical. We might understand Foucault’s point about the ancient Persians inventing the state as an ahistorical claim concerning origins extending back to the accounts of Persia under autocratic rulers such as Cyrus the Great. Indeed, various readers of Foucault’s writings on Iran have interpreted him in precisely this manner, leading to the charge that Foucault’s Iranian writings suffer from a peculiar lack of attention to historical change, peculiarly because Foucault’s writings—both before and after events in Iran—are characterized by a meticulous attention to historical detail. Now, it could be that this is the case, but I believe a more charitable reading of these writings (and Foucault’s claim concerning the origins of the state in particular) demands an alternative interpretation.

Mohammad Reza Shah was obsessed about this history and attempted to evoke links between his reign and the ancient state of Persia, thus the ‘archaic modernity’ of the shah. Whether it was his coronation or the celebration of an uninterrupted 2500-year monarchy, the last shah continuously sought to portray himself as the rightful heir of this mythical past, as standing on the shoulders of Cyrus the Great.³² Recall that Foucault characterizes the shah’s version of modernization as “a modernization that is an archaism”:

A small detail that struck me the day before when I visited the bazaar, which had just reopened after a strike that had lasted more than eight days, suddenly came back to me. Incredible sewing machines, high and misshapen, as can be seen in the advertisements of nineteenth century newspapers, were lined up in the stalls. They were adorned with patterns of ivy, climbing plants, and budding flowers, roughly imitating old Persian miniatures. These unfit-for-use Western objects, under the sign of an obsolete Orient, all bore the inscription: “Made in South Korea.”³³

³¹ Foucault, “What are the Iranians Dreaming About?,” in Afary and Anderson, 208.

³² Hamid Dabashi describes this mythologizing of a Persian past in the following way: “Encouraged by U.S. support, the shah had crushed a major rebellious movement in 1963, and checked and brutally repressed the urban and guerilla movements that ensued after that; and by 1971 he felt so confident that he arranged for a massive, obscenely expensive celebration of the presumed 2,500-year anniversary of the Persian monarchy.” (*Iran: A People Interrupted* (NY: New Press, 2006), 132) Nikki Keddie fleshes out the ‘presumed’ part of this by pointing out that the monarchy had not existed between 640 and 1501 CE, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, updated edition (New Haven: Yale University Press), 167.

³³ Afary and Anderson, 195

Foucault continues, "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*."³⁴ In "The Shah is a Hundred Years Behind the Times," Foucault recounts that he was told before he departed Paris for Iran that Iran was going through a crisis of modernization, because the shah had a vision of a modern state that could not be accommodated by traditional Iranian society, but this is not the situation he found at all. Instead of a ruler with his gaze fixed firmly on the future, he found one fixed on a vision of modernization that was itself already old:

In 1921, when Reza Khan, the head of the Cossack brigade, was brought to power by the English, he presented himself as a disciple of Ataturk. No doubt this was a usurpation of the throne, but he also had three objectives borrowed from Mustafa Kemal: nationalism, secularism, and modernization. The Pahlavis were never able to reach the first two objectives. As to nationalism, they neither could, nor knew how to, loosen the constraints of geopolitics and oil wealth [...] For secularism, things were equally difficult. Because it was the Shi'ite religion that in fact constituted the real principle of national consciousness, Reza Shah, in order to dissociate the two, tried to propagate a notion of "Aryanness," whose sole support was the myth of Aryan purity that reigned elsewhere. In the eyes of the people, what did it mean to discover one fine day that they were Aryans? It was nothing more than seeing the two-thousand year-old monarchy being celebrated today on the ruins of Persepolis.³⁵

On this second interpretation of the claim that Persia invented the state, it is not Foucault, but rather the shah who sees Persia as inventor of the state. In this sense, Foucault's invocation of Persia as inventor of the state is ironic. However, there is another sense in which the shah truly is heir to the authoritarian rulers of ancient Persia, namely in his failed attempts to quell dissent and control the people of Iran by rendering the people legible in Scott's sense, or, as Foucault puts it: "This modernization is now utterly rejected, not only because of the setbacks that have been experienced, but also because of its very principle. With the present agony of the regime, we witness the last moments of an episode that started almost sixty years ago, the attempt to modernize the Islamic countries in a European fashion. The shah still clings to this as if it were his whole *raison d'être*. I do not know if he is still looking toward the year 2000, but I do know that his famous gaze dates from the 1920s."³⁶

To return to the second claim in the passage from "What are Iranians Dreaming About?" in addition to claiming that ancient Persia invented the state, we see that Foucault also invokes the concept of political spirituality as a term to describe the mode of resistance to the shah. According to Foucault, Islam provides both the source of Iranian state power and the means to resist this state power. The Iranian scholar Hamid Dabashi takes up this issue in his book on modern Iranian history, *Iran: A People Interrupted*. Dabashi sees contemporary Iran as the product of what he terms two 'dialectical forces.' The first is a centripetal force that threatens to rend it asunder. It is the force of the various ethnic minorities that together com-

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 196.

³⁶ Ibid., 196-197.

prise the majority of Iranians. These largely rural minorities have historically contested the claims of the Iranian state, while a second, centrifugal, force seeks to consolidate Iran into a postcolonial modern state centered on the capital Tehran. "What we witness today in Iran is a political culture that over the last two hundred years has been in a continuous crisis—a crisis that has extended to its economy and polity alike, from the symbolics of its relations to power to the institutions of what it holds to be legitimate authority."³⁷ The history of modern Iran is the history of this crisis of authority and government, both in a virtual sense (in terms of the varied hopes, dreams, and ideologies that its peoples profess) and a real sense (in terms of the concrete power relations expressed by the rulers, various foreign powers, business interests, and religious leaders).

Foucault considers it axiomatic that power and resistance accompany one another, and Iran certainly presents no exception to Foucault's axiom. The religious resistance to this modernizing power was to be found among the radicalized Shi'ite clergy: what began as an organized movement against the shah, became a full-blown revolution against the shah and the geopolitical circumstances that made it possible for him to continue to cling to power. As we shall see in the concluding section, this organized resistance fascinated Foucault because it bore some similarities to European resistance movements and yet, in certain key ways, it was so alien to these movements that Foucault was beginning to conceptualize in terms of conduct and counter-conduct. The clerics forged a political will, understood by Foucault as a coincidence of religion and politics in the form of a political spirituality that embodied political spontaneity on the part of the populace that could not be mandated from above.³⁸ It was both spontaneous and immanent, and its force was transmitted through modern technical means.³⁹ This form of political spirituality that manifests a political will is a function of Iran's unique history, according to Foucault. Iran was never colonized as other Middle Eastern countries were, nor are its borders an artifact of colonization as is the case, for example, of its neighbor Iraq. Although the nation's rulers were dependent upon Russia and Britain during the nineteenth century and at various points in its history it was a client state of world powers due to its abundant natural resources. Iran was, strictly speaking, never a colony for it was never directly administered by a colonial power:

Because of, on the one hand, the absence of a colonizer-occupier and, on the other, the presence of a national army and a sizeable police force, the political-military organizations, which elsewhere organized the struggle for decolonization and which, when the time came, found themselves in a position to negotiate independence and impose the departure of the colonial power, could not emerge. In Iran, the rejection of the regime is a massive social phenomenon.⁴⁰

³⁷ Hamid Dabashi, *Iran: A People Interrupted* (NY: The New Press, 2007), 27.

³⁸ I consider the relationship between this political will and Rousseau at the conclusion of the second part.

³⁹ Foucault discusses how revolutionary ideas were spread using cassette tapes in "The Revolt in Iran Spreads on Cassette Tapes," *Corriere della sera*, November 19, 1978 in Afary and Anderson, 216-220.

⁴⁰ Foucault, "The Mythical Leader of the Iranian Revolt," in Afary and Anderson, 221.

In the Iranian context, this political will substitutes for the organized political resistance that served as the impetus for most forms of anti-colonial resistance. The people resist the Shah, while the official arms of his government help him cling to power; Foucault designates this resistance "political will." This political will is a rejection of the status quo. In language reminiscent of his discussion on Kant, who Foucault claims understood Enlightenment as an escape, Foucault writes that "this political will is one of breaking away from all that marks their country and their daily lives with the presence of global hegemonies."⁴¹ In "What is Enlightenment?," which is the touchstone for those who wish to recover a humanist, liberal Foucault from his last writings on the aesthetics of existence, Foucault describes both the ethical and political dimension of Enlightenment, understood in Kant's famous phrase as the escape from "self-incurred immaturity." The ethical dimension of that escape designates that attitude of modernity that seeks to render the mundane present heroic; here Foucault draws upon Baudelaire and his modern *askesis* of the dandy. Defenders of the humanist Foucault emphasize the individualism of this project exclusively, but Foucault is adamant that the Enlightenment has both its collective and individual dimensions, that it is both ethical (and I would add religious) and political:

Significantly, Kant says that this Enlightenment has a *Wahlspruch*: now, a *Wahlspruch* is a heraldic device, that is, a distinctive feature by which one can be recognized, and it is also a motto, an instruction that one gives oneself and proposes to others. What, then, is this instruction? *Aude sapere*: "dare to know," "have the courage, the audacity to know." Thus, Enlightenment must be considered both as a process in which men participate collectively and as an act of courage to be accomplished personally. Men are once elements and agents of a single process. They may be actors in the process to the extent that they participate in it; and the process occurs to the extent that men decide to be its voluntary actors.⁴²

It is this neglected dimension of collective agency that fascinates Foucault in the Shi'ite resistance to the shah, which he terms alternatively a religious will and a political spirituality. He attempts to think through this collective agency in terms that depart from the Marxist analysis of revolutionary change still dominant at this time. However, the emphasis on collective agency in this text also demonstrates that the late Foucault was not simply interested in individual autonomy (liberal or otherwise) in his final writings. Instead, he tries to find an alternative account of collective agency without abandoning the concept of collective agency altogether.

At this point, we must take care not to minimize the differences between this Shi'ite political spirituality and Kant's *Aufklärung*, as these differences are considerable. While it is true that this collective action on the part of the oppressed is an escape, this is where the similarities end. Although Kant's Enlightenment marks an ethos of modernity, Shi'ism has a profoundly ambivalent relationship to modernity.⁴³ While the fact that modernity was often im-

⁴¹ Ibid., 222.

⁴² Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Essential Writings*, Vol. 1, 306.

⁴³ Indeed, the Iranians have a profoundly ambivalent relationship to modernity. To take just one defining trait of modern subjectivity, that of self-determination: Modernity and imperialism were hopelessly intertwined, so what Europeans experienced as self-determination had to be wrested from colonial occupiers,

posed in Iran and other nations of the Middle East through force or the threat of force certainly contributes to the different relationship to modernity, the fact remains that the traditional role of Islam in pre-modern Middle Eastern societies differed fundamentally from the role that Christianity played in medieval Europe. As Foucault notes, there was a distinction between ecclesiastical power and secular power present from the outset of the history of the Church in Western Europe. One finds Christ's injunction in the Synoptic Gospels to "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's," and, although the distinction often became blurred during the Middle Ages when the Church acquired vast land holdings, the basic Scriptural precedent was acknowledged. Not so in the Muslim world: from the beginning, Islam was both a secular and a spiritual power.⁴⁴

The relationship between modernity and Islam becomes further complicated when we realize that ideas considered quintessentially modern and European became part of Iranian political and intellectual discourse as a result of Azerbaijani influence on the Constitutional Revolution in Iran from 1906-1911. European intellectuals, Foucault included, tend to assume that European influence brought both colonial domination and the means to contest that domination through the liberal democratic discourse of rights and self-determination. Not so, according to Hamid Dabashi:

Those who have been pushing an entirely European set of 'modernization' theories find it a nightmare trying to account for Azerbaijan as the principal site of progressive ideas and liberating monuments in the region.⁴⁵

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 forced Iranian ruler Mozzafer al-Din Shah to institute a constitutional monarchy and other modern reforms constitutive of a public sphere, such as a free press. This development was short-circuited by the British-backed military coup that led to the replacement of the Qajar dynasty by the Pahlavis in 1925. These revolutionary attempts at modernization were suppressed and replaced by the Pahlavis' archaic modernization.

In this section, I have sought to complicate the notion of modernity and its relationship to the account of power in Foucault's writings on Iran. While Foucault certainly focuses on modernity in European contexts, it is clear that his work can be employed in a framework that admits multiple modernities, European, post-colonial, and otherwise (the example of Edward Said and the role that Foucault plays in Said's work evinces this). In addition to problematizing the notion of modernity as it relates to Foucault's work, I have begun to show the role that

often through violent means. This was true in Iran as well, despite the fact that Iran was never directly administered by a colonial power. The flip side of European autonomy was often colonial subjection, economic and otherwise. See Hamid Dabashi's discussion of this issue in *Iran: A People Interrupted*.

⁴⁴ For a recent account of the rise of Islam and its relationship to Europe, see David Levering Lewis, *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Europe, 570-1215* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2008). In Lewis' account, the history of Europe is fundamentally without a consideration of the role that Islam played in the formation of European culture and identity during the Middle Ages.

⁴⁵ Dabashi, 95. The main influence during the early years of the twentieth century is that of Mirza Ali Akbar Taher Zadeh Saber (1862-1911). Dabashi cites Saber's poetry as instrumental both in the Constitutional Revolution and the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917.

political spirituality as collective religious action on the part of both Shi'ite religious leaders and believers was a key factor in Foucault's fascination with the events in Iran beginning in 1978, despite the fact that he often resorts to European categories in order to explain these events. The final section turns to the role that religion plays in constituting modern forms of power relations. I begin with Ian Almond's claim that Foucault's Iranian writings are simply examples of Orientalism. Without denying the Orientalizing dimension of Foucault's writings, I argue that Almond's position oversimplifies Foucault's attempts to conceptualize events in Iran once we examine Foucault's genealogy of biopower presented in his 1977-1978 lecture course *Security, Territory, Population*.

3. Conduct, Counter-Conduct, and the Question of Pastoral Power

Recently, Ian Almond has argued that Foucault conceives Islam in Medieval terms. In other words, Foucault sees archaic modernism at work in both the shah's actions and the resistance to the shah. While Foucault avoids the oversimplification of conceptualizing the Revolution in terms of the shah's forces of modernization arrayed against the traditional revolutionary forces of the Ayatollah, Almond sees Foucault following Nietzsche in conceiving Islam in vitalistic and largely medieval terms:

Although Foucault follows Nietzsche in his depiction of a 'life-affirming Semitic religion,' the journalist does not set this image of life-loving Islam against a negative, life-denying Christianity (as the author of *The Antichrist* did). What we see, rather, is the invocation of similar revolutionary figures from the history of Western Christendom: Cromwell's Presbyterians, Savanorala, the Anabaptists of Münster. Once again, Islam becomes an example of how Europeans used to think, a nostalgic glimpse of the European past through the Islamic present.⁴⁶

In other words, Foucault's Islam is one that is frozen in time and gives us a glimpse of our European past when religion was a more vital force in society. "In travelling to Iran, Foucault is actually travelling back in time. The possibility of a transcendental faith that can move things in this work, rather like the intimate homoerotic bonding between Arab men, belongs to a set of practices 'we' Europeans no longer believe in."⁴⁷ Almond correctly notes that Foucault turns to medieval and early modern European antecedents in order to explain the revolt of conduct in Iran. But is this simply a matter of nostalgia, or is it something more? In this section, we will assess Almond's claim through an analysis of Foucault's 1977-1978 lecture course at the Collège de France. According to Almond, Foucault's version of Islam is "immobile," stuck in a medieval past that modern Europe has transcended. Almond's claim regarding Foucault's nostalgia is hasty though; this can be seen if we examine the relationship between the concept of political spirituality deployed in the Iranian writings and the twin concepts of conduct and counter-conduct and their role in Foucault's genealogy of biopower.

Foucault saw the concept of conduct, along with its complementary term counter-conduct, as the linchpin uniting religion and politics in terms not of "the Church and State, but

⁴⁶ Almond, 36.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

rather between the pastorate and the government."⁴⁸ If these twin concepts are indeed fundamental to Foucault's analysis of governmentality and pastoral power, then one of the aims that Foucault was trying accomplish in his Iranian writings was to determine whether this analysis applied to the Iranian situation as well, and if so, how. Foucault writes in "What are the Iranians Dreaming About?" that Islamic government can best be understood in terms of "political will" that brings together the social and religious, and thereby "opens a spiritual dimension in politics." This collective political will is a manifestation of counter-conduct against the shah's regime; counter-conduct in turn designates the myriad forms of resistance to state power, both passive (for example in various forms of mysticism) and active (for example in a range of activities from civil disobedience to revolution). Unlike the specific forms of governmentality, which develop out of the pastorate, what Foucault documents in Iran is a political will that is simultaneously political and religious whereas in the West, he sees specific practices of governmentality arising out of religious ones. The idea of counter-conduct relates to Foucault's idea of critique and the question of political will that he begins to work out in his texts on the Iranian Revolution, among other places. *Security, Territory, Population* undertakes an investigation of biopower in terms of these related concepts of conduct, counter-conduct, critique, and governmentality.

Foucault defines the term 'biopower' during the first session of the lecture course as "a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species become the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern Western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species."⁴⁹ The announced theme of the course is biopower, but the lecture course proceeds from an analysis of security and governmentality, through a discussion of pastoral power and conduct, and finally concludes with a discussion of *Raison d'Etat* and police. It seems that Foucault has completely forgotten his initial theme of biopower, though it quickly becomes clear that this is not the case: rather, Foucault needs to first provide a history of how populations came to be governable or (invoking Scott's term) legible, before turning to a discussion of bio-power. Put differently, *Security, Territory, Population* provides the reader with a genealogy of biopower.

Foucault confirms as much in the summary for the course, writing that he was concerned with the "genesis of a political knowledge that was to place at the center of its concerns the notion of population and the mechanisms capable of ensuring its regulation."⁵⁰ Such a genealogy would begin with a history of government "understood as an activity that undertakes to conduct individuals throughout their lives by placing them under the authority of a guide responsible for what they do and for what happens to them" before turning to an analysis of modern forms of governmentality in the early modern period.⁵¹ It is the discussion of

⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978*, edited by Michael Senellart (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 191.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁰ Michel Foucault, "Security, Territory, and Population," in *Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow (NY: New Press, 1997), 67.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

pastoral power that is most immediately relevant for understanding Foucault's conception of political spirituality in the Iranian writings.

Foucault introduces the term 'conduct' during his lecture of March 1, 1978 in the context of his discussion of the pastorate and its unique technologies for governing individuals, for inculcating a state of obedience.⁵² A genealogy of techniques of governing must account for these novel techniques for governing 'one and all,' above all obedience as an end in itself. As Foucault writes in "*Omnes et Singulatim*': Toward a Critique of Political Reason,"

In Christianity, the tie with the shepherd is an individual one. It is personal submission to him. His will is done, not because it is consistent with the law, and not just as far as it is consistent with it, but, principally, because it is his *will*. In Cassian's *Cenobitical Institutions*, there are many edifying anecdotes in which the monk finds salvation by carrying out the absurdest of his superiors orders. Obedience is a virtue. This means that it is not, as for the Greeks, a provisional means to an end, but, rather, an end in itself.⁵³

Written at the same time as the lecture course and delivered as part of his Tanner Lectures in October 1978, this text summarizes this genealogy of governmentality, which hinges upon the concept of obedience. As a result of obedience, the individual empties herself of all the passions characteristic of the individual will.⁵⁴ The pastorate provides a field of general obedience in which even mastery (for example, of the priest or bishop) is a function of obedience.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the point is not salvation, but rather "an entire economy and technique of the circulation, transfer, and reversal of merits, and this is its fundamental point."⁵⁶ The pastorate institutes a form of power that generalizes obedience and actualizes it upon each individual within its economy. In other words, "the objective of the pastorate is men's conduct."⁵⁷

A genealogy of pastoral power is necessary if we are to make sense of governmentality, a term which designates the early modern profusion of these techniques of obedience into a wide variety of different contexts. In his 1978 essay "What is Critique," Foucault writes:

This art of governing, of course, remained for a long time tied to relatively limited practices, tied ultimately, even in medieval society, to monastic existence and practiced above all in relatively restricted spiritual groups. But I believe that from the fifteenth century and right before the Reformation, one can say that there was a veritable explosion of the art of governing men...⁵⁸

⁵² The discussion of conduct in the following paragraphs draws upon my entry "Conduct" forthcoming in the *Foucault Lexicon*, edited by Leonard Lawlor and John Nale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁵³ Foucault, "*Omnes et Singulatim*" in *Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 3: Power*, edited by James D. Faubion (NY: New Press, 2001), 309.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 308-309.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁵⁶ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 183.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁵⁸ Foucault, "What is Critique?" in *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth Century Answers and Twentieth Century Questions*, edited by James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 383-384.

Foucault goes on to distinguish this ‘veritable explosion of the art of governing men’ in two senses: first, “a laicization” of these techniques into realms not traditionally those of the Church; and, second, a “reduction” to various domains: “how to govern children, how to govern the poor and beggars, how to govern a family, a house, how to govern armies, how to govern different groups cities, states, how to govern one’s own body, how to govern one’s own mind.”⁵⁹

But what of conduct? What is the relationship between conduct and the profusion of these arts of governmentality in the West during the early modern period? First, Foucault notes that conduct and counter-conduct are co-constitutive. It is not the case that we begin with concrete forms of power that mandate obedience and then subsequently movements of counter-conduct materialize to contest these mandates. Rather, the well-ordered field of conduct is constituted in reaction to various threats of disorder in the early Christian world; in this regard Foucault cites Gnostic attempts to contest the disorderliness of matter, but various threats can be found in both Judaic and Christian antinomian movements.⁶⁰ Foucault mentions examples of such movements of counter-conduct, with Martin Luther’s movement figuring most prominently. Revolts of conduct are distinct from political or economic revolts, yet often closely related to them. What distinguishes revolts of conduct is that their object is conduct itself, and their question always concerns how one wishes to be led. In other words, they are never completely autonomous, they never question whether one ought to be led; rather, they question why and how one must be led in a particular way.⁶¹

While there were reactionary revolts of conduct outside of the pastorate, i.e. those that arose in response to a pastorate deemed intolerable (in this respect he cites refusals to the institution of confession as well as heresies), Foucault focuses his attention on revolts of conduct that arose within the pastorate itself. These internal resistances are of interest because what is at stake in the pastorate is the question of how individuals are to conduct themselves. These “are movements whose objective is a different form of conduct, that is to say: wanting to be conducted differently, by other leaders (*conducteurs*) and other shepherds, towards other objectives and forms of salvation, and through other procedures and methods. They are movements that also seek, possibly at any rate, to escape direction by others and to define the way for each to conduct himself.”⁶² Critique, understood as the problem of how one conducts oneself and contests practices of governmentality, is prefigured in the medieval pastorate.⁶³

Foucault makes three points about the internal revolts: First, there is the issue of Gnosticism. If this fallen world of matter is intrinsically evil, then we must escape from all its re-

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 384.

⁶⁰ For Judaic antinomianism and a detailed account of the seventeenth century religious movement of Sabbati Zevi, see Gershom Scholem, *Sabbati Zevi: The Mystical Messiah 1626-1676* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

⁶¹ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 197.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 195.

⁶³ Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957) provides a classic account of the various revolts of conduct that contested the regimes of conduct instituted by the pastorate during the Middle Ages. As the title indicates, Cohn’s focus was on the various movements that sought to contest pastoral order in the name of mysticism.

strictions and laws—antinomianism becomes mandated. The Christian pastorate develops in response to this Gnostic counterconduct by imposing order. “The Western and Eastern Christian pastorate developed against everything that, retrospectively, might be called disorder.”⁶⁴ The pastorate is thus a response to the antinomianism inherent in Gnosticism; it is the imposition of order in the face of Gnostic anarchism and antinomianism.

Second, these are not general revolts; they are specific in that they arise to contest specific modes of conduct in the religious realm. They are distinct from economic and political revolts, although they are often closely related to them. “Throughout the Middle Ages, resistances of conduct are linked to struggles between the bourgeoisie and feudalism [...] They are also linked to the uncoupling of urban and rural economies that is particularly noticeable from the twelfth century [...] You also find revolts, or resistances of conduct linked to the completely different but crucial problem of the status of women.”⁶⁵ These revolts never remain autonomous: while they often begin by contesting a specific practice of conduct, they quickly become generalized.

The third feature lies in the fact that these revolts of conduct are most intense from the tenth and eleventh centuries through the sixteenth century in Europe. There is an historical shift in these movements. Beginning in the tenth and eleventh centuries and extending through the Protestant Reformation, these local contestations occur within the religious realm. Gradually, these revolts begin to contest reigning political orders. Examples provided by Foucault include insubordination in the arena of warfare, the proliferation of secret societies during the eighteenth century in Europe, and refusals in the area of medicine ranging from the refusal of particular vaccinations and treatments to the refusal of medical treatment altogether by various religious movements (Foucault’s examples remain salient as these revolutions in counter-conduct can still be found in various attempts to voluntarily refuse child immunizations and the widespread interest in alternative health therapies).

Broadly speaking, then, the profound transformations in the role that conduct played in all aspects of everyday life in the Middle Ages were accompanied by counter-conducts that sought to resist these transformations. The Protestant Revolution thereby comes to be seen as the intensification of varied movements that contested the changes in practices of governmentality, in the ways that the conduct of individuals and populations was conducted. One of the key sites of both the intensification and contestation of these transformations was in that of religious institutions. Religious institutions were key to Foucault’s understanding of power relations and the proliferation and intensification of power relations in the early modern period. In *Discipline and Punish* he had cited the role that monasticism played in developing modes of surveillance during the Middle Ages. In part, disciplinary power was a generalization of a religious practice of discipline into the everyday, secular realm of the school, the hospital, the factory, and the prison. This discussion of conduct and counter-conduct provides necessary context for Foucault’s writings on the Iranian Revolution: Foucault’s interest in Iran lies in the different ways that these revolts of conduct sought to contest the authoritarian re-

⁶⁴ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 196.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

gime of the shah while at the same time revealing certain continuities with medieval and early modern European revolts of conduct.

Although Foucault never mentions conduct and counter-conduct in his various texts on the Iranian Revolution, he speaks of the resistance to the shah in precisely the same terms that he uses to characterize medieval and early modern European revolts of conduct (or counter-conduct; Foucault uses the terms interchangeably). In the interview with Pierre Blanchet cited previously, he argues that economic factors cannot be the sole factor driving the revolution in Iran, contrary to reductionist Marxist approaches. Instead, he writes that

Shi'ism is precisely a form of Islam that, with its teaching and esoteric content, distinguishes between what is mere external obedience to the code and what is profound spiritual life; when I say that they were looking to Islam for a change in their subjectivity, this is quite compatible with the fact that traditional Islamic practice already gave them their identity; in this way they had of living the Islamic religion as a revolutionary force, there was something other than the desire to obey the law more faithfully, there was the desire to renew their entire existence by going back to a spiritual experience that they thought they could find within Shi'ite Islam itself.⁶⁶

Notice that this description of revolutionary Shi'ism reiterates the precise terms that Foucault employs when discussing counter-conduct in the 1977-1978 lecture course. There, pastoral power imposed itself upon the antinomianism of Gnosticism and imposed order. In the case of Shi'ism, the living spirituality of Shi'ism transcends mere formalism of the law and its religious strictures. Shi'ism could be revolutionary precisely because it did not represent a political calculation among various factions on the left and the right. The revolution happened, according to Foucault, because people forgot for a time the self-interested political calculations that had preoccupied them previously. "A phenomenon has transversed the entire people and will one day stop. At that moment, all that will remain are the different political calculations that each individual had in his head the whole time."⁶⁷ In this description of the individual political actor who is both politically calculating and the member of a political will, Foucault's description is reminiscent of Rousseau's notion of the general will. In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault invokes Rousseau in order to make sense of the transformation of the nature of sovereignty during the eighteenth century. Sovereignty comes to be understood under the rubric of government:

Read the two texts by Rousseau—the first, chronologically, is the article for the *Encyclopédie*, "Political Economy"—and you can see how Rousseau poses the problem of government and the art of government by noting (and the text is quite typical from this point of view) that the word economy essentially designates the father's management of the family's goods, but this model can no longer be accepted, even if it was valid in the past. We know, he says, that nowadays political economy is no longer family economy [...] At any rate, in this article he takes on the task of defining an art of government. Then he writes in *The Social Contract* in which the problem is how, with notions like those of "nature," "contract," and "general

⁶⁶ Afary and Anderson, 255.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 256.

will," one can give a general principle of government that will allow for both the juridical principle of sovereignty and the elements through which an art of government can be defined and described."⁶⁸

This general will entails a subordination of the individual will to the will of all. It does not consist of an aggregation of each individual will into a composite will but rather a new singular entity that speaks with one voice and acts as one will. Granted that the general will vastly oversimplifies the complexity of the revolution, nevertheless Foucault does not conceive of the Iranian Revolution completely in medieval terms. The danger and promise of Rousseau's general will mirrors the danger and promise present in the Iranian Revolution as Foucault misunderstood it: the promise is that of a new order arising from the old, a new and more just order that will replace the old one. The danger is that this promise will go unfulfilled: that the individual will be forgotten (and forget herself) as revolutionary fervor that sweeps the society. Foucault writes during the events of this tumultuous period, when it is uncertain what will replace the old regime. Foucault believes, based upon what he has heard from Iranians, that an Islamic government will mean one of two things: either a utopia, which would be understood as "something very old and also very far into the future, a notion of coming back to what Islam was at the time of the Prophet, but also of advancing toward a luminous and distant point where it would be possible to renew fidelity rather than maintain obedience."⁶⁹ In other words, utopian vision would be an archaic modernism that would oppose the Shah's archaic modernism. Understood in this way, this Islamic utopia would have been the inverse of Kant's Enlightenment, which is an interrogation of the present in order to determine how today differs from the past. This Islamic utopia, by contrast, would mark a radical rejection of the present in the name of a recovery of the past, which opens upon a future. The question of how this recovered past would differ from the mythical past favored by the shah. The glib answer would be that the shah's mythical past was seen by virtually all as a sham. A bit less glibly, Foucault might answer that the vision of the past offered by Shi'ism is one that people are both willing to believe and willing to act upon; it is convincing. The second possibility raised by an Islamic government is that of a democratic government that will respect the individual so long as the exercise of liberties does not harm others (echoing Mill) and a government in which the product of each individual's labors belong to the individual who produces them (echoing Locke).⁷⁰ This second possibility is the one emphasized by Beaulieu, Paras, and others who would seek the significance of Foucault's later writings in an emphasis on liberal individualism or humanism. Still, it remains the case that in neither possibility is Foucault able to clearly distinguish between the political dimension and the spiritual; he invariably collapses the religious dimension into the political one.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 107.

⁶⁹ Foucault, "What are the Iranians Dreaming About?" in Afary and Anderson, 206.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Jeremy Carrette argues that this identification of the religious dimension with the political serves a useful critical function. Indeed it does, but at the expense of granting religious belief any motivational power. See Jeremy Carrette, *Spiritual Corporeality and Political Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 1999).

I began this section with Ian Almond's claim that Foucault's texts on Iran perpetuate Orientalist stereotypes of Iranian identity (and Shi'ite identity in particular) as static and mired in a projected medieval European past. While there may indeed be passages in these writings that invite such a reading, I hope to have shown that this is not the only possible interpretation. In employing the categories of his analyses of the genealogy of governmentality to characterize the political spirituality of Islam, Foucault begins to widen the scope of his analyses of governmentality beyond a simple Western framework. Haltingly, his work on Iran during this period can be seen as proposing multiple modernities: those of the shah and those who resisted his vision of archaic secular modernity with an alternative vision of an Islamic modernity that recovers the past and inaugurates a future.

The promise of an Islamic government largely remains unfulfilled: Iran has become a country ruled by an authoritarian Islamic regime, but it remains the unruly place that Foucault saw and attempted to understand, understanding that is made more difficult due to the caricature of Iran and its Islamic government that existed then and continues to exist in the fervid imaginations of many Western politicians and media outlets.⁷² By travelling to Iran and reporting from its tumultuous present, Foucault was fulfilling the role of the intellectual as he conceived it. To be an intellectual was to be politically engaged. And while Foucault was in many ways profoundly wrong about the meaning of events in Iran, this is the risk of the intellectual. As he says in response to a question posed by Iranian writer Baqir Parham,

the very definition of the intellectual comprises a person who necessarily is entangled with the politics and major decisions of his society. Thus, the point is not whether or not an intellectual has a presence in political life. Rather, the point is what should the role of an intellectual be in the present state of the world, in order that he or she would reach the most decisive, authentic, accurate results. I am, of course, only dealing with the society of which I am a part. Later, in comparison with your experiences, we shall see what are the differences in our situation in the West and yours.⁷³

The second stage remained incomplete at the time of Foucault's death, little more than a promissory note contained in his dispatches and dialogues on Iran. Foucault always saw his project as an audacious one in which he would likely misunderstand more than he understood. This does not mean that the risk is not worth taking - quite the contrary. If we are to better understand ourselves, we must make the attempt to understand others, even at the risk of misunderstanding. This may indeed be the most lasting effect of Foucault's encounter with Islam.

⁷² Although it is beyond the scope of this paper, in addition to consulting scholars such as Dabashi and Keddie that I've cited, readers interested in this caricature of Iran's Islamic government should consult the recent article by Flynt Leverett and Hillary Mann Leverett, "The Mad Mullah Myth: The Dangers of Misunderstanding Iran's Strategy," *Harper's Magazine*, 325(11): 53-57. The article's point is simple: contrary to the myth of the "mad Mullahs" that is so prevalent in the media and political discourse in the United States and other Western nations, if we examine the decisions that the Iranian government has made dating back to the institution of the Islamic Republic, these are the decisions of rational political actors. The fact that the Iranian government's actions regarding nuclear proliferation can be dismissed simply as the actions irrational agents provides another indication that Said's work on Orientalism remains sadly relevant.

⁷³ Afary and Anderson, 184.

In this paper, I have retraced Foucault's attempts to make sense of the Iranian Revolution in order to show how this attempt reflects his thought at the time and how reflection on these writings can help us to rethink the role of collective agency in Foucault's work. I have defended the three claims I presented at the outset: (1) Foucault does not turn away from collective agency to individual agency as a result of his encounter with Iran, nor does he move away from thinking about power to thinking exclusively about ethics; (2) Foucault's texts on Iran can be seen as the basis for a conception of modernity as a multivalent set of practices, some of which serve the interests of those in power and some of which serve to contest these interests, some of which are secular and some of which are religious. Finally, (3) we can see Foucault's writings on Iran as something more than mere nostalgia for a past that never was once we examine these writings in relation to his contemporaneous work, *Security, Territory, Population* in particular. Many further distinctions could be made about these multiple practices of modernity (or these modernities), but these are the ones that provided the focus for this paper.

Corey McCall
Department of Philosophy and Religion
Elmira College
1 Park Place
Elmira, NY 14901
USA