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# Foucault, Secularization Theory, and the Theological Origins of Totalitarianism

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### Chapter 7

# Foucault, Secularization theory, and the theological origins of totalitarianism<sup>1</sup>

Michael Lackey

Michel Foucault's provocative remarks in the Preface to Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Gauttari's Anti-Oedipus about the omnipresence of fascism have inspired scholars to reflect more on the anti-fascist impulse at the core of Foucault's writings than on Deleuze's and Guattari's text. For instance, in 'Beyond Theology and Sexuality,' Jeremy Carrette cites some memorable passages from the 'Preface' to clarify his 'queer theory' approach to Foucault, which functions to unveil 'the fascist regimes of Christian theology and sexuality in the bondage of a fixed self.'<sup>2</sup> In 'The Fascist Longings in our Minds,' Rey Chow combines Foucault's ideas from the 'Preface' with a Freudian theory of projection to justify her claim that 'Fascism has become for us the empty term, the lack, onto which we project all the unpleasant realities from which we want to distance ourselves.'3 James Bernauer makes extensive use of the 'Preface' in his essay, 'Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life,' to demonstrate 'that Foucault's style of analysis should make him the "patron saint" for the study of Nazism." That scholars have used the anti-fascist remarks in the 'Preface' to understand the core concepts at the heart of Foucault's work should surprise no one, for as Foucault makes abundantly clear in a 1984 interview, one of his life-long objectives was to construct a nonauthoritarian discursive model, one that would establish a civil relation between interlocutors, whether those interlocutors were citizens, academicians, politicians, or countries.5

While many contemporary scholars agree that there is a strong antifascist impulse running throughout Foucault's writings, there has been some confusion about Foucault's take on the role of religion in the formation of a fascist technology of the self. In this essay, I argue that, for Foucault, it is impossible to understand 'the fascism in us all'<sup>6</sup> that made Hitler and the Nazis so effective without taking into account the crucial role Christianity played in the formation of the Western political subject and the modern nation-state. There are two stages to my argument. In the first, I briefly examine secularization theory. Recent studies have been posing a substantive challenge to the traditional secularization hypothesis, which holds that science and reason have been slowly but surely supplanting religion and faith. As I will demonstrate, Foucault recognized many years ago that the traditional Enlightenment story about secularization was an incoherent fiction that significantly distorted our understanding of intellectual and political history. In the second part of this essay, I analyze Hitler's religious conception of the political. Examining Hitler's speeches and writings, I contend, will shed considerable light on the distinctive theological technology of the self that made fascism flourish.

The consequences of using Foucault's work to understand the origins of totalitarianism and fascism are staggering. First, Foucault's work will force us to reconsider those canonical studies, such as Erich Fromm's Escape from Freedom, Max Horkheimer's and Theodor W. Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment, Hannah Arendt's The Origins of Totalitarianism, and Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities, which hold that secularization was a precondition for the emergence of the nation-state, totalitarianism, and fascism. Foucault refused to give credence to the secularization hypothesis, an intellectual move that has baffled some prominent scholars. For instance, Vincent P. Pecora praises Foucault for teaching us 'how to rethink the Enlightenment's idea of progress,' but he faults him for failing to understand 'the story of secularization that accompanied it.'7 But if my interpretation of Foucault is convincing, he would argue, contra Pecora, that secularization has never even begun to take hold much less to occur in the West, and consequently, Foucault would argue, contra Fromm, Adorno, Horkheimer, Arendt, and Anderson, that it is impossible to understand the origins of totalitarianism and fascism without taking into account a distinctly religious conception of the political subject.

> I have dug out the theologian instinct everywhere: it is the most widespread, peculiarly *subterranean* form of falsity that exists on earth.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars have consistently claimed that secularization has been underway in the West from the Enlightenment to the present. What exactly secularization is, however, continues to perplex. Here are three separate models: (1) given the way science and reason supplanted religion and faith,<sup>9</sup> (2) given the way the Protestant Reformation shifted epistemic authority from the unified Church to the individual conscience,<sup>10</sup> or (3) given the way translations of the Bible into vernacular languages led to the proliferation of irreconcilable religious schisms,<sup>11</sup> the credibility of the church and its truths has been significantly undermined, thus leading to the rise of a nonreligious mentality in the West. Such are the standard versions of the secularization hypothesis that have dominated.

But a casual glance at the writings of some prominent writers tells a much different tale. For instance, in 1882, Friedrich Nietzsche's madman from The Gay Science boldly proclaimed God's death, and a close reading of Nietzsche's writings from 1882 through 1885 indicates that he would have probably accepted the central premise at the heart of traditional secularization theory, that with the passage of time, science would eventually supplant religion. But in 1886, there was a palpable shift in the Uebermensch philologist's writings. First, they became more intensely political, thus leading him to do an extensive analysis of 'the secret black art of [the] truly grand politics of revenge'12 and to prophesy the coming of the twentieth century's political horror show: 'The time for petty politics is over: the very next century will bring the fight for the dominion of the earth-the compulsion to large-scale politics." The second shift relates to Nietzsche's critique of God and religion. While Nietzsche continued to argue in the years 1886 through January of 1889 that God is both an incoherent and dangerous idea, he started to realize that the God-concept is not disappearing from the culture as he had formerly thought: 'I fear we are not getting rid of God because we still believe in grammar . . .<sup>14</sup> Gone is the cocksure atheist of 1882, who boldly claimed that the God-idea is on the wane. Indeed, for Nietzsche, not only is the God-concept not disappearing, but it is also assuming a more prominent role in the political sphere, which is why he warns his reader in The Anti-Christ 'not [to] underestimate the fatality that has crept out of Christianity even into politics.<sup>15</sup>

We see a similar pattern in Mark Twain's writings. In the year 1899, we could say that Twain would have agreed with Arendt, who claims in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that twentieth-century anti-Semitism is based on 'a secular nineteenth-century ideology' that is distinct from traditional 'religious Jew-hatred.'<sup>16</sup> For instance, in 'Concerning the Jews,' an essay published in the September 1899 issue of *Harper's Monthly*, Twain tries to explain the origins of Western anti-Semitism. Throughout this essay, Twain says that he is 'convinced that the persecution of the Jew is not due in any large degree to religious prejudice.'<sup>17</sup> Twain does not totally exonerate religion, for he does claim that, if religion plays a role in justifying the culture's anti-Semitism, it is only a minor one. In fact, Twain offers a tentative

quantification of religion's role: 'Religious prejudices may account for one part of it, but not for the other nine' (2000: 242). What really accounts for rampant anti-Semitism is the Jewish superiority in making money: 'I am persuaded that in Russia, Austria, and Germany nine-tenths of the hostility to the Jew comes from the average Christian's inability to compete successfully with the average Jew in business—in either straight business or the questionable sort' (2000: 242–243). Therefore, Twain concludes that 'Jewish persecution is not a religious passion, it is a business passion' (2000: 249).

Now let us consider a passage Twain penned on June 22, 1906. Discussing the many pogroms against Jews in Russia during the years 1903 through 1906, Twain says:

For two years now Christianity has been repeating in Russia the sort of industries in the way of massacre and mutilation with which it has been successfully persuading Christendom in every century for nineteen hundred years that it is the only right and true religion—the one and only religion of peace and love. For two years now the ultra-Christian Government of Russia has been officially ordering and conducting massacres of its Jewish subjects.<sup>18</sup>

Striking in this passage is not just Twain's reversal regarding the causes of 'Jewish persecution,' but his contention that the early twentieth-century pogroms are part of a long line of massacres Christendom has been committing 'in every century for nineteen hundred years.' Between the years 1899 and 1906, Twain revised his view about the role religion was playing within the culture. Indeed, in his 1901 essay, 'To the Person Sitting in Darkness,' Twain claims that a Christian conception of the political has been central for the justification of the invasive and intrusive politics of Russia, Great Britain, and the United States. Utilizing a benevolent discourse about the Blessings of Civilization, which holds that imperialist powers dominate lesser nations for their own good, Western leaders have been able to vindicate their invasive politics and to mobilize the masses to support their agenda. But this whole political agenda, Twain argues, has been premised on a Christian conception of the political:

We know this. The Head of every State and Sovereignty in Christendom and 90 per cent of every legislative body in Christendom, including our Congress and our fifty [*sic*] state legislatures, are members not only of the church, but also of the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust.<sup>19</sup> For Twain, it is impossible to understand or appreciate the West's imperialist political agenda without taking into account the Christian orientation of Western legislators, that body of leaders that both frames the nation's agenda and legitimizes the global project.

Let me supply one last example to illustrate my point. As a college student at Cambridge, E. M. Forster rejected Christianity sometime in 1898 or 1899, an experience that he considered one of the most momentous of his life.<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, religion is treated as a charming but increasingly obsolete fiction in his early works. For instance, in the 1908 novel, A Room with a View, the narrator says that 'the thing one never talked about-religion-was fading like all the other things.'21 Given this situation, religion is of marginal importance in the novels from 1907 until 1910, a fluffy subject for fluffy characters (such as Mr. Beebe in A Room with a View) or a twisted subject for twisted characters (such as Mr. Pembroke and his sister, Agnes, in the 1907 novel, The Longest Journey). But by 1913 and 1914, when Forster was penning his overtly homosexual novel, Maurice, religion became an extremely ominous presence, a socio-cultural power that enforces strict gender and sex roles (as with Mr. Ducie's sand diagrams depicting the God-mandated heterosexual Ideal) and identifies and defines 'sexual irregularities' in order to monitor and control human sexuality (as with Mr. Borenius, who claims that 'when the nations went a whoring they invariably ended by denying God'22). In 1918, so dominant was the religious mentality within a political context that Forster wrote in a letter to his friend, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, that England is a 'God State.'23 By 1924, with the publication of A Passage to India, Forster suggests that it is impossible to understand the colonizing politics of the British Empire without taking into account its religious justification, which is best expressed in Isaiah 9:7: 'For unto us a child is borne, unto us a Sonne is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder.' As chosen people, who take their cue from God, the British are divinely ordained to rule and govern (the government shall be upon Christ's shoulder, and since the British are the Imperial ministers of Christ, the government falls upon their shoulders), which explains why the British have been authorized to control India. Mrs. Moore, who turns against 'poor little talkative Christianity' in A Passage to India, does so, because she finally realizes how it has justified Britain's invasive and intrusive politics, a point she makes when she specifically alludes to the Isaiah passage.<sup>24</sup> Given the overwhelming power of religion to structure social forms and to determine the political agenda, it should come as no surprise that Forster claims in 1939 that 'this is an age of faith.'25

A German philologist, an American satirist, and an English novelist all undergo a similar experience. Initially, they all accept the traditional view that the West is becoming secular, but they all ultimately reject that view. Since they all draw the same conclusion but at different historical moments, it would make more sense to say that something changed, not so much in the culture, as in the way that they conceptualized historical and political events. Put differently, they adopted a different model of secularization, which led them to shift their view about the religious orientation of the culture at large. This is most obvious when we think about Twain's example. In 1906, Twain does not say that a religious resurgence occurred within the culture, thus justifying the claim that religion has been the cause of the 1903 through 1906 pogroms against Jews in Russia; rather, he revises his earlier view by claiming that Christendom has been consistently justifying the persecution of Jews for the last nineteen hundred years. In other words, Twain makes use of a new secularization model in 1906 that enabled him to see the religious causes of persecution that he did not see when he penned his 1899 essay, 'Concerning the Jews.' Other than Nietzsche, no one, I contend, provided us with a more astute model for identifying the subterranean theological impulses operating within language, psyches, culture, and the polis than Foucault, and, therefore, no one has been better positioned to shed more light on the theological origins of totalitarianism and fascism than Foucault.

For Foucault, who claims that 'the death of God profoundly influenced our language'<sup>26</sup> and led to the death of the subject,<sup>27</sup> secularization is a process of coming to secular consciousness, one of identifying and exorcising theological assumptions that continue to inform systems of thinking even when one has rejected the God-concept. Within this tradition of secularization theorists, it is not enough simply to ignore religion or to deny God's existence. One must perpetually examine the degree to which one's system of thought is based on a theological model of knowledge. It is such a view of theological assumptions that is central to Jean-Paul Sartre's critique of the Enlightenment. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rationalists may have believed that they had supplanted God and religion, but since they held firm to a belief in human nature, they were unwitting believers.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, to actually be secular, according to Sartre, one must reject the existence of human nature: 'there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it.<sup>29</sup>

What distinguishes writers such as Nietzsche, Sartre, and Foucault from traditional secularization theorists is their method of analysis. Secularization theorists in the Enlightenment rationalist tradition hold that, to determine whether a person or a community is secular or religious, we need only to determine whether individuals or communities are making conscious declarations of belief. These writers base their theories, for the most part, on empirical indicators such as church attendance, prayer in schools, and polls about belief. By contrast, secularization theorists in a Nietzschean, Sartrean, or Foucauldian tradition hold that it is possible for a person to reject God and religion but to remain faithful, at the level of the psychological subconscious or the political unconscious, to a theological view of the world. These writers focus mainly on unexamined ideological assumptions, unconscious conceptual frameworks, and orientations toward knowledge. That Foucault belongs to this latter tradition is clear in the 'Preface' to The Order of Things, where he claims that his method of analysis 'does not belong to the history of ideas or of science: it is rather an inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within what space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical a priori, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies, rationalities be formed' (1994: xxi-xxii). Instead of examining what people say or believe, Foucault examines the systems of knowledge and power that have given birth to their particular systems of thinking. Nietzsche deploys this same method of analysis, which is why he concludes that science, despite its secular pretensions, 'rests on a faith,' 'that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine.'50 It is not what science thinks or says about itself, but the conditions of knowledge under which it came into being that determine whether it is theological or secular.

Given this approach, Foucault, like Nietzsche and Sartre, rejects the simplistic view that the Enlightenment marks a decisive shift from the sacred to the secular or even the beginning of a shift from the sacred to the secular. As Bernauer insightfully claims, 'early modernity,' for Foucault, 'was not a tale of growing religious disbelief but, rather, saw the emergence of an energy which drove both the global missionary activities of European Christianity as well as a vast religious colonization of interior life' (2004: 78). Indeed, Foucault specifically claims that Christianity continues to institute in his day ('still very numerous') an authoritarian technology of the self:

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Christianity is not only a salvation religion, it is a confessional religion; it imposes very strict obligations of truth, dogma, and canon, more so than do the pagan religions. Truth obligations to believe this and that were and are still very numerous. The duty to accept a set of obligations, to hold certain books as permanent truth, to accept authoritative decisions in matters of truth, not only to believe certain things but to show that one believes, and to accept institutional authority are all characteristic of Christianity.<sup>31</sup>

Foucault objects to Christianity's 'strict obligations of truth, dogma, and canon' not simply because this Christian view significantly divests humans of individual autonomy, but because it sets into motion an insidious power relation within self and with others. Indeed, Foucault argues that religion's destructive potential manifests itself in and through then-contemporary polemics, which is based on the idea of annihilating one's adversary:

As in heresiology, polemics sets itself the task of determining the intangible point of dogma, the fundamental and necessary principle that the adversary neglected, ignored, or transgressed; and it denounces this negligence as a moral failing; at the root of the error, it finds passion, desire, interest, a whole series of weaknesses and inadmissible attachments that establish it as culpable.<sup>32</sup>

By indoctrinating citizens with the idea that there exists a God-created Truth, an 'intangible point of dogma,' religion has been able to institute within individuals a fascist technology of the self, 'a state of domination' in which 'an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilizing them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political, or military means.'<sup>35</sup>

The theological or religious technology of the self, therefore, is not dependent upon an overt or conscious declaration of belief, but rather, upon an instituted model of self-knowledge,<sup>34</sup> one that presupposes the existence of a God-created 'permanent truth' and an 'intangible point of dogma.' Within the Christian model, according to Foucault, knowledge is hierarchical, and therefore, the Christian subject conceives of itself in relation to an imagined metaphysical reality: 'In Christianity, asceticism always refers to a certain renunciation of the self and of reality because most of the time the self is a part of that reality that must be renounced in order to gain access to another level of reality.'<sup>35</sup> What the self produces is secular, ephemeral, and therefore untrustworthy, so if Christian subjects want to be right with God, they must renounce the products of the secular self and submit to the metaphysical, immutable, and therefore absolute reality of God. This relation of Christian subjects to themselves cannot be imposed from the outside; it must be something that they desire, something that animates their relation to themselves and others. Having internalized, at the level of desire, the view that there exists a God-created, metaphysical reality, Christian subjects must renounce thoughts and impulses that are incompatible with their faith-constructed Truths. Moreover, Christian subjects, instead of engaging with others in the production of a mutually agreed upon and culturally negotiated system of 'truth,' must demonize, denounce, or dismiss those individuals whose 'truths' are at odds with the permanent Truth that God has authored. It is, I contend, this hierarchical model of knowledge that created the conditions for fascism to flourish. But to give my reader a clear sense of this hierarchical model, let me turn to Hitler's writings, for he articulates most clearly the nature of the fascist technology of the Western self.

The German quest for God is not to be separated from Christ. We have lost our true cohesion with God. We are neither warm nor cold. Half Christian, half heathen. Yes, even the best are groping in the dark, not knowing what to do.<sup>36</sup>

Using Foucault's model of the Christian technology of self to understand fascism, specifically the fascism in us all, will enable us to challenge two standard assumptions about Hitler's theologically inflected conception of the political. The first assumption is that Hitler could not have been a Christian because he persecuted Christians. The second assumption is that Hitler, instead of actually believing in and/or accepting Christianity, exploited it for political reasons. Therefore, Hitler was only a nominal Christian and not truly a Christian in practice. It is my contention that, if we use Foucault's approach to the formation of the political subject to understand Hitler's distinctly Christian conception of the polis, these two assumptions would be exposed as false and misleading.

That Hitler regularly proclaimed himself a Christian and that he considered the Nazi Party to be based on Christian principles are simply matters of historical fact. In his first wireless speech to the German people after he came to power in 1933, Hitler announced that his political party regards 'Christianity as the foundation of our national morality.'<sup>37</sup> Just two weeks later, he boldly declared in another speech his theological allegiance to Christianity: 'it is Christians and not international atheists who now stand at the head of Germany' (1941: 148; February 15, 1933). In a 1934 speech, Hitler specified the nature of the Nazi Party's Christian orientation by claiming that '[t]he National Socialist State professes its allegiance to positive Christianity,'<sup>38</sup> and by positive Christianity, he meant 'caring for the sick, clothing the poor, feeding the hungry and quenching the thirst of the parched' (1941: 597; February 24, 1939). Indeed, in January of 1939, Hitler boasted that under his leadership, Germany has almost quadrupled State contributions to the Churches, and that the National Socialist State differs considerably from France, the United States, and England because it refuses to accept the 'separation between Church and State.'<sup>39</sup> Even as late as 1945, Hitler insisted that 'God the Almighty has made our nation. By defending its existence we are defending His work.<sup>40</sup> Given its commitment to positive Christianity, Hitler claimed that the Nazi Party 'stands on the ground of a real Christianity,' because it is based on 'Christian principles' (1942: 386, 387; February 24, 1939).

Absolutely crucial to Hitler's Christian conception of the political is his distinction between 'real Christianity' and a perverted version of the faith, an idea he develops in *Mein Kampf*. His conception of the legitimate polis is based on a distinction between relative 'knowledge,' which is not really Knowledge because it is fluctuating and therefore unreliable, and dogmatic Knowledge, which is objectively True and therefore always valid. Indeed, Hitler casts a skeptical eye on a movement's or a political system's 'outward formulation,' which is subject to interpretation and error. In other words, political 'truth' is relative and therefore not Knowledge. Beyond critique, however, is what Hitler refers to as an 'inner sense,' which 'is immutable.<sup>41</sup> As a Catholic, Hitler believes that the Catholic Church provides us with an ideal model for accessing this immutable Truth, for the Church refuses to lose sight of the 'inner sense':<sup>42</sup>

Here, too, we can learn by the example of the Catholic Church. [...] It has recognized quite correctly that its power of resistance does not lie in its lesser or greater adaptation to the scientific findings of the moment, which in reality are always fluctuating, but rather in rigidly holding to dogmas once established, for it is only such dogmas which lend to the whole body the character of a faith. (1971: 459)

To create the conditions for a moral culture and to establish an enduring political system, Hitler insists that the community must give primacy to religion, for 'faith is often the sole foundation of a moral attitude' (1971: 267). Indeed, without religious dogma, the twin terrors of anarchy and nihilism loom large: 'The attack against dogmas as such, therefore, strongly resembles the struggle against the general legal foundations of a state, and, as the latter would end in a total anarchy of the state, the former would end in a worthless religious nihilism' (1971: 267). In short, if the culture would

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have a true politics, it must acknowledge the primacy and inviolability of religion, because only religion can give us what is reliable, enduring, and legitimate. On this point, Hitler is as emphatic as he is direct: 'Anyone who thinks he can arrive at a religious reformation by the detour of a political organization only shows that he has no glimmer of knowledge of the development of religious ideas or dogmas and their ecclesiastical consequences' (1971: 114). For Hitler, religion must be the basis and foundation of a political system, and never the other way around. Therefore, Hitler concludes that '[flor the political leader the religious doctrines and institutions of his people must always remain inviolable' (1971: 116).

Understanding the primacy of religion in the formation of the political explains how Hitler, as a Christian, could justify persecuting 'Christians.' To clarify my point, let me take issue with James Carroll's impressive work on Hitler and the Nazis. In his massive study, Carroll draws a clear line of connection between early Christian theology and the Nazi pogroms against Jews, but he stops short of concluding that Hitler and/or the Nazis were Christian. Rather, Carroll rehearses the standard argument, which seemingly justifies the claims that Hitler, in the final analysis, could not be considered a Christian and that he was even hostile to Christianity. As Carroll says: 'Hitler suggests that, once finished with the Jews, he would have targeted for elimination, one way or another, those whose loyalty to Jesus competed with loyalty to the Third Reich' (2001: 16). Unfortunately, Carroll does not cite the source for this claim about Hitler, but it is likely that he has Hitler's famous 1939 speech in mind. In this speech, Hitler claims that National Socialism can never be considered incompatible with Christianity, because National Socialism is based on the one and only true Christian faith. Hitler unambiguously makes this point when he justifies taking action against false servants of the faith:

But, the National Socialist State will ruthlessly make clear to those clergy who instead of being God's ministers regard it as their mission to speak insultingly of our present Reich, its organizations, or its leaders, that no one will tolerate a destruction of this State, and that a clergy who place themselves beyond the pale of the law will be called to account before the law like any other German citizen. (1942: 51; January 30, 1939)

For Hitler, 'the Government of the Reich [...] regards Christianity as the unshakable foundation of the morals and moral code of the nation' (1941: 157; March 23, 1933), so if certain members of the clergy defy the State, they would be implicitly setting themselves against God. Therefore, in the name of God, Hitler feels not only justified but also obligated in taking action against godless opponents of the State: 'We shall protect the German clergy in their capacity as God's ministers, but we shall destroy clergy who are the enemies of the German Reich' (1942: 53; January 30, 1939). The major premise that Hitler takes as a given could be stated thus: in serving the National Socialist State, members of the clergy are implicitly 'God's ministers.' Conversely, in defying the National Socialist State, members of the clergy are implicitly opponents of God. This Christian conception of the political is based on the idea that religion precedes politics, that Christianity is the basis of National Socialism rather than National Socialism being the foundation for Christianity. Therefore, we could say, contra Carroll, that Hitler intended to persecute, not Christians, but only those 'Christians' who have failed to understand real Christianity, which Hitler considered to be the religious foundation of the National Socialist polis.

More important than Hitler's conflation of politics and religion is the technology of self that made this particular view of the religiously inflected polis so effective. Put differently, it is not necessarily what Hitler said but rather the fascist technology of self that he and the Nazis subscribed to and instituted that made his political agenda Christian. At this point, let me examine the technology of self on which Hitler's view of the Christian polis depends. In a 1922 speech, Hitler articulates the only conditions under which a nation could flourish. Hitler claims that 'my feeling as a Christian points me to my Lord and Saviour as a fighter':

In boundless love as a Christian and as a man I read through the [biblical] passage which tells us how the Lord at last rose in His might and seized the scourge to drive out of the Temple the brood of vipers and adders. How terrific was His fight for the world against the Jewish poison. Today, after two thousand years, with deepest emotion I recognize more profoundly than ever before in the fact that it was for this that He had to shed His blood upon the Cross. As a Christian I have no duty to allow myself to be cheated, but I have the duty to be a fighter for truth and justice. (1942: 26; April 12, 1922)

At issue here is a legitimate and enduring political system on which civilization could flourish. Hitler goes on to claim that he considers it his 'duty to see to it that human society does not suffer the same catastrophic collapse as did the civilization of the ancient world some two thousand years ago—a civilization which was driven to its ruin through this same Jewish

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people.' For Hitler, when a government allows nonreligious people to rule and govern, a 'catastrophic collapse' of civilization is destined to occur. Of ultimate importance is a religious sensibility, the only true foundation of personal identity and the body politic. Therefore, to ensure that German civilization does not suffer the same fate as ancient Rome, Hitler believes that he has not just a right but an obligation to rid the culture of non-Christians, and specifically Jews.

What leads Hitler to this conclusion is his conviction that the Jews are rooted in the ephemeral realities of the material world rather than the everlasting truths of the spiritual world, and to illustrate this point, Hitler alludes to the Gospel passages in which Christ banishes the money changers from the temple:

His [the Jew's] life is only of this world, and his spirit is inwardly as alien to true Christianity as his nature two thousand years previous was to the great founder of the new doctrine. Of course, the latter made no secret of his attitude toward the Jewish people, and when necessary he even took to the whip to drive from the temple of the Lord this adversary of all humanity, who then as always saw in religion nothing but an instrument for his business existence. (1971: 307)

Jews base their lives on their 'business existence' rather than 'religion,' which is why their lives are 'only of this world' and why their 'spirit is inwardly alien [...] to true Christianity.' This passage is useful because it enables us to understand what Hitler means by religion. Religion is based on other-worldly concerns, such as an immutable or spiritual truth, while business is based on 'this world' concerns, such as money and power. And since Jews root themselves in their 'business existence,' and since their lives are 'only of this world,' their very natures are opposed to Godly virtues as well as religion. Starkly put, the opposition Hitler establishes is between the religious, that which is eternal, immutable, and noncontingent, and the nonreligious, that which is ephemeral, mutable, and contingent. Therefore, Hitler opposes Jews because they most thoroughly incarnate nonreligious principles, and as such, their very existence opposes and threatens the foundations of true civilization, which can only be legitimate or secure when it is based on 'true Christianity.'

It would be a mistake, at this point, to assume that all Germans or that all Christians embody the virtues of 'true Christianity' and therefore true politics, for as Hitler argues, there are many 'Germans' and 'Christians' who have perverted the faith and therefore vitiated the political. Hitler makes this argument when he alludes to Christ taking 'the whip to drive from the temple of the Lord this adversary of all humanity.' He concludes by condemning then-contemporary Christians for debasing the faith through their support of and appeal to Jewish parties: 'Christ was nailed to the cross, while our present-day party Christians debase themselves to begging for Jewish votes at elections and later try to arrange political swindles with atheistic Jewish parties—and against their own nation' (1971: 307). Those 'Christians' who support 'atheistic Jewish parties' have allied themselves with anti-Christian beings, and as a consequence, they have corrupted more than just religious faith; they have vitiated the political order itself. It is for this reason that the political powers of the Weimar Republic failed to invigorate the German nation. Note Hitler's logic as he denounces the post-Great War political agenda:

[W]here, I would ask, was Christianity for them in these fourteen years when they went arm in arm with atheism? No, never and at no time was greater internal damage done to Christianity than in these fourteen years when a party, theoretically Christian, sat with those who denied God in one and the same Government. (1941: 148-149; February 15, 1933)

By aligning themselves with atheistic parties, Weimar Republic German leaders, who are only 'theoretically Christian,' have corrupted the faith, which is why the political order ultimately failed. Hitler, by contrast, argues that he and the Nazi Party will institute a different kind of politics, one based on the true faith: 'I do not merely *talk* of Christianity, no, I also profess that I will never ally myself with the parties which destroy Christianity' (1941: 148; February 15, 1933). For Hitler, theoretical Christians have forfeited their right to call themselves true Christians or true Germans, which is why they are false servants, and having debased Christianity and thereby themselves, they have implicitly set themselves 'against their own nation.'

To illustrate the dangers of allowing non-Christian people to play a role in the construction of the polis, Hitler offers the Jews as evidence. It is important to keep in mind that Hitler does not consider Jews religious. As he claims, 'their [the Jews'] whole existence is based on one single great lie, to wit, that they are a religious community' (1971: 232). When it comes to the formation of the polis, the Jews' lack of religion has staggering consequences. Were they to play a role in the construction of the body politic, the political order would most certainly crumble. Such is the reason why

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Jews have never been able to construct a culture of their own:

Since the Jew—for reasons which will at once become apparent—was never in possession of a culture of his own, the foundations of his intellectual work were always provided by others. His intellect at all times developed through the cultural world surrounding him.

The reverse process never took place. (1971: 301)

As an intellectually inferior race that cannot be the originators or discoverers of religious Knowledge, the Jews can comprehend and assimilate the ideas of others, but they have never been able to discover or produce a Knowledge of their own. Consequently, they have never been able to produce an enduring and legitimate culture, which can only come into being were it based on true Knowledge. This is the case, because dogmatic Knowledge, which is religious by nature, is the necessary foundation for constructing a legitimate and enduring culture and polis, and since the Jews, according to Hitler, are not and cannot be religious, they have never constructed an enduring and legitimate culture ('The reverse process never took place').<sup>45</sup> In short, Jews are necessarily a diasporic people because they do not possess the requisite religious sensibility to build a God-based (and therefore legitimate and enduring) body politic.

Understanding the primacy of religion in Hitler's conception of the legitimate political order poses a substantive challenge to those scholars who claim that Hitler merely exploited religion for political reasons. For instance, a scholar such as Bernauer, I argue, mischaracterizes Hitler's totalitarian agenda by focusing on 'fascism's discourse of political religiosity' (2004: 81). Suggesting that fascism's religiosity is primarily political ('political religiosity') fails to take into account the vital and primary role religion played in the formation of the political. If the objective is, as Foucault claims, to understand the conditions of knowledge that gave birth to the fascist relation within individuals and with others, then to analyze and interpret Hitler's political agenda in terms of a 'political religiosity' would be a misrepresentation of the order of knowledge in which the fascist sensibility and mentality came into being. For Hitler, the very phrase 'political religiosity' would disqualify religiosity as religious and would render the political illegitimate. In other words, if we want to understand the fascist relation as Hitler conceives it, then we must start by understanding his conception of a religious-based or faith-based politics rather than a 'political religiosity.'

For Foucault, Christianity has cultivated this idea that religious Knowledge precedes and supersedes political 'knowledge' and has thus set the stage

for fascism. The basis for this fascist technology of self first came into being 'starting in the sixteenth century,' which is, as Foucault argues, not 'the beginning of de-Christianization, but rather, as a number of historians have shown, [...] a phase of in-depth Christianization.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, Foucault specifically claims that 'modern states begin to take shape while Christian structures tighten their grip on individual existence' (2003: 177). What made Foucault reject the traditional secularization hypothesis and thus conclude that Christianity had become a more instead of a less dominant force of political control in the West was his conviction that Christianity evolved sophisticated methods for structuring and thereby taking possession of a person's inner life. To illustrate Christianity's newly developed approach to controlling everyday citizens, Foucault focuses on the shift from the fifteenth and sixteenth century obsession with witchcraft to the seventeenth and eighteenth century obsession with possession. This shift reflects a radical internalization of Christianity, for while witchcraft was defined in terms of a person's conscious, rational choice to reject God and to accept the devil, which means that the perpetrator could be legally punished, possession is an internal affair that is beyond a person's control, which means that the victim could not be held legally accountable: 'In possession, however, rather than a pact sealed by an action, there is an invasion; the devil's insidious and invincible penetration of the body' (2003: 208). From this point on, Christianity evolves a subtle and insidious 'technique for the government of souls' (2003: 177), which entails 'a slow penetration of the body' (2003: 209), resulting not in a body transported into the realm of the transcendent, but rather 'a body penetrated in depth' (2003: 211).

Given the logic of Foucault's work, it is Christianity's insidious technique of penetrating bodies that makes way for the 'fascism in us all' of the twentieth century, 'the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us' (1983: xiii). We are now ready to clarify precisely how Hitler's religious conception of the political entails the 'fascism in us all.' Prior to the Protestant Reformation, truth obligations were imposed on Christian subjects by the culture's religious institutions of power, but during the Reformation and Enlightenment, there was a palpable shift of epistemic authority from the unified Church to the individual conscience. It was at this point that everyday Christian subjects were starting to be interpolated ('in-depth Christianization'), at the level of desire, with a model of knowledge that subordinates political 'reality' to religious Reality. By the nineteenth century, in-depth Christianization had been linked with the nation-state, thus giving birth to, not the secular

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imagined nation-state, as Benedict Anderson would have us believe in his book *Imagined Communities*, but the sacred imagined nation-state. What distinguishes the sacred imagined nation-state from the sacral monarchy is the locus of authority. The African American writer, Richard Wright, published in 1953 a novel (*The Outsider*) that brilliantly pictures the way in-depth Christianization functions within the mind of everyday citizens within the twentieth-century body politic. Like many prominent twentieth-century intellectuals, the main character, Cross Damon, subscribes to the view that 'Modern consciousness is Godlessness.' Ironically, modern Godlessness has not led to the death of religion, but to its mass proliferation. As Cross says to the Marxist intellectual, Mr. Blimin:

since religion is dead, religion is everywhere . . . Religion was once an affair of the church; it is now in the streets in each man's heart. Once there were priests; now every man's a priest. Religion's a compulsion, and a compulsion seems to spring from something total in us, catching up in its mighty grip all the other forces of life—sex, intellect, will, physical strength, and carrying them forward.<sup>45</sup>

Wright would certainly acknowledge that Western intellectuals have become secularized, but he would qualify this claim by arguing that everyday citizens have become even more compulsively and fanatically religious, which has led to a more religious body politic. But what is distinctive about the role of religion in the twentieth century is that citizens do not have to be told what to do or how to believe; through an in-depth Christianization that has been linked with the nation-state, citizens naturally and willingly subordinate their secular selves to the religious dictates of the nation-state, even when doing so ultimately destroys them.

The development of in-depth Christianization in relation to the nationstate was two-fold. First, there was a positing of a Divine Ideal, whether that would be a transcendent Law or a Godly mandate. This Ideal was, in the best of all possible worlds, the basis and foundation for the political. Indeed, it was used to determine which nation-states were legitimate, so a writer such as Rudyard Kipling could justify the colonization of inferior nations because they were composed of 'lesser breeds without the Law.' Second, citizens of the nation-state would be right with God and the State only insofar as they had subordinated their ephemeral, secular, and personal desires to the Eternal Law of the Divine. This is what Foucault means when he claims that Christianity presupposes 'a certain renunciation of the self' so that a person can 'gain access to another level of reality.' When citizens of Hitler's Germany renounce their own desires and submit to the Nazi Party, they may know that they are losing themselves, but they also believe that they are gaining the Divine, which is the basis and foundation for Hitler's Christian nation. Once this order of knowledge has been established, there is no need to coerce individuals into behaving as subjects of the Nazis' Christian nation; rather, the citizens, having undergone the experience of 'in-depth Christianization,' would intuitively know how to identify anti-Christian adversaries, who reject God and His Truths out of willful ignorance or a moral failing. Therefore, Hitler's Christian subjects would not have to be commanded to demonize, denounce, or dehumanize non-Christian or anti-Christian subjects; his subjects would engage in such marginalizing practices as a matter of logical course, and doing so would be a marker of their faith in first God and then Nation.

According to Foucault, both the Christian Truths and the religious technology of self that Hitler and the Nazis deploy are arbitrarily constructed systems that enable fascism to come into being as well as to flourish. Hitler's Christian mandates are not neutral and objective representations of a neutral and objective God. They are human-constructed concepts calculated to secure and consolidate the ruling Party's power, so when everyday citizens submit to the dictates of fascists, they do so because they 'love power.' The citizens, like Hitler, may not be aware that power is the governing principle of their behavior, but for Foucault, their ignorance is precisely what makes the oppressive political systems so effective, dangerous, and destructive.

While Foucault considers the specific religious Truths that lay the foundation for the fascist nation-state to be dangerous and destructive, what concerns him most is the Christian technology of self that has enabled the fascist political regime to come into existence and to flourish. By positing an hierarchical model of knowledge and by subordinating the ephemeral to the Eternal, Christianity has set into motion a political system that makes citizens 'desire the very thing that dominates and exploits' them. Put more concretely, since citizens' secular desires are configured as untrustworthy, irrelevant, and, at times, unpatriotic, they must renounce them in the name of a higher divine Reality, which the sacred imagined nation incarnates. As soon as citizens what it will, and the citizens will consider their sufferings, losses, and even death an Ultimate Gain, because they have, in giving their lives for their nation, ultimately given their lives to God and His Eternal Truths.

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#### Conclusion

Let me be absolutely clear about my objectives in this essay. I am not trying to say that Hitler was a Christian. What Hitler personally and privately believed, I cannot say. But it is indisputable that he consistently referred to himself and the Nazi Party as Christian, and if we use Foucault's method of examining the conditions that gave birth to a particular form of knowledge/power that inhabited the minds and bodies of everyday citizens of Nazi Germany, we would have to conclude that a distinctly Christian technology of self was central. Indeed, Foucault specifically claims in his 'Society Must be Defended' Lectures that the 'old religious-type anti-Semitism' played a crucial role in the formation of 'the nineteenth century' nation-state.<sup>46</sup> This nineteenth-century religious anti-Semitism set the stage for Hitler's political project in Nazi Germany, for as Carroll notes in his massive study of Christian anti-Semitism, polls indicate that 95 percent of German citizens considered themselves church-affiliated Christians in 1940 (2001: 28). Therefore, Hitler's speeches and writings are important documents not so much for understanding Hitler's inner life or his Christian faith, but for comprehending the technology of self that enabled fascism to flourish in the hearts and minds of many everyday citizens of Nazi Germany. Moreover, if we use Foucault's model of in-depth Christianization, we would have to conclude not that Hitler exploited religion, and specifically Christianity, to achieve his political objectives. Rather, we would have to conclude that Christianity produced the technology of self that made Hitler, the Nazis, and fascism a living nightmare from which we are still trying to awake.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the University of Minnesota for the financial support that made some of the research for this project possible. I would also like to thank James Bernauer for helping me to clarify some of my ideas.
- <sup>2</sup> Carrette, Jeremy (2004), 'Beyond Theology and Sexuality: Foucault, the Self and the Que(e)rying of Monotheistic Truth,' *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics* of Religious Experience. Aldershot: Ashgate, 227.
- <sup>3</sup> Chow, Rey (2005), 'The Fascist Longings in Our Minds,' Linked Histories: Postcolonial Studies in a Global World, Wendy Faith and Pamela McCallum, eds. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 24.
- <sup>4</sup> Bernauer, James (2004), 'Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life,' Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience. Aldershot: Ashgate, 81.

- <sup>5</sup> See 'Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault,' *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984: Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth,* Paul Rabinow, ed. New York: The New Press, 111–119.
- <sup>6</sup> Foucault, Michel (1983), 'Preface,' in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1983), Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, xiii.
- <sup>7</sup> Pecora, Vincent (2006), Secularization and Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation, and Modernity. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 28.
- <sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (1980), *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 130.
- <sup>9</sup> See James Thrower (2000), Western Atheism: A Short History. Amherst: Prometheus Books; David Berman (1990), A History of Atheism in Britain: From Hobbes to Russell. London and New York: Routledge; Michael J. Buckley, S. J. (1987), At The Origins of Modern Atheism. New Haven and London: Yale University Press; and Thedore Ziolkowski (2007), Modes of Faith: Secular Surrogates for Lost Religious Belief. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- <sup>10</sup> See Erich Fromm (1941), Escape from Freedom. New York and Toronto: Farrar and Rhinehart, Richard Wright (1995), White Man, Listen! San Francisco: Harper-Perennial, and Steve Bruce (2002), God is Dead: Secularization in the West. Oxford: Blackwell.
- <sup>11</sup> See Benedict Anderson (1991), Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London and New York: Verso.
- <sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (1989), On the Genealogy of Morals, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 35.
- <sup>13</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (1966), Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 131. In her excellent book, Nietzsche, God, and the Jews, (1994) Albany: SUNY Press, Weaver Santaniello argues that Nietzsche shifted his focus to politics in 1887 (128), but I focus on 1886, which is when Nietzsche published Beyond Good and Evil. For other studies of Nietzsche's politics, see Tracy B. Strong's Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transfiguration (1975) Berkeley: University of California Press and Daniel W. Conway's Nietzsche and the Political (1997) London and New York: Routledge.
- <sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (1989), Twilight of the Idols, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 48. For an extensive analysis of this sentence, see my essay, 'Killing God, Liberating the "Subject": Nietzsche and post-God Freedom,' Journal of the History of Ideas 60(4) October 1999, 737-754.
- <sup>15</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (1989), *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Random House, 168.
- <sup>16</sup> Arendt, Hannah (1976), The Origins of Totalitarianism. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace and Company, xi.
- <sup>17</sup> Twain, Mark (2000), 'Concerning the Jews,' *The Complete Essays of Mark Twain*, Charles Neider, ed. New York: De Capo Press, 243.
- <sup>18</sup> Twain, Mark (1963), 'Reflections on Religion,' Hudson Review 3: 338.
- <sup>19</sup> Twain, Mark (2000), 'To the Person Sitting in Darkness,' in The Complete Essays of Mark Twain, 295.
- <sup>20</sup> See N. Furbank, E. M. Forster: A Life. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 49–80.

- <sup>21</sup> Forster, E. M. (2000), A Room with a View. New York: Penguin Books, 183.
- <sup>22</sup> Forster, E. M. (1993), Maurice. New York and London: W.W. Norton, 13-15, 237.
  <sup>23</sup> Forster refers to the 'God State' in a letter dated April 13, 1918. The letter is unpublished and housed at the King's College Library at Cambridge. I would like to thank The Society of Authors as agent for the Provost and Scholars of King's College Cambridge for giving me permission to publish this material. For a superb analysis of Forster's critique of religion and the God-concept, see Donald Watt's essay, 'E.M. Forster's Quarrel with the God-State.' Philological Quarterly, Fall 1981, 60(4): 523-537.
- <sup>24</sup> Forster, E. M. (1984), A Passage to India. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 166, 228.
- <sup>25</sup> Forster, E. M. (1977), 'What I Believe,' *Two Cheers for Democracy.* San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 67.
- <sup>26</sup> Foucault, Michel (1977), 'The Father's "No," 'Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 86.
- <sup>27</sup> See Michel Foucault (1994), The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. New York: Vintage Books, 344-387.
- <sup>28</sup> For an excellent analysis of Enlightenment rationalists' reliance upon a theological conception of knowledge and their inability to 'de-divinize' language and the world, see Richard Rorty (1989), *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3–69.
- <sup>29</sup> Sartre, Jean-Paul (1999), 'The Humanism of Existentialism,' Jean-Paul Sartre: Essays in Existentialism. Secaucus: Carol Publishing Group, 36.
- <sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (1990), Gay Science, trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin, 281, 283.
- <sup>31</sup> Foucault, Michel (1997), 'Technologies of the Self,' *The Essential Works of Foucault* 1954–1984: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, Paul Rabinow, ed. New York: The New Press, 242.
- <sup>52</sup> Foucault, Michel (1997), 'Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview,' *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth,* Paul Rainbow, ed. New York: The New Press, 112.
- <sup>53</sup> Foucault, Michel, 'The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom,' in The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth, 283.
- <sup>54</sup> Foucault specifically claims that he is interested not so much in what the human is (this is an incoherent idea according to Foucault) but in 'the instituted models of self-knowledge and their history.' In other words, Foucault's project is predicated on this question: 'how was the subject established, at different moments and in different institutional contexts, as a possible, desirable, or even indispensable object of knowledge?' Foucault, 'Subjectivity and Truth,' in *The Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, 87.
- <sup>35</sup> Foucault, 'Technologies of the Self,' 238.
- <sup>56</sup> Goebbels, Joseph (1987), Michael: A Novel, trans. Joachim Neugroschel. New York: Amok Press, 120.
- <sup>37</sup> Hitler, Adolf (1941), My New Order, Raoul de Roussy de Sales, ed. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 144; February 1, 1933.

- <sup>58</sup> Hitler, Adolf (1942), The Speeches of Adolf Hitler: April 1922-August 1939, trans. and ed., Norman H. Baynes. London, New York, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 385; August 17, 1934.
- <sup>39</sup> Hitler, Adolf (1939), Speech Delivered by Adolf Hitler Before the German Reichstag on January 30, 1939. Washington, D.C.: Gift of German Consulate General, 1939, 51.
- <sup>40</sup> Hitler, Adolf (1945), 'Text of Hitler's Twelfth Annual Speech to Reich,' New York Times, January 31, 1945, 4.
- <sup>41</sup> Hitler, Adolf (1971), *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 459.
- <sup>42</sup> As James Carroll observes, Hitler never left the Catholic Church and the Catholic Church never excommunicated him (2001, 28).
- <sup>45</sup> For a more extensive analysis of Hitler's Christian justification of violence against the Jews, see Michael Lackey, 'Poetry as Overt Critique of Theology: A Reading of Paul Celan's "Es war Erde in ihnen," 'Monatshefte: für deutschsprachige Literatur und Kultur, 94(4) Winter 2002, 427-440.
- <sup>44</sup> Foucault, Michel (2003), Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France: 1974–1975. New York: Picador, 177.
- <sup>45</sup> Wright, Richard (1993), The Outsider. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 274.
- <sup>46</sup> Foucault, Michel (2003), Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975–1976, trans. David Macey. New York: Picador, 88–89.

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