

Digest of Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (1976, pp. 1–64)

“Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence. Supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting.” ~ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, III

I. Context

- Race Wars (16th & 17th centuries)
 - o Political struggles between people become struggles between *races*
 - o From a universalist “decentering of truth” (Hobbes) to a basis for truth in “local interests”
- Biopower (18th century)
 - o Discourse of race wars is masked by a return to universalism and a discourse of perpetual peace
 - o Managing the population takes precedence over correcting individuals
- Modern Racism (19th century)
 - o Racism against the “abnormal” manifests as the will to cleanse a race of defective instantiations
 - o Modern racism becomes “primarily a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power’s control: the break between what must live and what must die” (254)

II. “Philosophico-juridical” Discourse

The conflictual relationship between the two groups that constitute the social body and shape the State is “one of war, of permanent warfare. [...] The State is nothing more than the way that the war between the two groups in question continues to be waged in apparently peaceful forms” (88).

- *What is this war that exists before the State? And what effects does war have on the State’s constitution?*
 - o Equality in the SON
 - If there were substantial differences (1) the strong would attack and easily overcome the weak or (2) the weak would recognize their weakness and submit to the strong
- Relationship of force in the SON
 - o “Calculated presentations” - “emphatic and pronounced expressions of will” - “mutually intimidatory tactics”
 - ***The SON is not brutish; no fists or weapons; no blood or corpses*** (92)

Question 1: Is Foucault’s interpretation of the SON sound? If there really were “no corpses,” would this “cold war” suffice to motivate a covenant?

- Sovereignty by institution
- Sovereignty by acquisition
 - o Victors kill losers → sovereignty dissolves
 - o Victors spare losers
 - (1) Losers can rebel to overthrow the new relation of force or (2) losers agree to submit and obey
- The preference of life over death founds a legitimate juridical regime of absolute power
 - o ***What suffices for sovereignty is a “radical will to live,” even though we cannot continue living unless the other is willing to let us live*** (96)
 - o Hobbes wants to eliminate the historical reality of war by gauging history, unjust government, and violence through the standard of the ideal principle of reason (97; 269)

III. Historical Discourse / Political Historicism

- What adversary is Hobbes' discourse opposing?
 - o Leviathan's "strategic opposite" is a way of making historical knowledge work within the political struggle (98)
 - The problem of the Norman Conquest of 1066
- Discourses in the civil struggles that were corroding the English State
 - o Voice 1: We're winners, you're losers. We're foreigners, but you're our servants.
 - o Voice 2: We were conquered, but will not remain so. This is our land. You'll leave.
- William's Norman Conquest manifested itself in (at least) three ways:
 - o Rituals of power until the 16th century
 - o Law and "linguistic sufferings" (100)
 - o Conflict between two heterogenous mythological sets:
 - Saxon stories, saintly kings, popular tales (e.g., Robin Hood)
 - Non-Saxon aristocratic legends (e.g., King Arthur); "reactivated" in the 1500s
- Racial themes underpinned both royal absolutists and parliamentarians in the 16th century

Question 2: Did "race wars" really not exist until the 16th century? Hasn't conflict almost always been understood as a struggle between groups whose identity stems from customs and geography? What exactly does Foucault mean by "racism"?

- Levellers (e.g., John Warr)
 - o Laws are tools of power that promote vested interests ("state of nonright")
 - (Post-Norman) laws were made by conquerors and must be eliminated
 - o Property relations are invalidated by the Conquest
- Diggers
 - o Laws and property statutes are a continuation of war
 - o Rebellions show that the people have never stopped denouncing property as pillage, laws as exactions, and governments as domination
 - Rebellion responds to a war the government never stops waging. Government means their war against us. Rebellion is our war against them (108)
- ***Power must be analyzed not in terms of natural right, but in terms of the "unending movement of the shifting relations that make some dominant over others"*** (109)
 - o Articulation of socio-political divisions in terms of national phenomena (i.e., language, ancestral customs, mythological past, archaic law and right)
 - o Rebellion as absolute right and historical necessity
- Political Historicism: war and power relations = domination
- Hobbes: power differentials are irrelevant (i.e., every power relation produces legitimate sovereignty)

Question 3: Is Foucault's concern with "discourses" the same as Skinner's emphasis on context, or are there fundamental differences between studying contemporaneous texts and tracing a genealogy of narratives?