

The Power of 'Gaze': Reflecting on the Visual Elements Implicit in Biopolitical Theory

Wang Zihao

School of National Governance, Southwest University, Chongqing, China

Email: 1819550932@qq.com

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Abstract² Visualism is a typical 'sensory' manifestation of Western philosophy, especially traditional metaphysics, in the epistemological dimension. Biopolitics, as a governance regulatory technology in modern Western countries, is closely related to visualism. When examining biopolitics based on visualism, we can find that under the influence of the tradition of visualism, biopolitics 'opens' and 'restores' individual and group life, achieving the construction and reconstruction of governance objects with the purpose of power governance. Through the analysis of Foucault's works, it can be seen that biopolitics has not only been a historical phenomenon for a long time, but also has not fundamentally transcended traditional metaphysics. The way biopolitics treats life is not a simple 'governance technique'. Rather, it implies trampling and contempt for life. The factors of visualism in biopolitics are revealed everywhere in the specific historical process, and may become a new path and direction for reflection on biopolitics.

Keywords² biopolitics, visualism, open vision-reduction, the technique of government

I. INTRODUCTION

Is there the possibility of micronarratives in political philosophy? It is generally believed that Western political philosophy has ushered in a new renaissance since the publication of Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* in 1971, and has occupied an increasingly important position in modern and contemporary philosophical research. However, the foundation of Western political science research norms, structures and categories can be traced back to Aristotle's empirical method research. The transformation of Western political science since the 20th century reminds us that political philosophy may have also undergone changes in theoretical models from macro-theoretical construction to micro-theoretical analysis, and in methodology from abstract speculative argumentation to concrete empirical analysis. The fundamental driving force behind this change comes from the higher demands placed on theoretical explanations by the complexity of our era.

Foucault confesses there is a traditional problem, I think, in political philosophy, which one might sum up this way: how can discourses of truth, or simply philosophy as, in particular, discourses of truth, be able to determine the legal limits of power?[1]. After Foucault's long-term efforts, a new power analysis framework of biopolitics (Biopolitics/Biopolitique) was born. Biopolitics is the theoretical frontier and latest achievement in the microscopic research field of contemporary Western political philosophy, and it belongs to the leading ideological research in French philosophy. This field originated from Foucault's post-structuralist social critical theory. Foucault first proposed the potential and invisibility of modern biopolitics as a Western liberal social governance technology in the book *Society Must*

Be Defended, which was later published in the French Course Lecture Series in 1976. It is generally believed that the development of modern biopolitics has gone through the development process of Foucault, Agamben, Esposito, Negri and Hardt, and its research has a distinctive social critique and power critique of Western political philosophy. Foucault's 'discipline-punishment society', Agamben's 'homo sacer' ± the 'bare life' model and Esposito's 'immune politics' all contain the typical theoretical presumption that power is inherently evil in classical political science. The above developments initiated and initially formed the critical tradition of biopolitics research.

How to understand contemporary biopolitics is related to whether the final conclusion of theoretical analysis is correct or not. In this sense, changing the theoretical perspective of observing problems is an extremely important methodological innovation. Since the modern Enlightenment, Western political thought has been based on the abstract assumption that human nature is inherently evil and distrustful of rulers who hold political power. Foucault and others inherited this tradition, that is, the critical dimension of power, which is in line with the great tradition of Western political philosophy. But it needs to be acknowledged that the critique of power can have multiple dimensions. Foucault's 'genealogy' is only an idea of theoretical construction, and it does not represent all theoretical answers to understanding biopolitical issues. This article uses the traditional metaphysical perspective of 'visualism' to analyze biopolitics. It mainly relies on Foucault's relevant works to analyze the factors of visualism implicit in his related works, and further digs into the inherent rationality of biopolitical theory in the metaphysical context and the long-term rationality of metaphysics in the context of modern political philosophy.

II. THE POSSIBILITY OF BIOPOLITICAL UNDERSTANDING UNDER VISUALISM

The development theory of Plato and Hegelianism in traditional metaphysics is an essentialist and rationalistic vertical transcendence of abstract logic from perceptual finitude to rational infinity. In the sense of logical transparency and understandability, a system is 'reasonable' and can be 'known' and 'viewed'. The traditional metaphysics represented by Plato and Hegelianism forms the contemplation and understanding of the dichotomy of subject and object, which is a process of continuous abstraction and construction of objects by reason. At the same time, it is also about constantly questioning 'what is' and achieving a 'rational' understanding of the world at the intellectual level. This understanding has a strong color of modern natural science.

Since the Enlightenment, reason has been understood as the light of nature. Enlightenment means illumination and uses reason as the only criterion for judging right and wrong. Max Weber believed that the modernization path of Western civilization since the Renaissance was the process of disenchantment and secularization, and the path it took was rationalism. This path is illuminated by the light of reason.

But how can we say that a rational object that is completely different from perceptual reality is in a certain sense constituted by reason in the same way as perceptual things? Here, rationality is an advanced cognitive ability in terms of its application. The metaphor of what the eyes see illustrates the relationship between truth (wisdom) and what the eyes see, which hints at the unique love of vision at the origin of Western culture.

Let us take Plato's philosophy as an example. As early as the classical period, Plato had clearly recognized the 'antimony' between human perceptual cognitive abilities and rational cognitive abilities. Therefore, Plato advocated promoting the 'turn' of the rational subject, so that the mind's 'gazing' on reality can rise in the dialectical movement of rational sublation of sensory limitations, and achieve the 'knowledge' of pure knowledge - 'Idea'. Idea comes from the Greek word 'eidos', implying that the highest knowledge (being as being) is nothing more than something within vision and thinking. This tacitly acknowledges the intrinsic connection between vision and truth at the beginning of metaphysics: truth is the cognitive object of the 'eye of reason' and is therefore knowable. To the extent that it is knowable, the truth must be seen in one way or another. In addition, Plato's 'sun' metaphor also attempts to use light as a medium to bridge the senses and things. The sun is the source of light, which is the idea of 'goodness'. Under the 'illumination' of the highest ideal, all things are endowed with the essential definition of 'genus', and the essence is simultaneously set apart 'that is higher than perceptual individuality, so it is distinguished from 'opinion'. Plato's 'metaphor of the cave' most vividly expresses the division of two worlds. The world of truth is just like the world outside the cave. The prisoners who escaped from the cave can only correctly understand the world of things are when they see the real things with their own eyes. This classification of all individualities into the logic of universality means the birth of metaphysics, and also lays the hidden danger for rationality to eliminate individuality and then lead to the degradation of intelligence.

The main purpose of analyzing biopolitics from the perspective of visualism is not to define an additional theoretical origin for biopolitics, but to see in what specific operational processes biopolitics embodies 'vision', which integrates sensibility and rationality and is highly concentrated in traditional metaphysics. Factors can even provide a more reasonable explanation for a series of phenomena caused by biopolitics. We assume that the above reasonable, and start our analysis of biopolitics with the nature and structure of the so-called 'visual'.

In class on March 17, 1976, after a whole semester of theoretical preparation, Foucault finally proposed the emergence of biopolitics (biopolitique) after the 'anatomie politique' in the 18th century. Foucault defined it as a 'rationalization of life', 'the right to live and to die' [1]. In the following years of teaching, Foucault's views gradually matured. For example, he mentioned that the 'birth of biopolitics' is 'from the 18th century onwards, people tried in some way to make those various problems raised by the practice of governance are rationalized by the unique phenomena of health, sanitation, birth rate, life span, race, etc., which are the totality of living people in the population' [2]. The reason why Foucault's theory deserves attention is that Foucault used an erudite historicism method to sort out

historical materials from the transformation process of modern Western society, and empirically pointed out that biopolitics gradually played a role in modern society. Prominence in governance methods. Foucault very concretely made biopolitics a fact with historical content, thus sublating the abstract form of pure metaphysics and subverting the general understanding of the objects of power in traditional political philosophy. To put it simply, Foucault's method is to define knowledge with 'genealogy' and 'archaeology' and construct a metaphysical narrative. The classical philosophical model is transformed into a sorting out of events in the historical process. Agamben points out, 'One of the most enduring features of Foucault's work is his decisive abandonment of the traditional approach to the study of power based on juridical institutional models (definitions of sovereignty, theories of the state). approach, instead supporting an unbiased analysis of the following question: how does power specifically penetrate the bodies of subjects and various forms of life?' [3]. This perfectly illustrates the purpose of Foucault's biopolitical theory. Simply put, biopolitics is a technology that directly governs people. The focus on biopolitics is not simply to divide power, but to point out the boundaries, scope and influence of power to achieve an analysis of modernity in a specific context. According to Foucault, the underlying concept of biopolitics is the interrelationship of knowledge and power. The combination of the two has produced prisons, schools, hospitals, and other facilities at the level of concrete things, and has produced governance control science for living people at the level of abstract concepts, constructing life, body, and a series of dominated narratives such as population. The emergence of biopolitics is the result of a multi-factor, interconnected structural transformation. Foucault's work has a philosophical rather than a purely historical status.

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III. BIOPOLITICS AND RESTORATION OF OPEN VISION AND INDIVIDUAL LIFE

A. 'Open View': 'Opening' and 'Planarizing' Life Objects

In the third chapter of 'Discipline and Punish', Foucault first proposed the concept of 'panopticism'. The invention of the term was directly inspired by Bentham's prison design structures. The 'Panopticon' designed by Bentham was not only an innovation in architectural structure, but also marked the spatial redistribution of prison power. The cell leader standing on the central monitoring tower can record, observe, and evaluate everything that happens in each cell at all times without being discovered by the prisoners in the cell from any

angle; on the other hand, the position of the prisoners in the acquisition of knowledge has always been a process in cell. Since the outside perspective cannot determine which the interior of the individual is deeply penetrated and whether there are actually police officers inside the center, exposed to the spatial distribution of the absolute plane under surveillance tower, they can only survive subconsciously. The clarification of vision. We see that the prerequisite for the under the assumption of the possibility of being observed at disciplinary mechanism to function more deeply insight all times thus causing unlimited psychological pressure into all possibilities. Foucault analyzed. In order to exercise the prisoners' hearts. This then forms the prisoner's potential this power, it must be equipped with a permanent, insightful, psychological obedience, which is transformed and omnipresent means of surveillance... There are thousands unconsciously. In this way, the design of the prison enables of eyes distributed everywhere, and the flowing attention is power to operate in such a way in this structure. In this state, always alert, W K H U H L V D K X J H K L H U D U F K L F if the observer observes the observed, power is invisible at recorded here are behaviors, attitudes, possibilities, doubts times and everything is visible; The observer is observed by continuing description of an individual's behavior [4]. If the observer, and power is always visible and invisible to all we say that vision has an impact on other sense organs visible persons. Foucault summed it up: The perfect because it elevates the diversity of representations into a disciplinary institution should make everything clear. The comprehensive and unified consciousness and makes it an center point should be both the light source that illuminates subject of cognition. With the preexisting nature of obtaining everything and the convergence point of everything that perceptual materials, the preliminary synthesis of intuitive needs to be understood. It should be the eye that sees representations must be a flat spatialization process that everything and the center to which all eyes turn [4]. occurs at a distance from specific things. Open vision' and

In 'The Birth of Clinical Medicine' Foucault combed 'flattening' are two aspects of the same process. Any through the transformation of medicine from closed individual who enters the vision of power will inevitably be 'categorical medicine' to open 'empirical medicine' before 'flattened' and exposed to a gaze with a specific purpose. and after the French Revolution, and also demonstrated the flat space of rational production is not without depth. It way in which the bourgeois revolutionary government linked precisely forms a field where power and knowledge are the identity of doctors to social and political governance intertwined. The two work together on the living subject, Institutional changes imply the supremacy of visual 'opening up' everything it needs to know like a scalpel. That perceptual positivism as a new knowledge type. Hidden in is to say, for clinical experience to become an doctors' analysis and treatment of diseases is the reduction of Z D U H Q H V V « W K H S D W L H Q W P X V W E H diseases into a series of understandable perceptual events and homogeneous space [5].

phenomena. In the historical stage when anatomical medicine B. 'Reduction': The 'Visual Construction' of Individual surpasses classification medicine, disease events are not only Life by Power regarded as the dominance of causal laws or the manifestation process of symptoms, but as the mark and dense internal Visualism separates the individuality of the objects to be human body in an absolutely real spatial positions, studied from each other, which is the 'reduction' of the and this understanding has not appeared in any previous objects. The biopolitics under visualism is to restore life. period. Clinical medicine reached this conclusion in the For example, according to Foucault, if medicine wants to progress, it must continue to obtain more typical cases for the process of dissecting cadavers. It abandoned the 'teaching'. As a result, the patient's 'life' is reduced to classification of medical tables, clinical records, interviews 'death' and 'corpse', and becomes the object of observation and other things that were used to confirm the names of 'death' and 'corpse', and becomes the object of observation diseases. Instead, it relied more on what the eyes saw to enter for the empirical eyes to seek knowledge. This healthy part the truth of the facts: It turns out that the occurrence of the becomes redundant, and his disease part becomes his medical disease is fundamentally caused by the lesion, a visible significance. The whole essence. After the theory of cadaver change in spatial position, and the ultimate cause that anatomy was widely used in medical research, the role of determines all complications. In order to obtain absolutely patients' accompanying diseases was further seen and individualized knowledge, we sought to obtain a complete interconnected with death, a deeper life phenomenon. and objective view of his situation; we compiled everything. Doctors understand the human body directly from death. we knew about him into his dossier. 'Death exposes the black box of the human body to the light of day: dark life, clear death, these oldest imaginary values in

How to understand the 'panopticon' design and the same structure as the autopsy? In fact, the deepening direction of W K H : H V W H U Q Z R U O G D U H L Q W H U W Z L C the rational scientific-power trial is not only a penetrating broken ribs of life in the corpses. Doctors directly consider process of understanding the body from the outside in, but and even recreate disease symptoms based on their also a 'opening and dissecting' of things that are not present understanding of the structure of corpses valuing certain so that they appear present, exposed and controlled. process skills that can suddenly detect lesions has once again become under a rational gaze. Scientific rationality needs to find a scientifically based idea... Establishing these 'made or deterministic explanation, with the purpose of understanding, natural signs is to protect the entire network of anatomical transforming, appropriating, and correcting what it considers pathological localization markers on a living human body. Any to be wrong, incomprehensible and dangerous. The eyes of power demand absolute certainty, and the calm gaze implies point map depicting a future autopsy [5]. The preset premise of coldness and ruthlessness. Acquiring absolutely individual life directly through death. Death jumps from the individualized knowledge is the prerequisite for absolutely observing, understanding and then controlling the individual. tragic end of life to the beginning of understanding life. Death

is a direct manifestation of the moving essence of disease, more real presence than the phenomenon of life.

The 'reduction' of life objects is also reflected in the process of the construction of objects by ruling power, that power circulates through the individuals it constructs. In his lecture on 'Security, Territory and Population' from 1977 to 1978, Foucault compared the fundamental differences between the 'pastoral system' (pastorat) and the politics of Greek city-states, pointing out that the former directly separated rulers and civilians. The relationship is regarded as the relationship of 'shepherd-sheep'. The 'shepherd should lead the sheep to 'happiness', and the 'shepherd should make every sheep 'saved'. There is no doubt that 'pastoral power' contains the germ of biopolitics, because the power of the shepherd penetrates the collective nature of the 'flock' and points directly to the individual of each 'sheep'. The Bible records: 'If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what do you think? Would he leave the ninety-nine and go into the mountains to find the lost sheep?' [6]. However, Foucault pointed out that this kind of political relationship of 'pastoral power' is rare in the political concepts of ancient Greek city-states (on the contrary, its tendency is implicit in Plato's thought). 'Pastoral power', the essence is to reduce the people 'sheep' waiting for the guidance of the savior. 'The Greek gods never lead the people like a shepherd leading his sheep'. 'The Greek gods mainly manifest on the city walls to defend his city' [7]. Foucault believes that the 'pastoral power' directed at the 'flock' is a concept unique to Judeo-Christianity which brings stronger strength to Western culture. The Hebrew 'pastoral power' is a 'hidden line' that is completely different from the Greek democratic political tradition but runs parallel to it. Foucault concluded from this: 'The great formation and layout (economics) of Western power were formed in a process of 'judicial (pastoral) state' administrative (regulatory/disciplinary) State'. The governing (security) state'.

IV. THE DEEP ENTANGLEMENT BETWEEN VISUALISM AND BIOPOLITICS

From the above analysis, we can see that the relationship between biopolitics and visualism is complex. The two are mutually inclusive and have a deep logical interaction.

First, biopolitics has never been an exclusive theory of modern philosophy. Foucault examined the social structure of the 17th to 18th centuries through 'genealogy' and believed that at this stage the 'raison d'Etat' replaced the Christian God and Machiavelli's 'monarchy and transformed into a more abstract control of state power. understanding, thus opening up the field for the successive emergence of new governance technologies, namely 'disciplinary mechanisms' and 'security mechanisms'. If we agree with Foucault's recognition and understanding of 'pastoral power' above, we can immediately see that in the modern and postmodern times, biopolitics under the understanding of visualism, as a kind of micro-political power, has played a vital role in Western civilization. There are roots in the medium to long term.

Second, the visual elements contained in biopolitics indicate that it has not completely escaped the influence of traditional metaphysics. Visualism is a key quality of Western philosophy, which runs through and appears in the

consciousness of various philosophers from Plato to Hegel, either explicitly or implicitly. Biopolitics, as the theoretical frontier and latest achievement in the field of microscopic research in contemporary Western political philosophy, originated from Foucault's poststructuralist social critical theory and belongs to the study of 'living thought' in contemporary French philosophy. As far as the development of intellectual history is concerned, biopolitics is a postmodern theory and should have the nature of general subject deconstruction and anti-traditional theory. However, after the above analysis, it is found that visualism is still reasonable as a theoretical perspective for understanding biopolitics. This shows that although many historical facts borrowed by biopolitics 'scientists' play a very good role in 'archaeology' of knowledge and micro-critique of power. But it is not enough to completely draw a clear line between biopolitics and traditional metaphysics, especially the philosophy of subjectivity. Visualism is the remaining trace of biopolitics in metaphysical methods, indicating that the relationship between biopolitics and old philosophy still needs to be studied in depth.

Third, it is difficult for biopolitics under the visualist approach to maintain value neutrality. As pointed out above, biopolitics borrows visualism to 'open up' vision and restore the phenomenon of life, highly abstracting the original rich dimensions of individual life and constructing it into a knowledge-based object closely related to governance. Recognizing this process itself is a criticism of power, indicating that at least the process in which power directly points to individual lives by resorting to 'visual' methods is a manifestation of the evil nature of power. We see that whether it is the 'patient' as a 'corpse', the 'prisoner' as a 'flesh', the 'people' as a 'flock', or the 'sacred man' as a 'bare life', their reality must be recognized. It acquiesces to the absolute visual visibility and the positivity of objective objects. To put it bluntly, whenever similar narratives appear, it means 'not treating people as human beings' in this sense, although biopolitics as a 'government' can be a purely political means and therefore 'value neutral', biopolitics as a 'visualism' can never be good because it has already been predicted. The destruction, contempt and trampling of life is the 'Ring of Gygis' that we must clearly understand and not use wantonly. Nietzsche seemed to have guessed the occurrence of a distinction very early. He thought angrily: 'This is society, our tame, mediocre, castrated society. In such a society, a person who comes from the mountains or has experienced sea adventures. The natural man will inevitably degenerate into a criminal.'

V. CONCLUSION

The governance of physical life by contemporary biopolitical power is becoming more and more obvious. Together with freedom, democracy, justice and other macro-political philosophies, it has become an inescapable reality in contemporary society and has participated in supplementing the categories of traditional political philosophy. Visualism is the fundamental nature of Western metaphysics, it is natural that we can use it to observe biopolitics. This is a transformation of theoretical perspective, which enriches the existing power critique content of biopolitics with the help of the metaphysical tradition without falling into pure empirical

analysis. The relationship between the two still needs to be further studied and investigated.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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