

Death of the War Machine: The Warrior, the Soldier, and the Noble Lie

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Michel Foucault theorizes the concept of security as a mechanism for the deployment of discursive power to manage and control populations.¹ Beginning with this premise, many scholars have expanded on the relationship between security and biopolitics. For example, Giorgio Agamben details the use of emergency powers and states of exception to expand the discursive apparatus (*dispositif*).²

This paper will focus on how an understanding of material security interacts with Foucault's conception of disciplinary power, specifically as a precondition for its deployment under relevant circumstances. The contingencies of Foucault's thesis usually take the form of 'positive' factors – the historical development of those techniques and technologies necessary to employ disciplinary power.³ However, material security offers a 'negative' constraint, which prevents the use of disciplinary techniques within certain contexts. This particularity arises with the figure of the warrior/soldier, which Foucault uses to introduce the concept of productive discipline through the relationship between docility and utility.⁴ Not only does this reveal a novel contingency to the applicability of disciplinary power, the specificity of its relevance to the context of the warrior/soldier reveals just how shocking it is that we can still affirmatively respond to Foucault's question: "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?"⁵

Foucault identifies the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the transitional moment in which the warrior "who could be recognized from afar; [who] bore certain signs: the natural signs of his strength and his courage, the marks, too, of his pride," is replaced by the soldier that, "can be made; out of formless clay."⁶ The differentiation between warrior and soldier is not found in Foucault's *Discipline & Punish*, but is my own mechanism to distinguish between the two types of soldier: the warrior as a pre-disciplinary figure and the soldier as the disciplinary product. Using this terminology has the added benefit of drawing a connection to the conceptual similarities of the pre-disciplinary 'soldier' to the concept of the 'warrior,' also defined by its indiscipline, used in the works of Foucault's mentor, Georges Dumézil, and his contemporaries, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.

Like Deleuze and Guattari, I borrow from Dumézil the notion that the 'warrior' constituted a distinct class from that of the 'sovereign.'⁷ While the sovereign remained dependent upon the warrior for material security, the warrior was able to maintain their separation and, with it, their defining characteristic – indiscipline.⁸ However, as material security conditions changed and dependency declined, the warrior began to be subsumed by the sovereign.

¹ David Couzens Hoy, "The Temporality of Power," in *Foucault's Legacy*, ed. C. G. Prado (New York: Continuum, 2009), 12.

² Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1998), 166-7 & 174-6.

³ Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2013), 11, 106, & 233-4; Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 136-9 & 170.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 135-8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 351-4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 358.

The advent of nuclear weapons and the system of deterrence was the culmination of these shifting dynamics of material security. With a functional cap on the utility of material power, security became, at least for nuclear powers, a purely discursive operation. Threats now arise not from resource or territorial competitions, but from the potential violations of deterrence logic by a supposedly ‘irrational actor.’ Such threats require a new form of conventional military force; the technicians of discipline in the form of the modern soldier, who serves as both the police officer and guard over the *international prison system*.

1. *The Threat of (In)Discipline*

In *Discipline & Punish*, Foucault offers a novel theorization of the how discipline began to function in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a *productive* force. In general, he differentiates this productive discipline from other historical systems of domination – slavery, service, vassalage, and monastic.⁹ With specific regard to the soldier, this new discipline is not the same as the mere development of skills at arms or marching in formation, both of which existed with their warrior predecessors.¹⁰ Rather, it is the production of a specifically docile body in which the traditional relationship of forces becomes inverted.¹¹ What Foucault identifies is that, with this new disciplinary mechanism, increased utility leads to increased obedience and vice versa. As he states:

A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an ‘aptitude’, a ‘capacity’, which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.¹²

In the context of the warrior/soldier, the conventional benefits of discipline and training is to foster more capable military forces; to make them faster, stronger, more skilled and tactical, to make them more dangerous. However, this increased lethality posed a double-edged sword to whomever would dare to wield it. A more dangerous force may betray its charge and turn against those who would seek to use them. From massacres to mutinies, training increases the risk of engaging with the warrior.

However, as Foucault demonstrates, with the production of docile bodies, this threat actually decreases as the soldier’s effectiveness increases. As Foucault quotes from the military text, *Le Bon Militaire*, by Louis de Boussanelle, “the disciplinary soldier ‘begins to obey whatever he is ordered to do; his obedience is prompt and blind; an appearance of indocility, the least delay would be a crime.’”¹³ Criminality becomes a pivot point as, not only does docility decrease the threat posed by the undisciplined yet lethal warrior, but the properly disciplined soldier becomes both a model and

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 137.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 136-8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 138.

¹³ Louis de Boussanelle, *Le Bon Militaire* (Paris: La Combe, 1770), 2, quoted in Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 166.

means for the establishment and maintenance of civil order.¹⁴ Themselves a product of discipline, the soldier becomes a ‘technician of discipline’ to control and coerce civil society.¹⁵

It is important here to recognize to whom the undisciplined warrior would have posed a threat. In *Discipline & Punish*, Foucault offers us a potential insight when he discusses the Napoleonic régime and the formation of the state created by two parties – the ‘jurist’ and the ‘soldier.’¹⁶ This framework, Foucault will develop into his theory of the state, and later, governmentality where he borrows heavily from Georges Dumézil,¹⁷ but it begins here, with this allusion to Dumézil’s tripartite hypothesis and its interaction with discipline and docility. As Dumézil’s theorization of the separation of the sovereign and warrior categories arises from ancient mythologies, it should come as no surprise that the desire of the sovereign to constrain the warrior goes back just as far.

The Mênis of Achilles

“The subject of the *Iliad* is the anger of Achilles, not Achilles himself.”¹⁸ The first word of Homer’s epic is *mênis*, typically translated as ‘anger’ or ‘wrath.’¹⁹ Leonard Muellner’s, *The Anger of Achilles: Mênis in Greek Epic*, explores the thematic development of the concept through both the *Iliad* and Hesiod’s, *Theogony*, to offer a more complete understanding of the term’s historical context and intention.²⁰

The conventional framing of Achilles’ *mênis* as ‘wrath’ may be enough to demonstrate the threat posed by a warrior that lacks docility and finds the sovereign, in this case Agamemnon, to be the target of their fury. What Muellner’s reading offers is a sophisticated account of the social dynamics at play that would underly the role of *mênis* in Ancient Greek culture. *Mênis* offers a mechanism for maintaining order amongst the distinct social categories identified by Dumézil through fear of its invocation. This ancient deterrence operation reveals and utilizes the notion of warrior ‘indiscipline’ as a mechanism for social ordering.

Muellner borrows from Dumézil the tripartite hypothesis which argues that Indo-European cultures share a common mythological formulation of social structure.²¹ In fact, Dumézil himself, cites the *Iliad* as an example of the theory’s relevance.²² This formulation consists of three social functions: the sovereign, the warrior, and the fecundity classes.²³ While the three functions reflect common base needs, they are, according to Dumézil, uniquely conceptualized within this mythological tradition.²⁴ However, unlike many of his philological predecessors and contemporaries, Dumézil understands this ‘ideology’ to be contingent and not racially or otherwise fixed or determined.²⁵ In other words, this tripartite formation appears and disappears throughout history

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 168.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁷ Stuart Elden, “The Yoke of Law and the Lustre of Glory: Foucault and Dumézil on Sovereignty,” in *Handbook on Governmentality*, eds. William Walters & Martina Tazzioli (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 47.

¹⁸ Leonard Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Mênis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), 1.

¹⁹ Gregory Nagy, introduction to *The Anger of Achilles: Mênis in Greek Epic*, by Leonard Muellner (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), vii.

²⁰ Leonard Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Mênis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), 3-4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

²² Georges Dumézil, interview by Richard Kearney, “Myth, Ideology, Sovereignty,” *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham UP, 2004), 58-9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 53.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

²⁵ Bruce Lincoln, *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 231.

and in various cultures.²⁶ Additionally, Muellner borrows from Dumézil his demonstration that mythological elements and themes are transferred to, or ‘re-presented’ as, mortal characters in epic poetry.²⁷ However, Dumézil, himself, goes further to describe how these social structures will, at times, move not just from mythology to epic but to the actual organization of civil and political society.²⁸

The figures at the heart of the Homeric contest are representatives of their respective castes *par excellence*; Agamemnon is the quintessential sovereign, and Achilles epitomizes the warrior. What Dumézil’s formulation recognizes is that this relationship is not inherently hierarchical. In fact, part of the dispute between Achilles and Agamemnon is, once the harmony between these two was broken, the assertion of each as above the other as the ‘best Achaean.’²⁹ Engaging in this contest over hierarchical status reveals that their social function already determines their prior comparable positions.

The lack of an established hierarchical relationship does not imply a lack of social order or cohesion. In fact, it is quite the opposite, as an elaborate system of social obligation and method of exchange was established to prevent dissonance and chaos.³⁰ The war prize, Briseis, reflected the disparate value systems within each social category and the complexities of establishing a system of exchange between the two. As Muellner notes:

...*mênis* is incurred by violations of the value system based on group distribution and reciprocal exchange. Apollo’s is incurred by Agamemnon’s refusal to accept an exchange with the priest Chryses for a woman awarded to Agamemnon even though the same community that awarded the woman approves the exchange (I.22-23). Agamemnon’s is incurred by Achilles’ unwillingness to honor his superior authority (I.185-86), as established in the communal division of plunder (I.119-20, 166-67). Achilles’ is incurred by Agamemnon’s depriving him of the symbol of prestige provided him in the communal division (I. 391-92).³¹

Thus, *mênis* is a social function triggered by a violation of the social organization. Rather than an element of chaos, it is an order-maintaining social structure. Violations of customs risk triggering the *mênis* of one’s counterpart making the initial violating act a risky and undesirable proposition.³²

While serving a social ordering function, *mênis* is the antithesis of Foucault’s discipline. Establishing order via the risk of incurring a counterpart’s wrath is the opposite of docility. Under the *mênis* structure, the more powerful and useful Achilles becomes as a warrior, the greater his capacity to threaten the sovereign. Agamemnon recognizes this when he tries to demean Achilles’ power as merely violence and a divine gift of physical prowess – incidentally also demonstrating the ‘born’ rather than ‘created’ nature of the warrior.³³ In the contest over Briseis, both view their authority as being undermined; Agamemnon as the sovereign attacked by his social inferior, Achilles as a warrior denied his spoils under the system of distribution.³⁴ In this clash, they both attempt to assert their hierarchical status as the “best of the Achaeans” to nullify any taboo incurred by their

²⁶ Georges Dumézil, interview by Richard Kearney, “Myth, Ideology, Sovereignty,” *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham UP, 2004), 59-61.

²⁷ Leonard Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Mênis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), 95.

²⁸ Georges Dumézil, interview by Richard Kearney, “Myth, Ideology, Sovereignty,” *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham UP, 2004), 54-6 & 59.

²⁹ Leonard Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Mênis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), 29-30 & 107-8.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 34-5, 98-9, 133, & 138.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³² *Ibid.*, 35.

³³ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

insults as they would be directed towards an inferior.³⁵ The conflict culminates with Achilles' assertion of his absolute superiority when making his oath to withdraw from the war, as Muellner notes:

At the conclusion of this short but potent oath, rather than hand on the scepter to the next speaker, Achilles hurls it to the ground. The gesture marks both his social detachment from the group of Agamemnon's Achaeans and that group's detachment from the divine and deathless *thémistes* of Zeus that the scepter represents.³⁶

With Achilles' withdrawal, his oath holds true as the Achaean's suffer without their heroic warrior. The two social groups – the sovereign and the warrior – have a “zero relationship” which, with any further antagonism against Achilles, could turn negative, with both dynamics revealing the distinction and separation between the two groups.³⁷ The dependency of the sovereign on the warrior is highlighted by the collapse of the Achaeans at this time and then reinforced by Achilles' return following the death of Patroklos. When Agamemnon is persuaded to beseech Achilles' return, not only does this represent its own framing of their relative statuses, but Agamemnon attempts to ‘save face’ in his performance. Agamemnon asserts his superiority by offering, not gifts, but a potlach to demonstrate his own prestige.³⁸ However, even this attempt at dominance is evaded by Achilles:

The current cunning trick to which Achilles is referring is an attempt to persuade him to relinquish his *ménis* and adopt Agamemnon's point of view on their quarrel. For Achilles to do so would be to fall victim to a deceptive show of Agamemnon's ‘generosity’ and a false notion of solidarity that would subjugate him to Agamemnon and cost him his heroic prestige and identity.³⁹

The conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon and its resolution reflect the Dumézilian social structure which divides sovereign power and the warrior into distinct categories. Having their own domains, violations or transgressions against their relative structures incite a passionate response, *ménis*, that demonstrates the threat each side may pose against the other. In this way, *ménis*, despite being a tool to maintain a type of social order, functions as the literal opposite of discipline. The warrior's capacity for indiscipline, their ability to direct that aggression against other social categories, and the increase of that threat potential with the development of their military prowess, all reveals their distinction from Foucault's produced docile soldiers.

Discursive Power and the Noble Lie

Insofar as the Homeric social arrangement is viewed as problematic, it would of course demand a solution. It should, then, come as no surprise that an author who thinks of the ‘good’ metaphysically would come up with an alternative social order, namely, Plato. In fact, Plato explicitly identifies the conundrum, saying, “You mean that those who devote themselves exclusively to physical training turn out to be more savage than they should,” when discussing the auxiliary and guardian's training without a control of ‘spirit.’⁴⁰ Plato even rejects Achilles' anger towards

³⁵ Leonard Muellner, *The Anger of Achilles: Ménis in Greek Epic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996), 107-8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴⁰ Plato, “Republic III,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 410d.

Agamemnon as an example of a dangerous social lesson.⁴¹ In, the *Republic*, we see not an observation but an advocacy for the deployment of a type of discursive and disciplinary power used to produce docility, resembling that identified by Foucault. This disciplinary mechanism comes in the form of the ‘Noble Lie’ and its use to maintain the docility of the auxiliary (warrior) class and their subjection to the regime of the guardians (sovereign).

Dumézil, himself, draws the connection between his tripartite hypothesis and Plato’s ideal city.⁴² Naturally, in this alignment the philosopher-kings constitute the sovereign, the auxiliaries are the warrior class, and the appetitive producers serve the fecundity function. Our primary concern is with the sovereign and warrior classes where Plato offers a distinct developmental trajectory. Book II of the *Republic* introduces the Luxurious City with only two classes – the guardians as a hybrid ruling and military class and the myriad artisans.⁴³ Indeed, it is not until nearly the end of Book III that the auxiliary guardians are parsed out from those that will come to rule.⁴⁴ Until this point, they are raised and trained together with an orientation towards the advantage of the city and, notably, being “unwilling to do the opposite.”⁴⁵

This latter point is the crux of the matter, as Plato takes the physical and skill element of the guardians’ (ruler and warrior) training for granted, but emphasizes the need to control and direct their ‘spirit’ away from potentially harming the city.⁴⁶ The spirit, which is fundamental to their ability to serve as guardians (still undistinguished), must not be allowed to provoke animosity within their ranks.⁴⁷ We can take this not only as simple internal fights amongst peers or individuals, but as between the soon-to-be distinct sovereign and warrior classes. Plato, thus, calls for a spiritual ‘self-control’ that must be imparted upon the guardians from childhood.⁴⁸

Aside from the ascetic lifestyle devoid of temptation that Plato describes for the guardians, he focuses on their spiritual development through a particular type of philosophical and theological education.⁴⁹ It is only here that Plato begins to hint at the separation between the rulers and the auxiliary. Both groups must undergo a specialized education that only teaches them the good of the gods and reinforces their commitments to the city.⁵⁰ However, to engage in such a pedagogical practice necessarily not only censors corrupting influences but promotes known falsehoods oriented towards a positive effect.⁵¹ Only those most loyal to the city, those that are qualified to rule, can be

⁴¹ Plato, “Republic III,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 390e-391c.

⁴² Georges Dumézil, interview by Richard Kearney, “Myth, Ideology, Sovereignty,” *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with Contemporary Thinkers* (New York: Fordham UP, 2004), 59.

⁴³ Plato, “Republic II,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 373b-374c.

⁴⁴ Plato, “Republic III,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 414a-b.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 412d-e.

⁴⁶ Plato, “Republic II,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 375b-376c.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 378b-d.

⁴⁸ Plato, “Republic III,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 395b-d.

⁴⁹ Plato, “Republic II,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 376a-377e; Plato, “Republic III,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 410d-e.

⁵⁰ Plato, “Republic II,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 377a-380c.

⁵¹ Plato, “Republic III,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 386a-c.

in charge of these stories and know of their falsity.⁵² Thus, the rulers perpetuate the Noble Lie onto the rising guardians, some of whom will become ‘complete’ guardians and rule in turn. Meanwhile, others who ‘pass’ but fail to make the cut for the ruling elite or remain too young become the auxiliary and remain unaware of the false myth taught to them.⁵³

Thus, while the auxiliary and the philosopher-kings eventually become nominally distinct classes, Plato has fused their upbringing and training, their *production*, such that they lose the competing value sets present in the sovereign-warrior categories reflected in the *Iliad*. Indeed, the values of the auxiliary are those imparted upon them by the philosopher-kings. This removes the impetus and social function of *ménis* – the indiscipline of the warrior. Additionally, the self-disciplining, imparted upon the auxiliary warrior, not only produces docility, but does so through a similar internalization mechanism that Foucault describes of panopticism.⁵⁴ What Plato may have lacked in the architecture of the panoptic prison, he makes up for with the ‘supervision’ of the auxiliaries’ childhood, the telling of lies, and metaphysics.⁵⁵

However, like the Luxurious City which may devolve due to its vulnerability to excessive appetites, materiality limits the efficacy of Plato’s attempt at docility. The City’s rulers remain dependent upon the warrior for conquests to appease expanding appetites and for security. With this dependency of the sovereign, the warrior may still act as Achilles and refuse to fight, a Bartleby-esque ‘preferring not,’ that functions as a form of resistance with a devastating and macro-level effect.⁵⁶ In other words, material preconditions limit the ability of discipline to overcome the sovereign-warrior categorical distinction.

2. *Material Security & Discipline*

The “Docile Bodies” chapter of *Discipline & Punish* brings the discussion to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as the period in which the realization of a productive disciplinary mechanism for the creation of soldiers begins.⁵⁷ At this time, we see the application of the techniques and technologies of *discipline*, but we lack the discursive transformation of the category of the warrior into the soldier that is necessary for the removal of their *indiscipline*. Whether we understand this indiscipline as their capacity to remain a threat to the sovereign or as the maintenance of their separation from some synthesis that would form the ‘state’ and Foucault’s later notion of ‘governmentality,’ the warrior remains insufficiently disciplined to become truly ‘docile.’ Foucault will note the shifts in this direction with the Napoleonic régime and the historical desire by reference to Rome, but he does not offer either an account of its completion or the nature of the roadblock.⁵⁸ What he does acknowledge are the categories, the ‘jurists’ and the ‘soldiers,’ and the need for both individual and collective coercion.⁵⁹

The shift in circumstances that make the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the beginning of the long-desired transformation of social organization must, therefore, be both somewhat novel,

⁵² Plato, “Republic III,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 389b-c.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 413d-414e.

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 215-6.

⁵⁵ Plato, “Republic III,” in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 386a-c & 416c-d.

⁵⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. Michael Hardt (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 34-6.

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 135-6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

to allow for a unique historical change, but not yet total, preventing its fulfillment. Additionally, it is not simply the development of the methods for applying discipline as even panopticism is not enough for the discursive transformation. What is required is the rendering ineffective of the warrior's indiscipline – both as a threat to the sovereign and in their dependency for security. In other words, the sovereign must establish their own capacity to secure material resources and be free of external threats. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would see neither of these material dynamics fully realized, but important moves began with colonialism and industrialization that opened up the possibility to begin deploying disciplinary techniques.

Colonialism was, of course, an economic pursuit to acquire raw materials, access cheap labor, and create foreign markets dependent on trade with the colonial power. However, to think simply along the lines of profit motives, labor exploitation, and racialized politics, ignores one of the largest benefits colonization offered European nations – security. For millennia, access to resources and luxuries required, as Plato recognized, expansion into neighboring territory.⁶⁰ However, these conquests of acquisition made territorial wars existential risks for all parties involved. Not only did any taking of territory deprive resources to the domestic population, but the perceived or actual material vulnerability of the overstretched conqueror, risked inviting other competitors to attempt their own hand at conquest.

Colonialism displaced both factors. On the one hand, resource acquisition was no longer zero-sum between European powers as long as the rest of the globe was available to exploit. On the other hand, colonized powers posed no existential threat to European states. Even with increased costs for shipping, maintaining colonial armies, bribing local competitors, and so on, the combination of access to massive quantities of resources with little to no risk to the security of the homeland made the colonial project massively beneficial. By effectively exporting conflict, much of the risk of the warrior was also displaced. Armies on foreign continents posed little existential risk to the sovereign's power.

Industrialization only magnified these new material realities. The new manufacturing operations substantially increased the efficiency of production positively impacting the utility of both domestic and imported raw materials. This efficiency meant increased profits and created a drive to acquire more raw goods, but, as a matter of necessity, it decreased the security risk associated with any potential material losses. More importantly, this productive comparative advantage created the beginning of a truly globalized set of economic relations. Colonies would export raw materials to industrial European powers who would refine those goods and export them across foreign markets.⁶¹ On the one hand, this created a system of dependency within the colonies, often paired with exploitative trade restrictions, further decreasing the role of the warrior in securing access to materials and markets. On the other hand, it created a globalized network of economic interdependence. Of course, the colonial networks served the core of this formulation such that this was more of a multitude of networks rather than 'proper' globalization. However, even between European colonizers, and especially with those that had come late to the colonialism and industrialization projects, economic engagement had fostered interconnectedness.

Economic interdependence as a preventative measure against war is well studied with modern globalization, but we should not ignore these historical underpinnings.⁶² While wars of acquisition remained, mercantilism tended to displace disputes overseas. The sort of regular

⁶⁰ Plato, "Republic II," in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper. trans. Alexander Nehamas & Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997), 373d-374a.

⁶¹ Carlos Lopes, *The Self-Deception Trap: Exploring the Economic Dimensions of Charity Dependency Within Africa-Europe Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 59-60.

⁶² Dale Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2015), 1 & 3-4.

generational conflict of medieval nobles was replaced by less frequent, but more devastating, clashes. Control over trade routes emphasized naval warfare during this period, as did disputes over colonized territories.⁶³ However, both emphasized the source and often the primary site of the disputes as outside of Europe. These clashes tended to be larger and more global but also further away and not usually targeted towards conquering colonial homelands.

Thus, while warfare remained a fixture of European political reality, the existential question for the sovereign was on the decline. In fact, the main threat to the sovereign often came domestically with revolutionary pressures. An added irony of the times was that the mercantilist system would often incentivize foreign powers to aggress, not to usurp foreign sovereigns, but to restore them, as with the Bourbons in France and even as late as the Allies' interference in the Russian Revolution amidst World War I.⁶⁴

The existential wars, like the Napoleonic, were oriented more towards ideology than acquisition. It no less reminded the sovereigns of their existential anxieties, but it now offered alternative methods to prevent or limit conflict. The peace following the Napoleonic Wars and the Age of Metternich lasted to World War I, in large part, due to the decreased need for material-oriented conflict within the European continent. As such, the warrior could remain afar as long as the sovereign could use their political prowess as an alternative means of resolving conflict.

During this time, the warrior's newly shaky position leads to a surplus of changes. Professionalization and discipline are readily described by Foucault. But the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also include the Golden Age of Piracy – a quintessential form of warrior indiscipline.⁶⁵ The concept of the privateer reflects the categorical distinction between the sovereign and warrior, and the need or opportunity presented to the sovereign in gaining the services of this external 'war machine.'⁶⁶ The sovereign was also not alone in trying to both access or incorporate the warrior within their ranks. The wealth of colonialism was managed sometimes more by private firms than by the nominal emperor or empress with their imperial sovereignty. While sanctioned by the sovereign, the first multinational firms established private armies under the colors and symbols of their home nations and established and administered colonies in their names. Firms like the East India Company and the Hudson Bay Company could be understood as attempts by the productive fecundity class to lay claim to the newly vulnerable warrior – something that may be returning with the military privatization efforts of contemporary neoconservatism.⁶⁷

In any case, the decline of dependency on the warrior to guarantee necessities and to secure the homefront resulted in a relative weakening of their position. Foucault notes the attempt to discipline the warrior by the sovereign, and the establishment of private military firms in the colonies may demonstrate a similar attempt by the productive class. However, these material conditions that made possible the weakened position of the warrior were not complete, and the warrior would still maintain their separation for some time.

⁶³ Dale Copeland, *Economic Interdependence and War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2015), 10-1.

⁶⁴ Brian Vick, *The Congress of Vienna: Power and Politics After Napoleon* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2014), 240-1; Michael Jabara Carley, *Revolution & Intervention: The French Government and the Russian Civil War 1917-1919* (Kingston, CA: McGill-Queen's UP, 1983), xi-xii.

⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 360.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁶⁷ Edward Cavanagh, "A Company with Sovereignty and Subjects of Its Own? The Case of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1763," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 26, no. 1 (2011): 27-8; Allison Stanger, *One Nation Under Contract: The Outsourcing of American Power and the Future of Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2009), 84-90.

3. Discursive Power & the Bomb

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (D&G) introduce the warrior (or war machine) by explicitly borrowing from Dumézil's division between it and the sovereign.⁶⁸ Understanding the combination of the two facets of the sovereign (the 'magician-king' and the 'jurist-priest') as the 'State,' D&G claim that, "the war machine is of another species, another nature, another origin than the State apparatus."⁶⁹ D&G also provide clarity on the specialized usage of the term 'discipline,' not as the training and even regimented orderliness needed for effective combat, but as what is done to the war machine in its appropriation by the State.⁷⁰ In contrast, indiscipline is something inherently tied to the warrior, as D&G claim:

The war machine answers to other rules. We are not saying that they are better, of course, only that they animate a fundamental indiscipline of the warrior, a questioning of hierarchy, perpetual blackmail by abandonment or betrayal, and a very volatile sense of honor, all of which, once again, impedes the formation of the State.⁷¹

All of these elements constitute the threat posed by the warrior towards the sovereign and were demonstrated in the *Iliad* with the *mênis* of Achilles. Distinct and a threat to the sovereign, D&G refer to the warrior as 'nomadic,' even entitling the plateau, "Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine."⁷² This brings us to two important points, the first, which will be returned to later, is that this nomadic warrior is fluid and defies striation,⁷³ and second, that Foucault, like with D&G's allusion to a specialized understanding of discipline, alludes back to D&G with his claim that, "one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an anti-nomadic technique."⁷⁴ D&G not only offer clarity and insight into the relationship of the warrior's antagonism towards the sovereign as the essence of their indiscipline, but they also reveal that the docility of *Discipline & Punish* is not completed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, D&G do fear the impending capture of the nomadic warrior by the State apparatus, saying:

Is it the destiny of the war machine, when the State triumphs, to be caught in this alternative: either to be nothing more than the disciplined, military organ of the State apparatus, or to turn against itself, to become a double suicide machine for a solitary man and a solitary woman?⁷⁵

The Bomb & the Sovereign's Success

On August 6th and 9th, 1945, the U.S. bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union conducted its first successful test of an atomic bomb and triggered the Arms Race. But it was April 11, 1951, that marked a fundamental shift at least 2,000 years in the making. It was on this otherwise inauspicious date that President Harry Truman fired the Commander of UN Forces in Korea, General Douglas MacArthur. Beleaguered by opposition forces on the Korean peninsula, MacArthur had been advocating for the tactical use of atomic weapons while maintaining

⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 351-2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 352.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 358.

⁷¹ Ibid., 358.

⁷² Ibid., 351 & 359.

⁷³ Ibid., 359-62.

⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 218.

⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 356.

a deterrence capacity.⁷⁶ His ouster formalized the bracketing of two types of warfare, nuclear and conventional, with the former strictly under the purview of the sovereign.

With nuclear weapons came a new totality to deterrence logic. The intricacies, caveats, and challenges to complex balance of power theories like those of E. H. Carr or Hans Morgenthau, premised on Metternich's conclusion to the Napoleonic Wars, were reduced to a single simplistic phrase: mutually assured destruction. In the previous section, I framed security along two lines, access to necessary material resources and the externalization of conflict from the homefront. Nuclear weapons, for those who have them, provide both in complete measure – with the proviso that the nuclear power has the capacity to maintain their arsenal.

By establishing a deterrent effect, the nation-state resolves its security concerns and, thus, so does the sovereign. The bomb exists within the sovereign's domain, not the war machine's. This is both literally the case, as in the U.S. where nuclear weapons are under the care of the Department of Energy, and discursively, with the authorization of their use under the control of civilian leadership. Deterrence is, after all, a discursive function:

The first paradox of deterrence, then, is that we have discourse that has meaning only insofar as it refers to arms, while arms in turn only have meaning insofar as they are articulated in discourse. In the second half of *Il Principe* Machiavelli discloses the paradoxical fullness and emptiness of political and military maneuver, when he shows us that each of the following statements is true only if both are true: (1) discourse can threaten only if it refers to a transdiscursive power; (2) this transdiscursive power can threaten only to the extent that discourse refers to it.⁷⁷

With the bomb, the sovereign no longer relies upon the warrior for this transdiscursive power, but instead on the discursive function of *nuclear* deterrence. Additionally, material power is no longer the basis for security competition between nation-states, meaning wars of acquisition are no longer a necessity for which the sovereign would depend on the warrior, but a luxury or desire of capital interests. Thus, the warrior has lost the efficacy of their indiscipline; their *mênis* could no longer maintain the social order of their separation from the sovereign. The warrior now faces the impossible choice of submitting to the sovereign (coalescing to form the modern state under Foucault's notion of governmentality) or withering away on its own. With this loss, the *warrior* now becomes the disciplined *soldier*.

However, deterrence simply nullifies the material element of security, it does not remove threats altogether. Deterrence as a discursive function opens new forms of state-based anxieties. This returns us to Foucault's discursive notion of security used to manage entire populations. While Foucault discusses a myriad of sectors to which such a use of security is applied – medicine, criminality, and so on – the warrior directs us towards one, the maintenance of the deterrence system.

As Foucault notes in *Discipline & Punish*, the disciplining of the soldier is not simply the production of a docile body but creates its own productive force – the 'technician of discipline.'⁷⁸ In other words, the soldier is not only a product of discipline but the purveyor of its application upon the rest of society and, indeed, the world. The role of the modern soldier is to maintain an international discursive regime for their respective nuclear nation-state to maintain the perceived integrity of its deterrence apparatus, which I refer to as the *international prison system*.

⁷⁶ Bruce Cumings, "On the Strategy and Morality of American Nuclear Policy in Korea, 1950 to the Present," *Social Science Japan Journal* 1, no. 1 (1998): 57-8.

⁷⁷ Michael McCanles, "Machiavelli and the Paradoxes of Deterrence," *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (1984): 14.

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 168-9.

Deterrence operates via an assumed logic in which triggering mutually assured destruction (MAD) violates the rational self-interests of any nation-state. Thus, any existential threat to a nuclear power, even by a nuclear rival, is an inherently irrational act. Of course, Foucault is famous for his work on madness, notably its social construction. Or, more accurately, that ‘reason’ is a historico-epistemic construct which defines itself by the exclusion at the periphery of those seen as other and thus labeled the ‘insane.’⁷⁹ In other words, rather than through some objective analysis or self-identification, those in power – the nuclear nation-state – can construct those they choose as insane threats and potential violators of deterrence norms. Madness, as a condition, is thrust upon any deemed to be in violation of the nuclear order – the rogue state, the evil empire, or the terrorist threat.

Thus, nuclear powers are incentivized, as a matter of security, to coerce, purify, or eliminate those at the exterior, while simultaneously developing, expanding, and applying their discursive system on those within their network. For both processes, the soldier is the disciplinary technician. If considered under the prison model, the nuclear power, its citizens, and those nations within its discursive regime (allies, protectorates, and so on) exist under the panoptic gaze of the sovereign’s prison guards. For those outside the walls of the prison – rogue states and even non-state actors – the soldier is the police officer charged to capture and incarcerate threats to the good standing of the international order.

From the perspective of the U.S., the function of conventional military forces is the expansion of an ideological order of an evolving notion of neoliberal capitalism. At the beginning of the Cold War, this took the form of Domino Theory, fearing the expansion of an alien and oriental communist threat. Therefore, Domino Theory was the fear of the expansion of the Soviet Union’s prison walls. This is because competing nuclear states, having their own deterrence capacity, maintain an invulnerability to opposing disciplinary regimes. Instead, they create their *own* prison networks to exert their *own* discursive control for their *own* security interests. This is the irony at the heart of deterrence theory. The existence of an external nuclear competitor is necessary for the system of deterrence to establish peace via MAD, and to not have, instead, a hegemon perpetually utilizing the bomb in a pursuit of global domination. However, this manifests the existence of an undisciplined other, who constitutes a perpetual and unwavering threat, the irrational ‘evil empire,’ that is impervious to the disciplinary and discursive techniques of power due to their deterrence capacity. This is what Foucault would refer to as a ‘reciprocal incompatibility’ which lies at the heart of deterrence theory.⁸⁰

Therefore, at the conclusion of the Cold War, the U.S. was not in the unipolar position of a true global hegemon, as it still had nuclear rivals. However, its conventional military and economic superiority did mean it had an unparalleled capacity to expand the walls of its international prison. The massive expenditure into what critics like Stephen Walt will refer to as the ‘liberal grand strategy,’ was not some idealistic, altruistic, or benevolent effort.⁸¹ Rather, it was a massive project in the deployment of discursive power on the international stage for the same base security interests, albeit of an immaterial nature, that forms the foundation of their criticism. Humanitarian intervention, nation-building, and the War on Terror are all deployments of the captured and

⁷⁹ Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy & Jean Khalfa (New York: Routledge, 2009), xxix-xxx; Noam Chomsky & Michel Foucault, *The Chomsky-Foucault Debate: On Human Nature* (New York: The New Press, 2006), 43-4.

⁸⁰ Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2013), 163-4.

⁸¹ Stephen Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America’s Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 13-4.

disciplined war machine, the soldier, to establish the international discursive regime of the U.S.'s neoliberal world order – to manage and discipline as much of the global population as possible under the rubric of security.

The Warrior's Remnant

Much has been said of the interaction between states within this new framework of discursive power, but non-state actors remain an unengaged loose end. So too, do those remnants of the warrior that maintained their separation but withered with the loss of a role in the social order. Naturally, the two occupy the same space.

In the *A Thousand Plateaus* chapter, "Micropolitics and Segmentarity," D&G discuss the 'molar' and the 'molecular.' The molar constitutes the macro-level attempts to capture, quantify, categorize, and contain the mass within. The molecular are those micro elements which defy this regimented segmentalism and move as a 'quantum flow.'⁸² In the attempt of the molar to capture the molecular, D&G conclude that "something always escapes."⁸³

The remnant of the category of the warrior escapes the disciplinary regime of the state and, thus, constitutes a threat, perhaps the ultimate threat, to the international order(s). In fact, D&G already theorized the possible threat posed by the warrior's remnant:

Could it be that it is at the moment the war machine ceases to exist, conquered by the State, that it displays to the utmost its irreducibility, that it scatters into thinking, loving, dying, or creating machines that have at their disposal vital or revolutionary powers capable of challenging the conquering State? Is the war machine already overtaken, condemned, appropriated as part of the same process whereby it takes on new forms, undergoes a metamorphosis, affirms its irreducibility and exteriority, and deploys that milieu of pure exteriority that the occidental man of the State, or the occidental thinker, continually reduces to something other than itself?⁸⁴

By considering this remnant figure's qualities, their name will become familiar. This undisciplined, militant, exterior, non-state actor, whose very existence constitutes both a threat and, as another reciprocal incompatibility, the basis for the contemporary security state, is, of course, the *terrorist*.

This does not legitimize the terrorist as some heroic resistor of the discursive order. Their existence is both an accident and a necessity of the modern security apparatus. They are a withered remnant of a former category, disfigured and perverted. Their undisciplined wrath is not targeted towards the maintenance of order as they have no social category. Thus, theirs is not the *ménis* of Achilles towards Agamemnon, but a vestigial bloodlust directed at systemic disruption. In some cases, and for those like Baudrillard, who seek a radical disruption, the terrorist may symbolize a challenge to this new global order.⁸⁵

However, the perversion of the category is not only the discrepant nature of the 'terrorist' to the 'warrior,' but also of the productive utilization of the category by the security apparatus. 'Terrorist' is a discursive label applied to those non-state actors at the periphery. Its use is the legitimation of state violence and can be directed at anyone no matter the ontological accuracy of its application. The 'terrorist' describes both the hijacker with a suicide vest and the mother at the TSA

⁸² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2022), 217.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁸⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 2003), 58-9 & 102-5.

checkpoint armed with a child and a bottle of breastmilk.⁸⁶ The reciprocal incompatibility of the terrorist is its utility, its universal applicability, which justifies a perpetual deployment of the security apparatus to purify or discipline the entire population.

4. Conclusion

With the nuclear age, security shifts from a competition and balancing of material power to the discursive function of deterrence. However, the duality of deterrence creates a reciprocal incompatibility in which the very balancing mechanism that prevents war produces an external otherness that is constantly perceived as a threat. Their difference, and that which can be cast upon anyone else external to the discursive regime of the nuclear nation-state, creates a constant need for the deployment of disciplinary power to manage global populations.

Understanding this international order through the metaphor of the panoptic prison, the role of the modern soldier is to serve as both guard and police officer. Within the prison network of the nuclear power, the soldier is a disciplinary technician meant to maintain, manage, and reinforce the ideological order necessary to sustain the deterrence logic. For those outside, the soldier is an agent of capture, meant to ‘purify’ the other of their alterity, or, failing that, to eliminate the external threat.

However, the soldier is only capable of being this ‘technician of discipline’ once their own docility is established. The historical separation between the categories of the ‘warrior’ and the ‘sovereign’ afforded the soldier’s predecessor an independence and capacity of defiance against the sovereign’s disciplinary advances. The role of the warrior’s indiscipline for maintaining this separation recharacterizes how we consider the novel formulation of ‘discipline’ proposed by Foucault. Only once the figure of the soldier is subsumed by the sovereign is the relationship of docility to utility realized. As long as the categories remain distinct, improvements to the warrior’s prowess only increases the capability of their *ménis* to maintain their social distinction.

This provides a new type of contingency for Foucault’s disciplinary power. Not only must the techniques and technologies of discipline be historically realized, but the negative constraint offered by certain material limitations, in this case the sovereign’s security, must be overcome. From at least as far back as Plato, the sovereign has desired to capture the warrior through a disciplinary and even discursive mechanism as evidenced by the Noble Lie. However, their dependency upon the warrior for security has left the sovereign incapable of overcoming the warrior’s defiance. Colonialism and industrialization began to change these material dynamics by displacing conflict overseas and reshaping how material power was garnered. It is only with the nuclear age and the establishment of the deterrence logic of mutually assured destruction that this transition becomes complete. The bomb has led to the warrior’s demise and in its place, we find, the disciplined soldier.

⁸⁶ Lisa Belkin, “Breastmilk and National Security,” *New York Times*, November 11, 2008, <https://archive.nytimes.com/parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/11/breastmilk-and-national-security/>.