

# THE DEVIL`S TRADE: TRANSCENDENCE OF FREEDOM FOR THE IMMANENCE OF SECURITY

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## ABSTRACT:

This paper analyses the notion of security and freedom through the lens of Foucault`s methodology. On the trace of his distinction between three different techniques of governance: law, discipline and security we see how today`s society has turn out into a society of security, where people are trading their freedom for alleged security. People are willing to give up their freedom in order to be safe and secured. But as we can see that is not true. Security is not for the people, but for the system. And what is most important, by giving up of a freedom, people are giving up of their essential ontological trait, they are trading its ontological essence – freedom, for ephemeral feature – security.

KEY WORDS: Security, freedom, reduction, transcendence, immanence, Foucault, Chomsky

## INTRODUCTION

In April, 2013 Michal Kosinski, David Stillwell, and Thore Graepel published a paper entitled *Private traits and attributes are predictable from digital records of human behaviour*<sup>1</sup> in which they are trying to show that “easily accessible digital records of behaviour, Facebook Likes, can be used to automatically and accurately predict a range of highly sensitive personal attributes including: sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious and political views, personality traits, intelligence, happiness, use of

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<sup>1</sup> Michal Kosinski, David Stillwell, and Thore Graepel: *Private traits and attributes are predictable from digital records of human behaviour* <https://www.pnas.org/content/110/15/5802>  
<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1218772110>

Accessed: 17.03.2019

addictive substances, parental separation, age, and gender.”<sup>2</sup> Not long after this publication this idea caught the attention of a PhD student named Christopher Wylie. He was already interested in consumer and demographic data – and he had a background in politics – so he was curious if he could use this approach to understand why Canada’s Liberal Democrats were losing elections. And that’s how Cambridge Analytica scandal emerged!

Cambridge Analytica scandal was a major political scandal in early 2018 when it was revealed that Cambridge Analytica had harvested the personal data of millions of people's Facebook profiles without their consent and used it for political advertising purposes. The illicit harvesting of personal data by Cambridge Analytica was first reported in December 2015 by Harry Davies, a journalist for *The Guardian*. He reported that Cambridge Analytica was working for United States Senator Ted Cruz using data harvested from millions of people's Facebook accounts without their consent.

These types of scandal like was almost fully anticipated by a French Philosopher Michael Foucault. Of course, he couldn’t foresee the Internet and new IT technologies but it is rather strange as if he almost did with his idea of disciplinary society, and especially with his concept of security or governmentality.

## FOUCAULT ON SECURITY

The concept of *discipline* that Foucault deployed earlier in his work, mainly in his notable book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*<sup>3</sup>, shed light on a number of practices and institutions – on order maintenance policing and parole systems, on video-surveillance and data mining, on electronic monitoring. But this phenomenon of IT-obtained security can be explained in a more detailed way with some other Foucault’s concept, developed in his later work, actually in a series of lectures at

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<sup>2</sup> Michal Kosinski, David Stillwell, and Thore Graepel: *Private traits and attributes are predictable from digital records of human behaviour* <https://www.pnas.org/content/110/15/5802>

<sup>3</sup> Мишел, Фуко, *Надзор и казна*, Слово: Скопје, 2004

College De France entitled exactly as *Security, Territory, Population*<sup>4</sup> from 1977-1978. The concept of **security** Foucault developed later to explain his idea of governmentality as a new modern form of governing. With this idea Foucault had gone beyond the concept of *discipline* to develop an account of power distinguished from both the disciplinary and the juridical models.

As we all know he defers three distinctive models of governance:

- juridical model based on binary distinction: allowed/not allowed; that's a legal plan of governance/sovereign
- disciplinary model where law is framed in surveillance and punishment system which took the body as its focus of subjectification
- security model - modern technology of governance - population

In these lectures, Foucault traced a genealogy of a different form of governance that he called at first "security," later "governmentality." At the heart of the lectures was this concept of *sécurité*, which differed in three important ways from *discipline*. I will briefly mention these differences as they are important to see that today's society with internet control is exactly the one that Foucault depicted: First, whereas *discipline* cabined, concentrated, and enclosed its space of operation, *sécurité* was centrifugal: "The apparatuses of security . . . have the constant tendency to expand; they are centrifugal... Security therefore involves organizing, or anyway allowing the development of ever-wider circuits." Second, whereas discipline focused on even the smallest infractions, *sécurité* lets the small things go: "The apparatus of security . . . let's things happen. . . . allowing prices to rise, allowing scarcity to develop, and letting people go hungry . . ." Third, whereas discipline sought to eliminate and eradicate completely, *sécurité* in contrast tried only to minimize – to seek an optimal level of the targeted behavior, to achieve a certain equilibrium. Not to eliminate, but to regulate to the most advantageous level. *Sécurité* was pragmatic. It tried to figure out how to optimize. In sum, *sécurité* differed significantly from *discipline* in its modes of functioning. As Foucault explained: "An apparatus of security...cannot

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<sup>4</sup> Мишел, Фуко, *Безбедност, територија, население: предавања на Колеж д`Франс (1977-1978)*, Фондација Отворено општество – Македонија: Скопје, 2017

operate well except on condition that it is given freedom, in the modern sense that it acquires in the eighteenth century: no longer the exemptions and privileges attached to a person, but the possibility of movement, change of place, and processes of circulation of both people and things.” Security, according to Foucault is a “mechanism for social control.”<sup>5</sup> So much, that we can even, “effectively talk of a society of a security.”<sup>6</sup>

We may say that with security, i.e. governmentality, finally the biopower is fully realized. As he claims that precisely in another of his work *History of sexuality*: “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations marking the beginning of an era of `biopower`”<sup>7</sup> This explosion has happened exactly in the modern age, and especially in the today`s internet world. These techniques emerged in 18-th century and, as Foucault suggests, they are connected with the problem of population. **Sovereignty is exercised on one territory, discipline over the body, and security on the population.** And the population is connected with calculation and statistics. And, when it comes to calculation and statistics, nothing is more accurate in calculation and statistics than computers and social networks. Social networks know where we have been, what we like, what we don`t like, what we eat, how we spend, if we sleep well, with whom we sleep, or even with whom we desire to sleep, if you anxious, or happy, or what will make you happy...

## TWO REDUCTIONS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

When Foucault thought about security, he had in mind these calculations, statistics that are recorded for each of us individually, but he did not imagine that the Internet and social networks would not only record these more accurately, but also in more detail, and not only that that would mean more opportunity for control through security, and not only would these data serve as the basis for the

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<sup>5</sup> Мишел, Фуко, *Безбедност, територија, население: предавања на Колеж д`Франс (1977-1978)*, Фондација Отворено општество – Македонија: Скопје, 2017, 16

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>7</sup> Мишел, Фуко, *Историја на сексуалноста: Волја за знаење*, Три: Скопје, 140

anticipation of behaviour, but, above all, as the basis for creating the behaviour. I think that for this to be fully realized two presuppositions had to be fulfilled

- 1. The first one in the field of psychology
  - 2. The second one in the field of ontology
1. In the field of psychology by accepting the model of stimulus – response. As we all know, behaviourism is a philosophy based on the proposition that all things which organisms do – including acting, thinking and feeling – can and should be regarded as behaviours. In education, behaviourist approaches emphasise changing behaviour through rewarding correct performance. This behavioural psychology mind-set has become so typical and dominant for this modern age because it can be used primarily for psychological assessment, marketing, recruitment, insurance, and many other industries. Yes, it is highly appreciated in industries, just because the simple stimulus-response procedures can easily sell products! And that is what all is about, isn't it, selling products?

As we all know, the earliest derivatives of Behaviourism can be traced back to Ivan Pavlov and his classical procedures of conditioning. For modern psychology that's all that matters – conditioning, and that's why they are interested merely in our animalistic stimulus-response activities. Humanistic psychology, depth psychology is not useful for selling and buying, and of course for controlling.

2. But in order for this to work, “ontological reduction” of reality must first be done - all relations of man to transcendence have to be detached, man has to be dissolved wholly in immanence. For a “one-dimensional” man first a one-dimensional world is required! The today`s world and all humans activities in it are solely immanent, without any, even slightest reminiscence of transcendence. As if there is a conspiracy of not mentioning the connections with the “that world.” Just try, for example to mention “death” to the modern man, and you`ll notice that it is kind of a forbidden topic, as if we are going to live forever. And even if death is mentioned in today`s discourse, it is mentioned in an “optimistic” context listing all the achievements of modern

science as if very soon, maybe even today or tomorrow, science is going to find some miraculous cure for death. But a philosopher knows that without our personal relation toward death the stepping into another world toward transcendence is impossible. Transcendence is related to eschatology. Hence, a philosopher (or a poet) knows that nobody is secure in eschatological perspective, and that's why there is no point in giving up freedom for security. Just because ontologically speaking nobody is safe. In an eschatological perspective nothing of this material immanent world is safe and secured. Security is fully immanent, freedom is fully transcendent. Freedom is not from this world, because it doesn't concern this world. Security concerns our bodies our immanent existence, freedom our being as an eternity, as transcendence. Security is from this world, freedom is not.

Foucault leads us exactly towards this line of thinking when considering the difference between the law, discipline and security. Namely, he says: "Law prohibits, discipline prescribes, and security, without prohibiting or prescribing, or possibly by using several instruments for prohibition and prescription, essentially has the function of responding to a reality ..."8 or even more precisely, Foucault continues: the **law** works in the **imaginary**9, because the law imagines and can be formulated only by imagining all things that could, but must not be done. It imagines the negative. In a way, **discipline** works in a sphere that is an **addition to reality** - a man is evil, bad, has bad thoughts, tendencies, etc., and for these reasons it will form an addition to that reality, made up of regulations and obligations, which are all the more compelling, if reality is what it is - hard and difficult to win. And, finally, Foucault says: "Unlike the law, which works in the imaginary and the discipline, which works in addition to the reality, the security will try to work in the reality by trying to mutually move the elements of reality ..."10, to set them up, we could say, to its advantage. We see that for Foucault security is completely in the immanence (although he does not use this term explicitly). The today's political is completely

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<sup>8</sup> Мишел, Фуко, *Безбедност, територија, население*, 61

<sup>9</sup> That "imaginary" is that transcendence from which it borrowed the ideas. The ideal world was imagined, presupposed in the age of law.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 60

immanent! The ideals that were embedded in laws and “borrowed” from “some other world” are expelled from the today`s political, there is no use of any idea and ideal in today`s politics. Today`s politics operates in the reality and solely with the reality it doesn`t has any need of transcendence. And in that sense, Foucault states: "The idea that politics has no task to introduce a set of rules imposed by God into human behaviour (transcendence is completely excluded, God is unnecessary - T.S.) ... politics has the task to act in the element of reality (solely in the immanence - T.S.), what physiocrats call physics, and therefore they say that politics is physics, that economics is physics."<sup>11</sup> We clearly see that every metaphysics is excluded from the political! To act in the political order, according to Foucault, means to act in the natural order.<sup>12</sup> Liberalism in this sense, continues Foucault, means to leave people to do whatever they want, to leave things to happen.<sup>13</sup> Hence, freedom in this liberal or neoliberal logic, for Foucault, means "ideology and a management technique, which should be included within the mutations and transformations of the technologies of power. And, more precisely and more correctly, freedom is nothing but a correlative for the establishment of security devices. One safety device ... can function well only on the condition that we give it freedom in the modern meaning of the word that it received in the 18th century: the possibility of moving, changing place and circulating of people and things..."<sup>14</sup> The power that is used and conceived as regulation, can be exercised only through the freedom of each individual in some pseudo-freedom sense. We see that in such a case, in liberal ideology, freedom is not a goal, but a means of biopower and biopolitics. With this, freedom is only one of the dimensions of the establishment of safety devices. It is only a means of the capitalist development, which basically makes it a precondition and as such abolishes it, or at least it becomes only one governing technique, an ideological tool of power. With the illusion of freedom, the man of today is only safe secured, but still, to the extent of the interests of the power. In order to be brought into this situation, as we said, he had to be reduced – psychologically, anthropologically and ontologically.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 62

But as we saw, even security is not guaranteed for the individuals in liberal society. When Foucault speaks about security it doesn't concern the security of the individuals, but rather it is about the **security of the system**. And this is the last, practical political implication of this above mentioned reduction that was taken from psychological and ontological perspective. Security is granted only for the system, security is needed for that system can effectively be perpetuated. Another author without making any references to this idea of Foucault, asks himself for whose security we are talking about, as a chapter of one of his books suggests, and in the same title chapter he gives the answer: "How Washington protects itself and corporative sector"<sup>15</sup>? We are talking about Noam Chomsky who although doesn't mention Foucault it looks like he is almost using his ideas in concrete political context. When he speaks about the power of the USA and its secret services, he says: "... the main concern of the government is security of the state power from the population" And he continues: "how should everyone who ever searched for various archives should know, government secrecy is rarely motivated by the real need for the security of the population, but definitely serves to keep people in the informative darkness."<sup>16</sup>

Even more precisely Noam concludes: "State power has to be secured from domestic enemy; on contrary, population isn't safe from the state power."<sup>17</sup> We see how Chomsky clearly illustrates what in a Foucauldian sense means security: it is about security of the system, not of the individuals, security is a tool for controlling and manipulating population in order state and especially corporative power to be maintained.

## CONCLUSION

People are reduced, rather they reduce themselves voluntarily to animals, trading their humanism for security, selling what is most valuable – their freedom

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<sup>15</sup> Ноам, Чомски, *Кој владее со светот*, Арс Либрис: Скопје, 2016, 158

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 167

<sup>17</sup> Ноам, Чомски, *Кој владее со светот*, Арс Либрис: Скопје, 2016, 167



for false, rather alleged security. The case of Cambridge Analytics showed exactly this – people lost their freedom, but didn't gain security; actually, just the opposite happened - their data were misused and the secure and safe utopia turned out to be a dystopia. The secured world that they sell us is not secured, but rather not free world. The world deprived of freedom even in a political sense. Because in the Foucauldian manner of speaking, in such a world freedom becomes a tool for security. And as, Chomsky showed security is for the state power, not for the individuals. The Snowden case was the peak of this totalitarian and allegedly secure society, and clear illustration for whom secured is for.

What is some practical solution for this? It can be only solved on individual level, not on social one. First and foremost, we must accept the true existence of our inner being as not fully immanent, and second maybe to try some kind of social asceticism, detachment from all digital, social media as much as it is possible. If it is possible? Maybe that's not, but it's always possible to remember that freedom is not from this world, that it is a transcendent principle which is reached, not the one to start from. Involved fully in the political immanence, it turns into an asset, an accident. Freedom is an ontological, not a political category, it is in the sphere of transcendence, security is in immanence, in the presence of political calculations of the biopower. So it's better not to give up our freedom, especially not to trade it for security.

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