

Secularizing the Remnant: Foucault and Paul

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Introduction

The twentieth-century French philosopher Michel Foucault is frequently suggested as an interesting, if unlikely, conversation partner for Saint Paul. While scholars such as Elizabeth Castelli have used Foucault's understanding of power relations and discourse to critique Paul's own discursive strategies, such conversations often go beyond applying a straightforward Foucauldian reading to Paul's letters.¹ Moreover, where those bringing Foucault and Paul into dialogue during the 1990s tended to focus on the issue of power, as seen most notably in the work of Stephen D. Moore and Kyle A. Pasewark,² over the past decade research focus has shifted towards the question of an ethics of the self described by Foucault with specific reference to Greco-Roman practices and techniques carried out on the self and whether a similar form of teaching or instruction might be found in Paul's letters. According to Halvor Moxnes, to cite one example of such scholarship, Paul's ethical teaching is more concerned with the formation of an identity for those who belong to the community of believers, than it is a question of direct moral exhortation.³ In this sense, Moxnes sees Paul's discourse as of continuing relevance today in relation to the pertinent issue of identity politics at stake in contemporary society where traditional forms of community, as the main vector of one's cultural and political identity, have ceased to exist as a result of globalization.

Nevertheless, in this article I would like to take a step back from existing discussions of Foucault and Paul in order to consider in more detail the fundamental questioning of notions of life and death which occurs throughout Paul's letters and also appears as a constant thread in Foucault's work. It is my contention that this questioning of life and death underpins Paul and Foucault's respective understandings of power and, equally, ethical existence. After considering briefly the parallels which can be drawn between the way Paul and Foucault conceive of the relationship between life and death, the article will focus in particular on the discussion of remnant in Romans and Foucault's concept of "security."

Paul's notion of remnant and Foucault's definition of security are both difficult concepts. The notion of remnant raises more questions than it answers about the place of the Jews within the new world order, and security is a concept which is underdeveloped, only discussed in Michel Foucault's lecture series *Security, Territory, Population*. This underdevelopment leads us to wonder how

¹ See in particular Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) and Sandra Hack Polaski, *Paul and the Discourse of Power* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

² See Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994) and Kyle A. Pasewark, *A Theology of Power: Being Beyond Domination* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

³ Halvor Moxnes, "Asceticism and Christian Identity in Antiquity: A Dialogue with Foucault and Paul," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 1 (2003): 3-29.

much importance should be attached to it. Yet both are introduced to clarify the relationship between life and death as understood by Paul and Foucault and as such play a pivotal role which merits closer examination. Moreover, I would like to suggest that our understanding and appreciation of these two concepts could benefit from reading them comparatively. And what I would like propose over the course of this paper is that when considered within a wider critical framework which identifies several important connections between Paul and Foucault, it becomes apparent that security functions within Foucault's thought like a secular version of the Pauline remnant.

Before looking specifically at the terms remnant and security, I will consider how Foucault and Paul understand the relationship between life and death. How do they each set about problematizing these concepts in the first place? What are the specific ways in which they challenge accepted notions of life and death? As obvious as it might seem, it is important to bear in mind the two very different agendas of Foucault and Paul. For Foucault, the idea of "life" has become the focus of a new discourse of truth inextricably bound to a shifting socio-economic climate and which replaces the notion of "death" as the dominant discourse or technology of power. The revised concept of "life" following Christ's resurrection involves a consideration of the new possibilities which open up to man when no longer in a relationship with God defined in terms of man's sin and inevitable death. Moreover, for Paul, the question of what it means to be alive pertains specifically to his understanding of messianic time, in other words, what it means to be living in the period between the resurrection and the *Parousia*. However, as opposed as Foucault and Paul might appear in terms of their respective agendas, it is possible to identify underlying tensions at work in both sets of texts which bring the two writers closer together.

I. Life as Excess

Both Foucault and Paul describe a shift from a focus on death towards an affirmation of life. Such life is defined in terms of its excess. According to Foucault up until the end of the 17th Century, the life of a subject belonged to his or her king or sovereign. Life, as such, was defined almost exclusively in terms of death. Foucault attributes two main reasons to this view of life. First, a sovereign's interest in the lives of his subjects only came into play at the point where he would exercise his power to take life away: "[T]he right to take life or let live."⁴ This right could either take the form of the king sending his subjects to die on the battlefield in order to protect his land from foreign invasion, or could involve the capital punishment of a criminal regarded as an enemy of the sovereign as a result of his transgression of the sovereign's law.

The second factor which contributed to this view of life under the shadow of death involved the notion of life as a biological, collective entity. According to Foucault in *The Order of Things*, life as an isolated object of biological study did not exist until the end of the 18th Century. Life, to the extent that it did exist, functioned purely as a means of classifying individuals and groups as "living beings." Foucault writes that "if it is possible to speak of life it is only as of one character—in the taxonomic sense of the word—in the universal distribution of beings."⁵ It is hardly surprising, moreover, that prior to the 17th Century the only significant mark this empirical understanding of collective life made on history was as a death toll, the reporting of the number of fatalities following widespread disease or famine.⁶ Thus life in both its individual and collective manifestations is only evoked in order to negate it, to pronounce the death sentence or to count up

⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 136.

⁵ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 175.

⁶ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 142.

the number of casualties produced by a war or natural disaster. Foucault links the attitude of the sovereign towards his subjects to Roman law, *patria potestas*, which stated that the master of a household had the right to kill both his slaves and his offspring if he deemed it appropriate.⁷

However, a more comprehensive connection can be made between Foucault's account of this attitude towards individual and collective life and Paul's depiction of life pre-Christ. For Paul the world before the arrival of the Messiah is a world dominated by death. This death is the natural and inevitable consequence of man's separation from God brought about by the Fall, Adam's transgression in the Garden of Eden (Rom 5.12-14). The prevalence of death is presented by Paul in two key ways, the exercise of wrath and the existence of a sphere of death under/within which all of mankind find themselves. First, death is a punishment, an act of God's wrath upon his people (Rom 1.18, Rom 2.8). Wrath is the means by which God affirms his omnipotence. Paul argues that any sin committed is committed directly against God and represents a turning away from God. In Romans 3.10-18 Paul quotes Old Testament scripture to emphasize this, claiming that "all have turned aside" (Rom 3.12) and goes on to state that "all fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3.22). However, the crux of Paul's argument concerning death is its power over everyone, not just those who lead particularly sinful lives (Rom 3.9).⁸ Death can thus also be conceived of as a sphere or "dominion" (Rom 5.14, 5.17, 5.21, 6.9) under which all are indicted. Where Foucault defines sovereign power in terms of "the right to take life or let live," Paul's conception of divine power prior to Christ's resurrection takes the form of the maxim "kill or let die" since death is the inevitable fate of all of mankind post-Fall.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault focuses primarily on a series of individual cases that combine to elucidate the claims he wishes to make about how power functions. However, he does also refer briefly to the wider implications of the attitude of the sovereign towards the lives of his subjects coupled with the constant threat of disease and starvation. He mentions in particular the need of society to accept and integrate the everyday reality of death through various rituals that have invested it with value:

...the ravages of disease and hunger, the periodic massacres of the epidemics, the formidable child mortality rate, the precariousness of the bio-economic balances—all this made death familiar and gave rise to rituals intended to integrate it, to make it acceptable and to give meaning to its permanent aggression.⁹

From this passage alone it is possible to situate Foucault's reading of the role of death in closer proximity to that of Paul's: being left to live really means being left to die.

Furthermore, it is possible to compare Paul's identification of a sphere of death to Foucault's notion of a matrix or grid made up of complimentary and competing discourses.¹⁰ Both point out how death is something that implicates the individual but which, equally, applies to all individuals. The various statements made by a sovereign in his punishment of criminals and his indifference towards the plight of law-abiding subjects intersect with the rituals carried out by his subjects as they attempt to deal with death in their daily lives. The result is a series of discourses all of which legitimize death and its violent presence within society. Likewise, Paul's understanding of

⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁸ The question of Paul's reference to death as a power has posed problems for various scholars. I have chosen to interpret it not as a "power" that competes with divine power but rather as an instrument of God's wrath, acting on his behalf in the same way an executioner would act on behalf of a King.

⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 55.

¹⁰ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 92.

death in the pre-Christ epoch is as a discourse that presents death as inevitable and inescapable yet something for which every individual is responsible.

For Foucault a transformation occurred during the 18th and 19th centuries that put life and not death at the focus of man's existence. For Paul this transformation occurred somewhat earlier with the death and resurrection of Christ. Foucault attributes this shift to the emergence of a series of strategies all concerned with the more effective management and control of individuals. Paul sees this transformation as the means by which man's pre-Fall relationship with God is restored. As such both are concerned with the production or, if one prefers, the creation, of obedient, life-affirming beings.

The shift from a focus on death to an affirmation of life involves two central processes: first of all, a notion of life that exceeds a straightforward opposition with death and secondly, an understanding of this life that implicates the individual in its control and management. For the purposes of this essay, I am going to deal primarily with the question of "excess" as it pertains more specifically to the notions of remnant and security.

Prior to the reforms of the 18th century, the use of physical torture defined in terms of its "excessive" force was nevertheless subject to the limits imposed on it by death. Heinous crimes such as patricide and attempts made on the King's life could not be punished by a simple hanging or execution but required prolonged torture that brought the criminal to the point of death as many times as was possible before the criminal was finally permitted to die. Yet frequently, as Foucault describes in his powerful opening account of Damians in *Discipline and Punish*, the condemned was pronounced dead long before the spectacle of torture was over.¹¹ It began to transpire that what was required was a means of controlling every aspect of a criminal's life. A process occurred whereby in sparing his life, the criminal was offered the possibility of rehabilitation and reintegration into society following a carefully calculated period of incarceration involving various disciplinary techniques. Similarly, the sinner through the death and resurrection of Christ is given the chance of a restored relationship with God. For the criminal therefore life is granted as a privilege, for the sinner as a "gift of grace." Thus for the "docile," law-abiding bodies of the later chapters of *Discipline and Punish* and those now restored to a pre-Fall relationship with God, life is not simply the absence of death but becomes a right that extends beyond a simple definition of life, evoking a proliferation of further possibilities and rights.

But God proves his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Romans 5.8-11)

As Ziesler points out, Paul does not explain in what sense Christ dies *for* sinners.¹² What is important here is the possibilities Paul alludes to in his use of the phrases "much more" and "more than that" ($\pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\omega\upsilon\varsigma$ | $\omicron\upsilon\nu\ \mu\alpha=\lambda\lambda\omicron\nu$ in Rom 5.9, $\pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\omega\upsilon\varsigma$ | $\mu\alpha=\lambda\lambda\omicron\nu$ in Rom 5.10 and 11). Man did not deserve to be reconciled to God. That much Paul makes clear. However, following this reconciliation, the possibilities, Paul suggests, must inevitably surpass anything that has gone before. Man is now in a position to fully enjoy the gifts of God's grace, the gift of salvation. The importance of this concept of "much more" ($\pi\omicron\lambda\lambda\omega\upsilon\varsigma$ | $\mu\alpha=\lambda\lambda\omicron\nu$) is emphasized in a subsequent passage:

¹¹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 51.

¹² John Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London & Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1989), 141.

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised its dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5.15-17)

This complex passage involves one of the most important statements made in the entire Pauline corpus. The passage begins by emphasizing that life and death as Paul comprehends them do not exist in direct opposition—the free gift (justification) is *not* like the trespass (Rom 5.15) and it is *not* like the effect of one man's sin (Rom 5.16). The trespass refers to the original sin of Adam. In this passage, Adam is placed in opposition to Christ but as such he does not simply represent the historical Adam but Everyman. While Adam may have brought sin, its possibility, into the world, Paul is not implying that everyone else is guiltless. As Ziesler suggests:

...it is not just that Adam as an individual started the whole nexus between sin and death, though Paul does appear to assume that death is universal because of Adam's sin. It is further that every man and every woman experiences afresh the nexus of sin and death.¹³

All have sinned and all were judged accordingly. It is in the light of this widespread condemnation that Paul wishes to emphasize the extent of God's grace. Not only is justification a gift but it is "free," man has done nothing to merit it. Furthermore, Paul repeatedly juxtaposes the "many" that have been condemned by their sins with the "more" who will benefit from God's grace in its "abundance."

Foucault describes how during the 18th and 19th centuries the notion of life comes to incorporate a whole plethora of different meanings and rights that far exceed a straightforward understanding of the term "life" to the extent that they deny the very possibility of an understanding of life as "bare" life. His narrative, which relies heavily on an extensive use of lists, not only points out the explosion of discourses associated with the term life but emphasizes this explosion by reproducing the cumulative impact such discourses have on the notion of life itself:

Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life, an individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified, and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner.¹⁴

This new conception of life relies upon a movement away from the notion of sovereign power towards an idea of political authority based upon multiple discourses all of which claim the interests of the individual, "the living" as their own. Political resistance and struggle is always, claims Foucault, in the name of life. Life as the ultimate value is not debated. What is called into question is the precise meaning, the specific rights that pertain to individual and collective life and the tensions between conflicting discourses on life, its standards and conditions.¹⁵

II. The Persistence of Death

However, despite the transformations identified by Paul and Foucault has death really been

¹³ Ibid., 150.

¹⁴ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 142.

¹⁵ Ibid., 145.

excluded? What has happened to death post-resurrection? What place does death occupy in biopolitical society? These are questions which pose problems for both Foucault and Paul. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians bears witness to his anxiety over the not so imminent arrival of the *Parousia* as well as his attempt to reconcile this delay with the fact some of his fellow Christians have died during this time. In an analogous way, Foucault's failure to adequately deal with the persistence of genocide within Western societies has been subjected to harsh criticism.¹⁶ However, what is of interest here is not the ways in which, according to Agamben and others, biopolitics is converted into a discourse of death involving a reactivation of sovereign power—such as one might find in discourses of racism—but how the persistence of death is recuperated or recovered by biopolitics.

Foucault's notion of security constitutes the means of explaining why within a biopolitical society there are those who are not saved, those who according to the old maxim are "left to die." It is in this sense that security can be compared to Paul's notion of remnant—remnant being one of the key arguments evoked by Paul to explain the persistence of death and condemnation post-resurrection.

Before launching into a comparison of the two concepts, it is perhaps useful to make some preliminary remarks about remnant and security. Starting with remnant – it is clear that Paul's usage of the term in Romans 9 through 11 is both dependent on existing notions both Hebrew and Greek and constitutes his own reading of the term in light of the Christ-event and his own mission to the Gentiles. The Greek usage of the term, *leimma*, tended to refer to the idea of something "which remains," is "left over" or "surplus." Similarly, in the Old Testament there are various secular instances of the equivalent Hebrew term that embody the same notion of something which remains. Remnant is also used to refer to the percentage of a population or community who are left following war, natural disaster or the passing of a divine judgment.¹⁷

From the time of Isaiah, remnant is frequently associated with eschatology and evokes the idea of those who have escaped or, more precisely, have been saved from divine judgment. Consequently, the remnant embodies a two-fold notion of condemnation and salvation. Those who remain do so in contrast to those who have not been spared from divine judgment. This is the case in Isaiah 10.22, the passage cited by Paul in Romans 9.27: "Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant will be saved." This is followed in Isaiah by the following proclamation, "Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness." However, in Paul's rendering, destruction is not mentioned but is replaced by "for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively." With Paul the significance of this passage has shifted towards an emphasis on the salvific dimension of remnant. It is salvation and not condemnation that is at stake here and the whole of Chapter 9 works to frame the Isaiah quotation according to this new agenda. Furthermore, as becomes clear in Romans 11, the remnant is something temporary—it does not represent an absolute, definitive state of affairs but rather signals an ongoing process.

For Paul, the remnant made up of the small percentage of Jews who have accepted the Christ-event is evidence that God has not rejected the Jewish people. Rather, in conserving a remnant, he has fulfilled his promise to them. The grace of God as manifested in the resurrection of Christ offers mankind the possibility and promise of salvation in the form of eternal life. This is a possibility offered to all, yet this does not necessarily imply that all will be saved. Only those who

¹⁶ Most notable amongst this criticism is Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998). Agamben argues that biopolitics has not replaced sovereign power but that sovereign power continues to operate at the heart of societies which deem themselves "biopolitical."

¹⁷ See in particular Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Vol.4*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 194-214.

believe in the possibility will, in effect, be able to experience this possibility. Consequently, not saving is not a sign of God's wrath but a further affirmation of his grace in saving those whom he does. It is important to emphasize that grace is exactly that, not a right or a given but a gift, a privilege.

In his 1978 lecture series given at the Collège de France entitled *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault identifies a third form of power in addition to his earlier models of sovereign and disciplinary power. He refers to this form of power as security. In taking as its aim the population at large, security can be seen as providing a supplement to disciplinary power which focuses on the individual body. Together they make up modern biopower. Where sovereign power involved coercion and violence, and disciplinary power is comprised of techniques of regulation and normalisation, security operates according to a principle of circulation. Unlike disciplinary power, which seeks to contain and limit, security is concerned with growth and production, and the increase of its mechanisms. Where disciplinary power is centripetal, security is a centrifugal force operating within and beyond society.¹⁸ This is why, unlike sovereign power, security does not target fixed territories but, rather, populations whose sizes, configurations and locations are in constant flux.¹⁹ According to Foucault, security can be linked to the emergence of capitalism. Security provides the possibility for economic growth by simultaneously encouraging and restricting circulation of goods, opening up borders and delineating new boundaries.

Foucault explains this idea of circulation with reference to two key examples, the punishment of theft and the treatment of diseases (namely leprosy, the plague and smallpox).²⁰ In all these cases, it is a matter of discerning an optimal point, the point where the impact of these incidents of both theft and death remains acceptable but, equally, can be managed efficiently and cost-effectively.²¹ Thus, in the case of punishing theft, a society must decide on the level of law-enforcement present in order to first catch offenders, the methods deployed to charge and sentence those accused of theft and the appropriate sentence to be imposed on those found guilty. While shopkeepers and taxpayers alike would draw the line at paying for enough policing and surveillance to ensure that no act of theft went unpunished, sentencing a petty thief to a lifetime in prison would be considered equally cost inefficient whether viewed in terms of the offender's rehabilitation prospects or protecting society from further thefts.

Likewise, in the treatment and containment of disease, governments are forced to decide upon the optimal use of resources to be allocated and the appropriate level of restrictions to be imposed. Clearly, there is little point stockpiling warehouses full of vaccines for a virus that has affected a very small percentage of the population even if there is the risk that some of those affected will die as a result. Similarly, the efficiency of closing borders and sealing off areas to contain a virus must be weighed up against the long term economic damage such extreme measures will incur. In economic terms, security involves the allocation of a finite set of resources to an infinite number of possible situations and events.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France (1977-78)*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 44-5.

¹⁹ The idea of a population that is continually on the move is of central importance to Foucault's discussion later in the lecture series of the emergence of pastoral power as part of the Jewish tradition and its subsequent appropriation and development within Christianity.

²⁰ See in particular the lecture given on January 11, 1978 in *Security, Territory, Population*, 1-28.

²¹ It might be helpful to consider Foucault's reference to an "optimal point" in relation to Malcolm Gladwell's concept of a "tipping point." Gladwell's tipping point is the point where a trend crosses a threshold and becomes an epidemic, crime wave or social craze. However, where for Foucault this point is something to be avoided due to its negative impact on the population, Gladwell also considers the positive social and economic effects of this phenomenon. See Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (London: Abacus, 2001).

To a certain extent, security functions within Foucault's work as a more precise rendering of what he has previously termed "biopolitical" in contradistinction to "anatomopolitical." The term "anatomopolitical" refers to the control and classification of the individual body through the various mechanisms and strategies of disciplinary power operating on and through subjects. Conversely, biopolitics deals with the population as a whole. What is at stake here is not simply the management and monitoring of the population but the propagation of life and the elimination of death. Moreover, the sense in which we understand the phrase "propagation of life" here is as something that not only entails an increase in physical, biological life but a proliferation of all the rights, definitions and attributes associated with life within a particular society.

Consequently, it is possible to draw two parallels: first, between disciplinary power that focuses on the individual and justification by faith which, for Paul, defines individual salvation. A second parallel can then be drawn between security, which deals with the population as a whole, and Paul's concept of election by grace—at the heart of which lies his understanding of remnant.

In identifying this parallel between security and remnant, I would like to signal four main elements that the two terms seem to have in common. First, both operate with reference to an event. Second, they are both concepts that should be regarded as qualitative rather than quantitative. The third point of comparison involves the way in which they constitute the specific means whereby death is reappropriated into a discourse of life. And finally, the fourth similarity lies in the promise or hope that both concepts appear to offer—both are directed towards the total elimination of a discourse of death from their respective worlds.

Proceeding with the first point of comparison, remnant and security are both structured around an event, or in other words, function according to a logic of the event. As such both require a fidelity to the event. Of course, how we understand event in Paul depends on whether we advocate a Badiouian or an Agambenian reading here. Clearly, Badiou's reading of event as a rupture that in its particularity opens up a possibility which is universal in scope lends itself to an appreciation of remnant in terms of its temporality. Thus conceived, the remnant does not preclude the universality or totality of God's salvation—it just refers to the transitory state of the Jewish people prior to their acceptance of the event and their belief in its possibilities. Conversely, Agamben's reading of the Christ-event does not evoke a rupture, as such, but engenders a suspension of the law, a suspension that also constitutes its fulfilment.

Security also requires a fidelity to the event but this is closer to Agamben's reading than Badiou's. Moreover, where Badiou sees the event as precisely that which opens up a different possibility to the economic status quo, Foucault identifies the event here as being fully integrated into economic strategy through what he refers to as *dispositifs* or mechanisms of security. Consequently, where Badiou identifies Paul as revolutionary militant *par excellence* and evoked in relation to a Neo-Marxist agenda, it has been suggested by Mika Ojakangas, among others, that Paul's messianism is the "historical precondition for the deployment of modern bio-politics" and by implication, capitalism.²² Thus while, according to Žižek, it may be possible to reconcile Agamben's emphasis on messianic time in Paul with Badiou's reading of Paul as founder of universalism, for the purposes of our discussion, it seems more fruitful to focus solely on Agamben's reading of Paul and, more precisely, his discussion of remnant.²³

Security is concerned with the government of the event. Where judicial and disciplinary forms of power focused on preventing events such as famine and disease and consequently remained perpetually threatened by their ever imminent possibility, security functions by allowing

²² Mika Ojakangas, "Impossible Dialogue on Bio-power: Agamben and Foucault," *Foucault Studies*, No. 2 (May 2005): 5.

²³ See in particular Slavoj Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 108ff.

such events to occur. In doing so, security is able to turn these events into an opportunity whereby their negative effects on the population are channelled, regulated, and ultimately eliminated. A city that faces extreme weather conditions on an annual basis is able not only to limit the damage caused by these conditions but will inevitably develop an economy and infrastructure that fully incorporates this event and employs thousands of people to monitor and manage its effects.

The objective of security is to eliminate the effects, or in other words, the cases of mortality, caused by events such as disease or famine; eliminating these effects to the extent that famine and disease cease to exist as events in the public consciousness.²⁴ However, this does not mean that disease and famine cease to exist *per se*, rather they have ceased to have an impact on the population at large. Individuals and individual groups or communities still continue to be affected by food shortages and epidemics. People still die and indeed, if security is to function successfully, people still need to die, people must continue to die, from these now non-existent events.²⁵

It is this paradox at the heart of Foucault's notion of security, which occurs through a dissociation of the individual and the collective, between groups of individuals and the population as a whole that brings us to the second point of comparison with the Pauline concept of remnant. Various commentators have pointed out that Paul's reference to remnant should be viewed as qualitative rather than quantitative.²⁶ His reference to the 7,000 who did not bow their knee to Baal in Romans 11.4 is generally considered to be symbolic rather than referring to a specific number of Jews. The same applies to Foucault's concept of security. Statistics function within security not with reference to any absolute truth value but rather as the carrier of a discourse that takes the population and its growth (both in terms of increase and economic) as its ultimate aim. Moreover, neither the remnant nor the population as objective of security should be considered as the sum of their parts but rather as the non-coincidence of the whole and its parts. This is Agamben's reading of the remnant and it is perhaps useful to elaborate briefly on this.

Agamben explains the idea of the remnant in terms of a "division of divisions." The most important division for Paul is, of course, the Jewish law that not only separates Jew and Gentile but also Man and God. With Christ, a further division takes place, that of the division itself. The division is divided and as such ceases to function in terms of the original division. Agamben refers to this as the "Cut of Apelles."²⁷

In dividing the dividing line, the remnant is made manifest. The remnant is made up of Jew and non-Jew both now defined by the negation of their previous identity. The non-Jew is now no longer excluded from God's chosen people so becomes a "non non-Jew" and the Jew, while not a non-Jew, is equally no longer a Jew in the old sense of the word, thus also a "non non-Jew." Under Christ the identities of Jew and non-Jew coincide as non non-Jew. The remnant is made up of this coincidence of non-identities.²⁸ Considered in this way, it is possible to comprehend why according to Agamben the remnant, produced by the "messianic cut of Apelles," is not a universal. Neither the Jew as non non-Jew nor the non-Jew as non non-Jew corresponds to a universal figure of man.

²⁴ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 30ff.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁶ *TDNT*, 210.

²⁷ Agamben recounts a story told by Pliny in which Apelles and Protogenes are engaged in a contest whereby Protogenes draws a line that is so fine that it is inconceivable that it could have been drawn using a paintbrush belonging to a human. However, with his paintbrush, Apelles draws a line which succeeds in cutting or dividing Protogene's line in half, lengthways. Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005), 50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 50-1.

What has occurred by way of the cut is that neither the Greek nor the Jew can coincide with himself. Inherent to the messianic is the “revocation of every vocation.”²⁹

Furthermore, the notion of the remnant is neither, according to Agamben, the all nor a part of the all but rather the impossibility of their coincidence. The remnant cannot be conceived of in numeric terms but as an instrument that makes salvation possible. It is that which prevents the division of divisions from becoming exhaustive. Thus, by making it impossible for the part to correspond to the whole, the remnant opens up the possibility for all to be saved.³⁰ As Agamben points out, “the messianic remnant exceeds the eschatological all, and irremediably so; it is the unredeemable that makes salvation possible.”³¹

It is only by forsaking the Jews that Gentile salvation becomes possible. But it is, equally, this turning away of the Jews that opens up the possibility of their reconciliation to God through his mercy. Likewise, the elimination of famine requires the persistence of hunger and starvation. Individual starvation and death is the condition that makes it possible to eliminate hunger and starvation from the population at large.

We have already established that the population is the final objective of security. Like the remnant, this concept of population is not to be understood as composed of groups of individuals. The population should not be considered in numeric terms. It too, is qualitative rather than quantitative. The relevance of the term “population” is, like the remnant, an instrument that ensures the proliferation of the mechanisms of security which Foucault defines in terms of an infinite number of series.³²

The population thus defined is neither totally comprehensive of all individuals yet at the same time has the possibility of exceeding this number of individuals. A gap can be found between Paul’s concept of individual salvation, justification by faith and collective salvation in the form of the remnant which admits the possibility that “not-all” will be saved. Likewise, Foucault’s concept of biopower based on the dual operations of disciplinary (anatomopolitical) power and security (biopolitical) appears to leave a space, an interstice through which death finds its way back into society.

However, and this is the third point I want to make about the relationship between remnant and security—death as we have already seen is not simply something which security fails to contain, something which slips through the net. Security depends on the persistence of death in order to ensure the primacy of its objective which is life. The presence of death on an individual level reminds the population of its purpose, of the underlying discourse of life that structures its very existence, its politics and ethics, its rules and regulations. Likewise, the remnant functions as a reminder that salvation, eternal life, is a gift and not something to be taken for granted. Those who are not saved, those who still continue to die in biopolitical society (of anything that seems untimely or unfair, in other words, of anything but old age), do so in order to save the greater whole. As such they do not represent a direct exchange or sacrifice, since there does not exist a direct correlation between individual and population.

Security functions like a vaccine, which is itself a key example of security.³³ To avoid widespread disease and death, a vaccine composed of a small, less potent strain of a disease is

²⁹ Ibid., 23-4.

³⁰ Ibid., 54-7

³¹ Ibid., 57.

³² Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 20.

³³ Ibid., 59-63.

required. Inevitably, in certain cases, the vaccine may not be enough to prevent disease or may itself lead to fatality (due to an allergic reaction, for example). However, the vaccine is aimed at the total population and therefore individual deaths do not affect its success in eliminating an epidemic but rather attest to the necessity of a vaccine in the first instance. Death and condemnation or divine judgment are crucial to discourses of life and salvation. Biopolitical discourse like Paul's understanding of grace involves a notion of life that exceeds a direct opposition with death and this is achieved by a process whereby death must be appropriated into a discourse of life. After all, for Paul it is the death of Christ that has assured eternal life for all.

Yet, despite their constant reference to death and judgment, security and remnant represent a promise and it is this notion of promise that constitutes the final point I want to make regarding the relationship between security and remnant. Paul's reference to the "seed of Abraham" in Romans 9.29 points towards the future, depicting the remnant as something that will grow and spread. Moreover, this reference to Abraham harks back to Romans 4 and in this context, the notion of seed can be argued, as Dunn suggests, to extend beyond Israel to incorporate all, who, like Abraham, have faith.³⁴

Likewise, an important example of how security operates according to future promise or potentiality is found in Foucault's account of urban development in the 18th century. He describes, in particular, the redevelopment of Nantes led by the architect Vigné de Vigny. According to Foucault, de Vigny's plan for development raised the issue of future growth and expansion—a question not previously considered by urban planning, which had hitherto focused on designing towns as complete and perfectly fitted to the current needs of a society.³⁵

Medieval towns and cities were limited by city walls that caused problems of overcrowding and did not allow for the expansion of a town without compromising the surveillance and protection offered by the clearly delineated city limits. With the redevelopment of Nantes, the idea of a town as something which would grow and evolve was embraced for the first time. This involved designing a plan which allowed for the possibility of growth and development and incorporated such possibilities into its own design.

So, just as Israel can no longer be conceived in terms of a fixed territory, or a certain number of people, the town cannot be contained within a given space. As Foucault claims:

One works on the future—the town will not be conceived or planned according to a static perception that would ensure the perfection of the function there and then, but will open onto a future that is not exactly controllable, not precisely measurable, and a good town plan takes into account precisely what might happen.³⁶

Inevitably, creating a town based on the idea of circulation opens up the possibility of the introduction of negative elements. An increased circulation of people engenders problems of vagrancy, crime and disease that might have been more forcibly controlled by the city walls of a medieval town. Yet the idea is that this circulation introduces more positive benefits than negative factors. So, overcrowding can be reduced allowing greater ventilation and hygiene thus controlling the propagation of disease even though diseases might be more easily brought into the town from elsewhere. Furthermore, increased access encourages greater trade within and beyond the town ensuring economic growth and improved living conditions. Thus, what has occurred is a shift from the idea of a town as inhabiting a fixed space and limited by this space to a town as something organic that is allowed and encouraged to grow and develop.

³⁴ James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word, 1988), 576.

³⁵ Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population*, 18-19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

The same applies to God's plan for salvation as understood by Paul. God's people is no longer limited to a single group of people belonging to a fixed territory but has become something that is opened up to everyone. As such its possibilities must have the opportunity to spread beyond the Jewish people—which is essentially what Paul's mission to the Gentiles is all about. But like a town which is developed according to a principle of security and consequently opens itself up to negative as well as positive aspects of growth and circulation, the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's people is also associated with the turning away of the Jewish people. While they remain the first people to have been chosen by God, they have nevertheless lost their privileged status. As Schrenk points out: "Israel loses its special position, and everything is swallowed up in mercy on all."³⁷

Central to the concepts of security and remnant is the hope that one day death will be eradicated and the total population will be saved. Every potentially life-destroying event is thus captured by security and becomes part of a continuous process towards the total elimination of death in biopolitical society while at the same time life and its definitions proliferate. In a similar way, the remnant can be described, and indeed has been by Schrenk, as a process of sifting.³⁸ It might be helpful to develop this analogy further. While only a few grains may initially pass through the sieve, i.e., the remnant, this does not mean that not all grains may eventually pass through. Moreover, as has already been pointed out, it is the obstinacy of the Jewish people that has enabled the inclusion of the Gentiles into God's people. The rougher, coarser sand is itself implicated in the process of sifting and refining.

Conclusion

Having identified various points of comparison between Paul's notion of remnant and Foucault's concept of security, it has been my intention to bring into focus some of the important parallels that can be found to exist between the two thinkers. In doing so, I hope to have paved the way for further discussion of the possibilities such a critical conjunction might engender with reference to questions of power, ethics and, of course, what it means and what it might mean to be alive.

This is a question that I believe is important to both Paul and Foucault. As Žižek has suggested, life and death for Paul do not constitute objective facts but rather two "subjective (existential) positions."³⁹ While such a statement inevitably risks a decontextualisation of Paul that fails to recognize the significance of the messianic moment in which Paul was living and trying to make sense of in his letters, Žižek's point that, for Paul, the resurrection of Christ offers, therefore, the possibility for man to think himself and his capabilities in terms of life rather than death is nevertheless valid. This definition can also be applied to the way Foucault views life and death. While there are marked differences between Foucault's early essays on limit experience, influenced by Bataille and Blanchot, his work on biopower and his later research on Antiquity and care of the self, the task of understanding the relationship between life and death remains a common thread throughout Foucault's career. In identifying life in terms of a discourse of truth, that is, life as either the property of a sovereign or the ultimate objective of biopolitical society, Foucault not only recognizes how these discourses operate on individuals to control and define them but also how a discourse can be challenged and subverted by other discourses on life. Likewise, Paul's understanding of (eternal) life as a promise or potentiality involves the perception that life no longer exists as a fixed entity but works as a form of discourse, a means of articulating man's restored

³⁷ *TDNT*, 214.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁹ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London & New York: Verso, 2002), 88.

relationship with God.

Moreover, for both Foucault and Paul, life must always be a life worth dying for. Whether this applies to the way in which one lives one's own life—being willing to risk one's life for one's cause (as in the case of Paul) or to confront the limit dividing life and death in order to feel more alive (as in the case of Foucault)—whether this refers to society as a whole, as we have seen with reference to security and remnant, to the way in which the lives of the population are secured through the persistence of death of its individual members. Recognizing this perpetual negotiation of life and death which underpins Foucault and Paul's thought is thus essential for any academic project which situates the two writers in critical dialogue.