

Pastoral Power, Early Modern Insurrections, and Contemporary Carelessness: What Foucault Can Teach Us about the “Crisis of Care”

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Abstract : Contemporary thinkers studying biopolitics and its lethal logic find little interest in Foucault's "vague sketch of the pastorate." Despite pastoral power being depicted as the matrix of governmentality in the genealogy of biopower, most post-Foucauldian theorists disregard its study. Sovereign power takes precedence in the examination of the governmental connection between care, violence, and death. Questioning this recurring motif, this article advocates for a feminist exploration of pastoral power. It argues that giving attention to the genealogy of the pastorate is essential to account for the carelessness that runs today's politics. Examining Foucault's understanding of this "power to care" uncovers the link between care work and politics, a facet of governmentality often overlooked in sovereignty-centered perspectives. His description of “pastoral insurrections”, in so far as it highlights that caring, far from being excluded from politics, is the object of competing problematizations, also calls for a more nuanced and complex comprehension of the politicization of care and care work than the ones developed by feminist theorists. As such, it provides an opportunity to delve into under-theorized dimensions of the "care crisis" in feminist accounts. On one hand, it reveals how populations are disciplined and controlled, not only through caregiving obligations, but also through being assigned or excluded from receiving care. On the other, it stresses that the organization of the public sphere is just as important as the organization of the private sphere, which is the main focus for most feminists, in preventing marginalized perspectives on caring from gaining political momentum.

Keywords : Foucault, feminist theory, resistance, pastoral power, crisis of care, biopolitics

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