



## Being-There

### – The Ontology of Biopower in H. G. Wells’ The Island of Doctor Moreau

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## Being-There : The Ontology of Biopower in H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

Yen-bin Chiou

As the “linguistic turn” virtually fades into oblivion, the “ontological turn” comes into fashion nowadays and becomes a more and more prominent battle cry in the field of literary studies. However, justifications for this new wave of reorientation of thinking are strikingly scarce, so much so that “ontological turn” ends up becoming a chic yet empty term that is simply bandied about on shaky ground. In fact, there is the historical basis for the ontological turn of thinking. Ontology becomes a topic worthy of intensive scrutiny, primarily because life has already replaced identity as the paramount site of political intervention at the time when bio-power is at its height. What truly matters in the circumstances is not so much the symbolic status of the individual, as is the ontological peculiarity of life that arises as the corollary of biopolitical intervention. Mindless of the consequential shift in the affected locus, we might fight on the wrong front. Worse yet, a tenacious dissident might consequently become the cohort of bio-power that is supposed to be contested. When it comes to emancipatory politics, identity politics is all in a worthy cause, to be sure. It puts high on the agenda the struggle for recognition, concerning itself

chiefly with restoring or establishing the right and the identity that are somehow stolen away. However decent its goal may be, identity politics is inadvertently moving forward in the direction dictated by bio-power. Just as bio-power has as its self-professed goal the optimization of life, endowing life with every quality requisite for a good form of life, so that identity politics has commitment to putting the much-sought-after identity back on the minorities who have been divested of it for diverse reasons. The line and goal of identity politics are deeply informed by bio-power, inasmuch as the process of addition that bio-power triggers is in turn upheld by identity politics as the topmost virtue. Identity politics grounds its undertakings on the Christian myth of *creatio ex nihilo*, the resurgence of which is greatly indebted to the prevalence of bio-power. Identity politics is misguided for this reason, insofar as it loses sight of the sophisticated mechanisms installed at the heart of bio-power. Apart from the self-declared process of addition, there is in fact a clandestine process of subtraction implicated in the biopolitical project of life engineering. Going hand in hand, these two conflictual processes come together and end up imparting complex dynamics to the biopolitical “humanizing process,” to use H. G. Wells’ locution. Instead of the prototype of human beings, the outgrowth of their collaboration is such ontological peculiarities as the “existence deprived of life,” or the “flesh without body” (Esposito 134). It is an intellectual and political imperative to be fully cognizant of the alarming presence of these ontological oddities we are confronted with day by day. In the final analysis, it is the urgency of addressing the ontologico-political problems thus caused that propels the said “ontological turn” and imparts motion to the writing of this article.

Wells’ *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) takes us directly to the nub of the problems bedeviling the biopolitical project of life engineering. The unanesthetized vivisection the infamous Moreau regularly performs unveils the

secret kinship between the process of addition and the process of subtraction at work in the said project. More importantly, it is from the complex dynamic that arises the unfortunate marriage between bio-power and thanato-power. The anthro-po-genetic machine that Moreau installs on the island therefore comes as the epitome of the full-scale penetration of bio-thanato-power into life, which culminates in the creation of the Beast People. However, what best epitomizes the eerie infants springing from the biopolitical womb, I will argue, is not so much the Beast People as the non-Beast People, i.e. the degenerating Beast People who show the sure signs of “reversion” and gradually metamorphose into the “flesh without body,” which is the ontologico-political being par excellence. Coming as the realization of biopolitical engineering at its purest, the production of the degenerating Beast People turns out to be the travesty of Christian creation myth, which trivializes and replaces the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* with its virtual antipode—the creation of what remains, of the being depleted of vivific life and beatific body. How do the good-meant bio-power and the ill-intentioned thanato-power dovetail and wind themselves into an unbreakable knot? How do the non-Beast People qua “flesh without body” then arise as the ontological outcome of bio-thanato-power? What is the ontological morphology of such dematerialized flesh that is incessantly sprouting amidst the jarring noises of the anthro-po-genetic machine? How can it be properly traced? Are the non-Beast People thus created simply the victims of bio-thanato-power? What is the likelihood that they can be considered as the ontological oddity that is foreign to the biopolitical grid of intelligibility so as to become a fatal threat to the operation of bio-power? This set of questions constitutes the ontological subtext of Wells’ novella. To unlock them, an in-depth scrutiny of “humanizing process” as depicted in Wells’ novella provides a key.

## I. Prendick's "about-face": Bio-Power and the Victorian Vivisection Controversy

Moreau's "humanizing process" (Moreau, 67) is in theory conceived at the behest of bio-power. Michel Foucault has offered a capsule characterization of bio-power as the power to "'make' live" (2003: 241). Coming into play ever since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, bio-power has the life of "man-as-species" as its topmost concern, and develops accordingly a set of "security mechanisms" in a drive to "optimize a state of life" (Foucault 2003: 243, 246). The optimization of life that bio-power strives for thus finds its counterpart in the "humanizing process" that Moreau contrives. As with bio-power which is aimed to make the life of "man-as-species" more capable and worthy of living, Moreau's objective is to "burn out all the animal" and "create a rational creature of my own" (Moreau, 78). Compared with the lofty biopolitical calling, Moreau's vocational dedication to plucking the life of animal species from bestial meanness is no less noble. Besides, it is more worthy to note that Moreau's reconstructive surgery brings the veritable novelty of bio-power into crystal-clear view. Since the plastic surgery is performed on the unanesthetized animal, the main site of biopolitical intervention is the living organism rather than the animal carcass, to say nothing of its identity. Life henceforth replaces death and identity to be the magnetic field charged with political power. Ever since power is less a matter of death or identity, the coincidence of the political project and the ontological enterprise becomes the norm for the first time.

The benignancy of bio-power cannot be inordinately celebrated, notwithstanding. The pastoral care of life is a double-edged vocation *ab initio*. This can be best illustrated by Moreau's "humanizing process," which, while upholding life as an incontrovertible value, has never been frugal with wielding

the rod of death from the outset. However legitimate his purpose may appear, Moreau's well-intentioned endeavor may be too much of a good thing. Prendick denounces Moreau's experiment as sheer atrocity for an excess of pain involved in his self-invented grafting operations (*Moreau*, 95). As is always the case, the cruelty in question is readily to be misconstrued as the disregard for the stipulated sanctions of bio-power. A point that Foucault reiterates to bring the novelty of bio-power to fore is its distinctive relegation of death to invisibility. As bio-power ceases to assert its clutches by inflicting pain in public on its intended target, death noticeably retreats from the public sphere into the private zone, to the point that "Power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death" (Foucault 2003: 248). Given the invisibility of death required in the biopolitical domain, it seems to Prendick not unwarranted to condemn Moreau's "humanizing process" as an obvious breach of biopolitical sanctions. After all, he performs the unanesthetized grafting surgery well nigh out in the open, so much so that the shrieks of the vivisectioned puma is hardly beyond Prendick's earshot.

Be that as it may be, nothing is further from Moreau's mind than to concede he has been wrong. His striking straightforwardness with regard to the necessity of inflicting pain is again illuminating, insofar as it helps maintain our perspective to view bio-power in a more comprehensive framework. Moreau virtually makes no secret of his atrocious theater, never shying away from christening his life laboratory as the "House of Pain" (*Moreau*, 59). What takes the center court of Moreau's apologetics for the gruesome infliction on experimental animals is, again, his well-intentioned attempt to "burn out all the animal" and "create a rational creature of my own" (*Moreau*, 78). The escalating intensity of physical pain, Moreau avers, will in all probability drive bestial creatures towards a threshold beyond which all the inherent taints of animality will be wiped out and an unalloyed "rational creature," hopefully, will then emerge from ashes. It seems to be all in a good cause to prescribe a

high dose of pain for the eventual completion of “humanizing process.” Pain, in other words, is the cost necessarily incurred in Moreau’s biopolitical project. Frank McConnell is a bit off the mark on that score when he derisively puts Moreau’s obsession with pain down to the “chaste sadism” characteristic of a celibate mad scientist (92). The driving force behind the infliction of pain, after all, is the pastoral care of life, rather than the blood-thirsty passion for death.

The necessity of pain takes us right to the nub of the problem concerning the political ontology of bio-power: if giving birth to “a rational creature” is a worthy cause, then what’s the point in going to great lengths to inflict pain, even death, on the life that the whole “humanizing process” is intended to “optimize”? This problem is a variation on the question that an increasing number of contemporary critics address to the “security mechanisms” installed by bio-power: if bio-power, as it stands, is the power *of* life which is exercised to regulate and maximize the capacities of living individuals or population, why does it betray its principles so often that it ends up reverting to the power *over* life, that is, to the sovereign power that has the subjugation of life as its means and even end? What is the secret kernel that is buried deep at the heart of the mechanisms of bio-power and threatens either to trigger their “paroxysms” (Foucault 1980, 149), or simply to allow the coincidence of bio-power and thanato-power (Agamben 1999: 83; Esposito 110-45)?

Prendick’s wavering stance on vivisection is instrumental in placing in perspective the strained dynamic inherent in the mechanisms of bio-power. Throughout the novella, Prendick looks at the practice of unanesthetized vivisection through a well nigh denunciatory optic. He has grilled Moreau on why he inflicts “all this pain” on animals (*Moreau*, 73). Despite his patient expounding, the grisly violence and death that Prendick encounters thereafter convince him of the “viler aspect of Moreau’s cruelty” (*Moreau*, 95). His repulsion against Moreau cuts deep as his empathy with the Beast Folk is

more and more in evidence: “Poor brutes!” thus he mourns the fate of Beast People on an elegiac note (*Moreau*, 95). Such is the growing division between Moreau and Prendick that it is not unwarranted to identify Prendick as a sympathizer of the Victorian anti-vivisection movement, which reached a crescendo in the first half of 1870s and faced a downward spiral after the passage of the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876.<sup>1)</sup> It is a general observation that this wave of controversy culminated in George Hoggan’s letter to *The Morning Post* of 1 February 1875. Hoggan was then a British doctor who had worked in Claude Bernard’s laboratory for four months. As the first-hand disclosure of the cruel experiments conducted by Dr. Bernard and his assistants, Hoggan’s letter ignited pervasive disgust toward laboratory science and lent credence to the general distrust of avant-garde medicine (Harris 102). By dramatizing the contrast between the “sensitive” laboratory dogs and the “unfeeling scientist,” Hoggan rendered his letter so inflammatorily heart-rending that it ended up becoming “a staple of antivivisectionist rhetoric” (Mayer 407). It is no exaggeration to say Hoggan’s letter has tremendous resonance for

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1) Richard D. French has provided a succinct account about the rise and fall of the English anti-vivisection campaign in Victorian society. See pp. 266-70. Martin Willis does not agree the passage of the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876 spelt an end of the English anti-vivisection movement. Though the Act put a dent on the anti-vivisection lobby, “the controversy that it [i.e. animal vivisection] was supposed to bring to an end lingered in the public imagination through the 1880s.” Willis establishes that the anti-vivisectionists regained force when the British Institute of Preventive Medicine was created in 1889. Its establishment reawakened the general xenophobic apprehension about the foreign methodology of animal experimentation and the prospective Pasteurization of England. In 1891, Francis Power Cobbe, the spearhead of the English anti-vivisection movement and the founder of the Victoria Street Society, published a pamphlet to disclose Pasteur’s abominable engagement in animal cruelty. Then the anti-vivisectionist movement reached another climax in 1890s, and the heated controversy was in all probability within Wells’ earshot when he came to write *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in 1895. See Willis, pp. 213-18.



anti-vivisection propaganda. In Prendick's polemics against Moreau, the legacy of Hoggan's humane "rhetoric" is very much in evidence.

Prendick is critical of vivisection, to be sure, but there is no lack of jarring notes in his skepticism. When the phenomenal "Moreau Horrors" comes back to him, Prendick distinctly remembers how a journalist sneaks into Moreau's laboratory with the help of a "laboratory assistant." In a bid to break the spell of the laboratory which has long been shrouded in mystery, the prying investigation, Prendick goes on to add, is carried out "with the deliberate intention of making sensational exposures." As it is played out, the "exposures" definitely arouse far more explosive popular response than intended because of "the help of a shocking accident—if it was an incident": "[o]n the day of its publication a wretch dog, flayed and otherwise mutilated, escaped from Moreau's house" (*Moreau*, 34). Prendick obviously has doubts about the truthfulness of this accident. After all, in such a "silly season" (*Moreau*, 34), it might well be a standard practice for a journalist to spice up stories by staging incidents. Of course, it is toward the press that Prendick points his accusing finger. What invites suspicion in this context is rather the ulterior motive involved in the publicity campaign, not the anti-vivisection cause. Indisputable as it, however, is that Prendick is reticent to oppose Moreau's diabolic practice when he suggests "The Moreau Horrors" is a complete fabrication. Besides holding back in his criticism, he even comes forward to speak up for Moreau, slamming "his fellow investigators" and "the great body of scientific workers" (including Hoggan?) for their "tepid support" and "desertion" (*Moreau*, 34). No matter if Prendick ascribes Moreau's expulsion from England to fraudulent journalism or to the lack of comradeship among his peer scientists, his otherwise trenchant criticism of animal vivisection is considerably neutralized. Given the sharp contrast between relentless denunciation and warm-hearted support, little wonder Elana Gomel detects in Prendick's flip-flopping stance on

the anti-vivisection issue “a complete about-face” (412).

Then, the crux of the matter is how to conceive of Prendick’s “about-face.” In fact, Prendick’s slippery take on the anti-vivisection issue has nothing to do with a deficiency of logical reasoning, and has everything to do with the wide currency of the biopolitical faith in the intactness of life. Under the sway of bio-power, the vivisectionists and anti-vivisectionists have a lot more in common than we are accustomed to expect. And it is this much-ignored common ground that makes allowances for Prendick’s about-turn.

To better understand how the exercise of bio-power unites two conflicting positions, let’s return to see how the crossfire was played out after the passage of the Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876. In response to the attacks of anti-vivisectionist polemics, the scientists started in the early 1880s to launch an organized publicity campaign, with a view to defending the necessity of their research method and reasserting their moral correctness. Unified in well-nigh concerted effort, the medical scientists provided a point-by-point rebuttal to anti-vivisectionist causes. A fundamental principle which informed the various claims they made, to put it simply, was that the legitimacy of experimental physiology was derived from the power *of* life, the bio-power that “fosters life” in Foucault’s phraseology (1980: 138), rather than the power keeping a tight hold *over* life. This pro-vivisectionist claim can be best exemplified by the national resolution issued by the British Medical Association (BMA) late in 1881. In the resolution, Dr. Humphrey from Cambridge spoke out loud for the indispensability of animal vivisection. Lying at the core of his statement was the primacy of life over disease and death: “That this Association desires to express its deep sense of the importance of vivisection to the advancement of medical science, and the belief that the further prohibition of it would be attended with serious injury to the community, by preventing investigations which are calculated to promote the

better knowledge and treatment of disease in animals as well as man” (“Forty-Ninth General Meeting of the British Medical Association,” 332).

If the security and intactness of all much-neglected lives is of particular concern for the Victorian anti-vivisectionists, the wellbeing of all living creatures is the goal that the pro-vivisectionists such as Humphrey vowed to further. Despite different leanings, no parties involved in the vivisection controversy are committed to putting life at risk. On the contrary, a drive they share is to extend the reach and range of rescue operations, in a bid to give refuge to as many precarious lives as possible. As Sherryl Vint points out, the Victorian anti-vivisection movement is not only “a plea for animal rights.” Connected with its consistent “critique of the culture of science” is its concern with the marginalized status of women, who are generally relegated to the category of animals (Vint 89-91). The gap between particularism (targeting assistances towards animals and women) and universalism (assuming responsibility for all living creatures) may well be a point where the anti-vivisectionists and pro-vivisectionists diverge, but it is not difficult to bridge it by the least common denominator of their respective battle cries—i.e. to safeguard lives against the threat of pain and death. The real bone of contention, in fact, lies nowhere else than in the competency in saving lives. To state differently, what distinguishes the pro-vivisectionists from the anti-vivisectionists is not the alleged fact that they are the mouthpiece for the power subjugating life, but rather the self-declared competency in defending maximal lives against danger. While the anti-vivisectionists would criticize their enemies for animal cruelty, the vivisectionists would confront the opponents in return with the charge of sabotaging the wellbeing of the majority. The power *over* life thus becomes well nigh a slur that both parties are eager to cast on their enemies. The apparent differences in opinions between the pro-vivisectionists and anti-vivisectionists are accordingly much smaller than it might seem. However

divided are their respective causes, both parties scramble unanimously to claim the power of life and put it in the center of their respective discursive pictures. No matter whether the threat is caused by unanesthetized vivisection or sluggish progress in medical knowledge, “avoiding injury to life” is the common ground on which they firmly stand. Viewed from this perspective, the competing standpoints involved in the vivisection controversy are nothing more than the different nodal points on the same network woven by bio-power.

Prendick's “about-face” on the vivisection issue encapsulates the pervasiveness of the power of life in a crystalline form. A superficial reading should suffice to discover the commonality of Prendick and Moreau in their commitment to the intactness of human life. All the sympathy and disgust Prendick feels toward the “crippled and distorted” Beast Men (*Moreau*, 35) arise in the main from the perception of their deviation in shape and demeanor from the course of a normal human being. What he encounters on the island is so intolerably confusing, primarily because it displaces his “general impressions of humanity” with are otherwise “well defined” (*Moreau*, 84). The same goes for Moreau, yet with one difference. Not content with Prendick's “general impressions of humanity,” Moreau goes further to sublimate them to a point of sophisticated ideality. Despite being a staunchest advocate of animal vivisection, Moreau has never set infliction of pain as his ultimate goal. Pain, as he expounds to Prendick, is only a path to the complete elimination of pain. An impeccable human being created according to his “humanizing process” will be akin to an impregnable citadel, which does not need to bank on pain as “the goad to keep them out of danger” any more (*Moreau*, 74). Rising from the excruciating crucible will be a new human body with more “well defined” contours, a “more intelligent” life that is liberated from the bestial shackles of reflex response. Be it keeping the intactness of human life passively (Prendick), or optimizing and maximizing the capability of life actively (Moreau), they

both are acts resting on the bedrock of the primacy of life.

The shared faith of Moreau and Prendick on life points directly toward the common root running under the heated dispute over animal vivisection. The biopolitical common ground to a large extent debunks the binary schema of cruelty versus wellbeing, death versus life that undergirds the rhetoric brandished by rival camps. That's why there is no lack of moments when Prendick's disgust toward Moreau subsides and his opposition to animal vivisection starts to lose trenchancy. Prendick's "about-face" transpires when the shift in register leads him to re-scrutinize Moreau's experiment through the biopolitical optic. The critical import of Prendick's flip-flopping take on the vivisection issue partly consists in its revelation of the ubiquitous presence of the power of life. What else is more telltale than the finale in the chapter entitled "Doctor Moreau Explains," where Prendick's change in perspective is much in evidence after Moreau has clearly set out the "humanizing process"? Standing right across him then, as Prendick comes to find, is no longer a cold-blooded butcher, but an conscientious progenitor of the life engineering project who is himself a beatific figure:

I looked at him, and saw but a white faced, white-haired man, with calm eyes. Save for his serenity, the touch of beauty that resulted from his set tranquility and from his magnificent build, he might have passed muster among a hundred other comfortable old gentlemen. (*Moreau*, 79)

## II. Postlapsarian Nudity: Bio-Thanato-Power and the Inclusive Exclusion of *Zoë*

For all that, this is not to overemphasize the far-reaching bio-power and

put the concomitant thanato-power in the shade. After all, the marks that the power of death leaves on the island are indelible and the havoc Moreau creates can't possibly escape our notice. If Prendick's "about-face" speaks volumes about his tacit appreciation of Moreau's biopolitical project, then his concomitant apprehension about the cruelty is all the more symptomatic of the unseverable umbilical cord that lashes together the power of life and power over life. Prendick's about-turn on the vivisection issue, in short, points to the originary dissymmetry of bio-power. Constitutively cut across by thanato-power, bio-power is not only the wellspring funding Moreau's "humanizing process," but also the seedbed for all the inflictions imposed on life. As an instance of the dramatic reversal in his stance, Prendick's "about-face" comes to synchronize these two conflictual moments of bio-power and disclose the opposite fronts of its Janus face at the same time.

Hence the Wells' insight into the dynamic of bio-power, which virtually coincides with Foucault's blindness as it were. The duality of bio-power is central to Prendick's "about-face," but to a considerable extent relegated to marginality in Foucault genealogical description of bio-power. As Foucault is never tired of averring, the technologies of bio-power is in the main geared to bring a capable body into existence:

Already in the control authorities that appeared from the nineteenth century onward, the body acquired a completely different signification; it was no longer something to be tortured but something to be molded, reformed, corrected, something that must acquire aptitudes, receive a certain number of qualities, become qualified as a body capable of working. (Foucault 2000: 82)

Foucault's genealogical description of the biopolitical production of the human body bears a striking resemblance to Moreau's "humanizing process."

Moreau's anthropo-genetic laboratory is a biopolitical apparatus par excellence, inasmuch as the reconstructive surgery performed therein is also aimed to "mold" animals into "more intelligent" species: "All the week, night and day, I moulded him. With him it was chiefly the brain that needed moulding; much had to be added, much changed" (*Moreau*, 76). Nevertheless, as is suggested in Prendick's "about-face," something more is involved in Moreau's "humanizing process" apart from the biopolitical optimization of life. Foucault's description of biopolitical molding is too schematic and one-sided to shed sufficient light on the subtle relationship between bio-power and thanato-power.

With regard to this problem, Aristotle's discussion of the Athenian democracy comes as a useful complement to Foucault's somewhat limited horizon. The coincidence of the ontological and the political is not so much a novelty peculiar to the biopolitical epoch, as it is the foundational problem the answers to which, as it were, determine the vicissitudes of the Western politics. To that extent, Aristotle is the founder of the Western politics so to speak. Of particular concern to him is a politico-ontological question which the biopolitical regime has never ceased to address and occupies the forefront of Moreau's experimental physiology—i.e. the question concerning how to transform and upgrade a life immersing itself in the satisfaction of basic needs (*zoē*) into a good life which is more worthy of living (*bios*). Compared with Foucault's partial perspective, the comprehensiveness of Aristotle's discussion deserves further scrutiny.

In *The Politics*, Aristotle traces a quasi-evolutionary trajectory from bare life (*zoē*) to a good, politically qualified form of life (*bios*), in order to better explain the making of man as the political animal and of a state as the aggregation of good lives: "When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in

existence for the sake of a good life" (1252b, 27-30). The line of demarcation Aristotle draws between *zoē* and *bios* is so fine and wafer-thin that we can hardly ascertain whether their relationship is discontinuous or not. On the one hand, he differentiates between "bare needs of life" and "a good life" to establish the superiority of *bios*, which emerges, to put it simply, as a result of the subtraction of *zoē*. On the other hand, *zoē* serves as a fertile ground for the germination of *bios*, which means the cultivation of "a good life" entails a process of addition, of supplementing *zoē* with something more, rather than subtracting.

There are no other philosophers who are more capable of appreciating Aristotle's ambivalence more than Giorgio Agamben. In his understanding, the transformation of *zoē* into *bios* is neither simply a matter of subtraction, of shedding the undesirable burden of *zoē*, nor merely a matter of addition, of enhancing *zoē* by investing it with extra qualities. Involved in the making of political qualified life, to do justice to Aristotle, is a process of "an inclusive exclusion," of an inclusion "by means of an exclusion" (1998: 7). To unpack Agamben's dense argument, we may rephrase it in this way: man can be included in the polis and take on *bios* only on condition that he is cut in himself to exclude *zoē* from nowhere else than from himself. The originary exclusion is the cutting of *bios* itself, insofar as *zoē*, as Aristotle states, is there inside every *bios* and hence politicized, or as Agamben argues, insofar as there is always already an "implication" of *zoē* in *bios* (1998: 7). As the main site of political intervention of bio-power, *zoē* is always already politicized from the outset and comes to emerge as *bios*. To present itself as *bios*, however, *zoē* has to be excluded from *bios* qua politicized *zoē*, or to say the other way round, from politicized *zoē* qua *bios*; hence the self-mutilation of *bios* in a manner of speaking. From Aristotle onward till today's biopolitical regime, Western politics has never grounded the making of *bios* simply on investing



bare life with a wide array of civil rights (addition). Nor is it a standard practice to expel *zoē* from *bios* (subtraction). As ever, the constitution of *bios* instead gets underway at an interstitial moment when the upward traces of addition and downward trajectory of subtraction enter into indistinction. At the core of Western politics is a striking paradox that the politically “good life” is constituted by an originary self-cutting, a radical exclusion of *zoē* from the always already politicized *zoē* qua *bios*. Even more paradoxical is the fact that the bringing into existence of the politically qualified life coincides exactly with the production of uncanny remainders, or explicitly stated, of the *zoē* which persistently remains after it is banished from the always already politicized *zoē* qua *bios*. Hence the importance of the question as to why “Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion (which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life” (Agamben 1998: 7).

Given the originary cut, we may understand why bio-power is intertwined with thanato-power *ab initio*. If bio-power is exercised mainly to produce qualified form of life, to include and transform bare life into “a good life,” then, as Agamben clearly stated, it is produced and included by exclusion of the always already politicized *zoē* qua *bios*. Such is the repeated practice of bio-power that the operation of “inclusive exclusion,” as it turns out, makes for the intertwining of bio-power with thanato-power. A blind spot pertaining to Foucault’s genealogical description of bio-power usually lies in its partial grasp of this operation. Focusing solely on the process of addition, Foucault is like always too engrossed in describing how bio-power invests the body with desirable qualities and “molds” it into shape as proper and docile as intended. Judith Butler has suspected Foucault is inordinately alert to the “materialization” of the body, too inquisitive about the biopolitical “principle of intelligibility” which serves to govern the whole process of materialization and make the body intelligible. Such is the weakness of the Foucault’s genealogical

description. His description, Butler contends, almost pays no attention to the “dematerialized,” thus unintelligible matter which at once undergirds the symbolic inscription of bio-power on the body, and “*has to be excluded*” from the process of body’s materialization (33-35, emphasis original). Along the similar line of Agamben, Butler urges forward the simultaneous interplay of addition and subtraction involved in the process of materialization of the body. More importantly, she never ceases to remind us of the persistence presence of the “dematerialized” matter, of an uncanny substance which, as the leftovers of materialization, is testimony to the biopolitical operation of “inclusive exclusion.”

It is not off the mark to underline the biopolitical import of Butler’s “dematerialized” matter, for this biopolitically unintelligible substance is ontologically very similar to the uncanny *zoē* which is produced in the midst of its being expelled from the always already *zoē* qua *bios*. If in Western politics the production of “good life” comes to present itself as a process of “inclusive exclusion,” then it remains to be scrutinized what will be the morphology of its end product—i.e. the *zoē* which is excluded and thus dematerialized.

Agamben has pressed into his service the Christian idea of nudity to illustrate this fuzzy and well-nigh ungraspable *zoē*. Agamben is struck by the complexity of this idea when he finds that in Christianity nudity is not conceived of as a natural, material state we are born within, but rather as a dematerialized corporeality which is at once presupposed and created by sin. It is commonplace to say Adam and Eve feel ashamed of their nudity after their immaculate naked bodies are tainted by sin. Presupposed in such an opinion is the assumption that there are two naked bodies in Christianity—i.e. the paradisiacal body that Adam and Eve were born with, and then the post-lapsarian body that makes the first humans feel ashamed. However,

Agamben suspects that in Christianity there is no such thing as paradisiacal nudity in the rigorous sense of the word. The so-called paradisiacal body is not naked at all primarily because the bodies of the first couple are clothed with grace *ab initio*. Nudity cannot come into view and become a stigma, until the paradisiacal body is undressed because of sin (Agamben 2011: 55-60). Then, we come up against a standard Catch-22 situation. If sin creates nudity by undressing the paradisiacal body, there must be presupposed a body which is naked through and though, sinful in itself, and on which God puts his grace in order to cover up its shameful monstrosity. Here a time loop is very much in evidence: the shameful nudity, the nudity par excellence, is the product of denudation and a presupposition at the same time. It is at once *a posteriori* the creation of sin, and *a priori* a presupposition, without which not only the vestment of divine grace is unnecessary, but the first couple will have nothing to be ashamed of when they are undressed. Hence nudity as a presupposed “event”:

. . . nudity is not actually a state but rather an event. Inasmuch as it is the obscure presupposition of the addition of a piece of clothing or the sudden result of its removal—an unexpected gift or an unexpected loss—nudity belongs to time and history, not to being and form. We can therefore only experience nudity as a denudation and a baring, never as a form and a stable possession. At any rate, it is difficult to grasp and impossible to hold on to. (Agamben 2011: 65)

If we read Agamben’s discussion here into his interpretation of Aristotle, first we will find a clear parallel between the paradisiacal body and the always already politicized *zoē*. Just as the pre-lapsarian body is always already vested with God’s grace, so the *zoē* is right from the beginning implicated in *bio*, always already politicized by bio-power and invested with all the “qualities”

requisite for a qualified life. The worker's docile body which has been effectively "molded, reformed, corrected" is paradisiacal in this sense.

Nonetheless, this is not the creation story in its entirety—be it the creation of human body in general, or the worker's body in particular. To go one step further, we find the parallel between the paradisiacal body and the laborer's body not only illustrates the always-already-politicized *zoē*, but also deconstructs the creation myth of Christianity. It suggests to the effect that the immaculate body of the first couple is far from primordial, inasmuch as it is artificially enhanced and prosthetically empowered. The creation myth reconstructed by Agamben verges on travesty when he goes further to state that the primordial (or "presupposed" in his wording) naked body is actually created, or exposed, by "denudation and baring." The creation, thus said, amounts to a counter-productive production, a production qua destruction. The primordial naked body, as Agamben argues, "comes back to light whenever the caesura of sin once again divides nature and grace, nudity and clothing" (2011: 64). Creation is nothing more than stripping bare and cutting. It divides the always-already-politicized *zoē* qua *bios*, in order to exclude *zoē* from the entity in which *zoē* and *bios* is as mutually indifferent as "nature and grace, nudity and clothing" in the paradisiacal body.

More worthy of note at this point is the result of creation qua cutting. What is created by means of cutting? What does remain after the "caesura of sin" and what is the morphology of this remainder? The dividing in question has nothing to do with the breaking up of a twin into two. It is an unlikely scenario that the cutting could readily break down the worker's body into *zoē* and *bios*. Nor is it likely to divide the paradisiacal body in half and return "nature and grace" to their own original places. If *zoē* is always already politicized, and the paradisiacal body is always already vested with grace in the same vein, there does not exist other modalities of *zoē*. What remains after

the dividing of *zoē* qua *bios* and the denudation of the paradisiacal body, in other words, can't possibly be *zoē* or nature as such, that is, the naked *zoē* or bare nature prior to the investment of God's grace. If the primordial *zoē* or nature does exist, it is, as Agamben avers, nothing but a presupposition. In reality, the primordial naked body does not exist *before* the paradisiacal body is undressed, but is instead created by "the caesura of sin" *after* denudation. Or to speak more precisely, the primordial nudity is only a presupposition *after the fact* (of undressing). It steps into the view of the first humans always too late and too early—it comes later than itself as a presupposition, and earlier than itself as an "event." Agamben is right to a point in stating that "nudity belongs to time and history, not to being and form." The primordial naked body does not assume a form enclosed with contours as definite and "well defined" as the paradisiacal body. It is so primarily because of its non-coincidence with itself, its in-adequation to itself. As a remainder of the pre-lapsarian body at once before and after its denudation, the primordial naked body is the excess par excellence. Stripped bare and shame-arousing, the primordial naked body just lingers out there, as forsaken as the "existence deprived of life," "a flesh without body" (Esposito 134). In a similar vein, Agamben christens the primordial naked body as "naked corporeality" (2011:76), which is the dematerialized flesh as spectral and monstrous as an organ without body.

The "naked corporeality" gives "flesh" to the *zoē* that is internally excluded by bio-thanato power. If bio-power creates "good life" only by means of the self-cutting of *bios*, what the so-called power of life produces is nothing more than a dematerialized and amorphous remainder, the *zoē* which remains after its being excluded from the always already politicized *zoē* qua *bios*. That *zoē* in question is not *zoē* as such, but what remains after the denudation of the paradisiacal body—i.e. the spectral being stripped of grace, the monstrous

“existence deprived of life.” The birth of the internally excluded *zoē* marks the very moment when bio-power comes to be indistinguishable from thanato-power. The political hence finds its obverse in the ontological, insofar as the ontological predicament is closely bounded up with the full-scale operation of bio-thanatopower. Crystallized in the ontological oddity thus created, so to speak, is the suicidal driving force behind the operation of bio-power. The impulse of bio-power is self-annulling, in that it lends fuel to the ongoing creation of qualified lives, yet ends up churning out the uncanny *zoē* that persistently remains after the concomitant process of exclusion. In a bid to garnish the world with good lives, the backfiring apparatus of “inclusive exclusion” turns out to pack the world with monstrous leftovers. From the existence of de-corporalized *zoē*, it is readily to be extrapolated the fundamental failure of bio-power.

Jean Luc-Nancy has added a spatial note to the *zoē* that comes into existence at once too early and too late, proposing the idea of “being-there” to trace the temporalizing-cum-spacing of its monstrosity. “There” refers to none of any definite place, for it is “not to be designated at all” (Nancy 46). Instead, the vacuous “there” opens up “a spacing,” which is by implication devoid of any set of plain coordinates requisite for the exact positioning of being (47). Being-there is thus the being of a “naked” life that is “thrown” into “a spacing,” radically bared of “its attributes” and “its very essence” (46-47). The “stubborn beast flesh” that gradually “creep[s] back” to the body of the Beast People (*Moreau*, 77-78), as I will argue in the next section, is the most apt epitome of the being-there of Moreau’s spectral creatures. In *The Time Machine*, Wells fantasizes that the Time Traveller becomes as “attenuated” as “a vapour” when the machine is proceeding at breakneck speed (20). Enlisted to speed up the progress of evolution, Moreau’s life-making apparatus is for this reason an anthropo-genetic counterpart of the time

machine. What is produced in Moreau's "humanizing process," in a similar vein, is nothing more than the "attenuated" body of the Beast People, the "stubborn beast flesh" that persistently comes back to warp their corporal shape. Wells has dropped a hint in this direction when we are told the Beast People are banished from the "House of Pain" as soon as the "beast in them" is detected, and just "go" unaided to find shelters on their own (Moreau, 78-79). Completely left to their own devices, Beast People are thus expelled to the dens that is "not to be designated" for them, i.e., to "there" the vacuity of which displaces all the reassuring "essence" and attenuates their being by spacing. Lingering in the wilderness, the Beast People are just being there qua internally excluded *zoē*, qua the "stubborn beast flesh" twisted out of beatific shape. Being stripped bare, the Beast People brings into view the being-there of their being, which spells out the ontological predicament they undergo when Moreau's biopolitical apparatus is in full-scale operation.

### III. The Fated Failure of Bio-Power as Vivi-Section: The "stubborn beast flesh" of Non-Beast People

As the overcoat of *creatio ex nihilo* is turned inside out, what faces out is the creation of what remains. The proliferation of being-there is the denouement of the biopolitical creation myth, rather than the worst-case scenario that bio-thanato-power might come up against. Viewing from this perspective, little wonder that Moreau's biopolitical project of human engineering is doomed to fail. Neither is it off the mark to say that the small-scale failure of Moreau's "humanizing process" is a capsule containing the large-scale failure of bio-power. Agamben is very explicit about counter-productiveness of bio-power when he avers that the installation of "the

anthropological machine of the moderns” ends up not so much in humanizing the animal as in animalizing the human: “it functions by excluding as not (yet) human an already human being from itself, that is, by animalizing the human” (2004: 37). It is the same mechanisms of “inclusive exclusion” that are up and running in Moreau’s “humanizing process,” the end-point of which, not surprisingly, sees the churning out of the “not (yet) human,” the “being-there” of “the stubborn beast flesh” that gives devastating twists to the morphology of Beast People. Hence the biopolitical import of the “reversion” of Beast People back to animals. As a sure sign of Moreau’s failure, the discernible “reversion” clearly traces the fated reversal of the humanization of the animals into the animalization of the human, and correlatively the mutual implication of bio-power and thanato-power. The “stubborn beast flesh,” I will argue, is hence the “naked corporeality” at once engendered by the anthropological machine and bearing testimony to its malfunctioning.

On the surface, the failure of Moreau’s elaborate grafting surgery seems to arise from technical difficulties. There are some body parts, Moreau admits, which are not ready to “grafting and reshaping,” such as claws, hands, brain, and last but not least, “somewhere . . . in the seat of the emotions” (*Moreau*, 78). But the hurdles turn out to be so overwhelmingly tremendous that the technical problems become doom: “always I fall short of the things I dream” (*Moreau*, 78). However resourceful and arrogant he may be, Moreau has to admit defeat when he finds the animal traits he has taken pains to eliminate start sneaking back to the Beast Folk one after another: “somehow the things drift back again, the stubborn beast flesh grows, day by day, back again. . . .” (*Moreau*, 77). Prendick provides bountiful of evidence to prove the truthfulness of the “reversion of the beast folk,” among which we see the “losing shape and import” of language, walking on all fours, “drinking by suction,” and so on and so forth (*Moreau*, 122-23). If Moreau has been dreaming of



accelerating evolution by vivisection and grafting surgery, the relentless counter-evolution as is shown by the striking “reversion” bursts his bubble.

As the animalization of the human comes to challenge his project of humanizing the animal, Moreau is doomed to take a humiliating beating in every showdown. Prendick has attributed all the tragic failure to “a blind fate” (Moreau, 96). The attribution is absolutely justifiable, given the fate is described as “a vast pitiless mechanism” (Moreau, 96) that operates along the same line with the life-making apparatus of bio-power. Just as bio-power excludes *zoē* from the always-already-politicized *zoē qua bios*, so that the “blind fate” wields its relentless power by “cut[ting] and shap[ing] the fabric of existence” (Moreau, 96). In other words, there is no mysterious overlord pulling the strings. It is the bio-political synchronization of cutting and shaping that leads Moreau and his victims to their eventual downfall. More worthy of note is the fact that the biopolitical fate falls to its own doom. For all its clutches, the rip it causes in “the fabric of existence” it weaves predestines the whole attire of life to fall apart at seams. The “stubborn beast flesh” is the threadbare rags that remain, persistently staying “there” to sound the knell for the malfunctioning bio-power.

In fact, the repulsive morphology of Beast People has shown the sign of the failure of Moreau’s biopolitical enterprise, way before the irreversible degeneration befalling his creatures. At first glance, the techniques involved in Moreau grafting surgery are the technologies of bio-power as defined by Foucault. When he recalls his early foray, Moreau thus describes how he puts a huge amount of work into changing a gorilla: “All the week, night and day, I moulded him. With him it was chiefly the brain that needed moulding; much had to be added, much changed” (Moreau, 76). Moreau’s remembrance of his toil repeats Foucault’s genealogical description of bio-techniques almost verbatim. To humanize the animal entails “moulding” and adding human traits

to the animal life. Involved in this undertaking is noticeably a process of addition, of shaping *zoē* into *bios* by investing it with every needed aptitude, with a view to forming a paradisiacal body in the end.

However, the eerie hybridity of Beast People marks the point where Wells and Foucault diverge. Moreau's "humanizing process" is presented in this novella as the Aristotelian moment of his experimental physiology, in a bid to travesty the biopolitical dream of human engineering. Revealed in the hybridity of the Beast People is the first peculiarity of biopolitical ontology: i.e. *zoē* (animal life) is always already implicated in *bios* (good human life), so that *zoē* is the always-already-politicized *zoē* qua *bios*. Wells pushes this Aristotelian moment to its logical end, satanically turning the product of the anthropological machine from the qualified good life, as is intended by bio-power, into grotesque hybrids. Is there any other figure that is more suitable to embody the always-already-politicized *zoē* quo *bios* than Beast (*zoē*) People (*bios*)? Given the deformed life is considered as the most apt figure for the good form of life, it makes little sense to distinguish human beings as such from Beast People. A fundamental truth revealed in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* is that, be it the male citizens who are entitled to human intercourse in the polis, or those well-disciplined bodies on the shop floor, they are all Beast People, as long as they are human beings. Little wonder Prendick finds it hard to differentiate "one of the bovine creatures who worked the launch treading heavily through the undergrowth," from "some really human yokel trudging home from his mechanical labours" (*Moreau*, 84). It comes as still less of a surprise that he, when back in London, finds it even harder to convince himself that "the men and women I met were not also another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls" (*Moreau*, 130). Prendick's cynicism bespeaks not so much a tribute to Gulliver as his appreciation of Aristotle, whose political discourse,

once read through the Agambenian optic, has already anticipated the upending of the human engineering project and prefigured the fated failure of bio-power.

Wells' critique of bio-power will lose much of its trenchancy if he does not underline the deliberate infliction of excruciating pain imposed upon Beast People. The process of addition, as I've argued, does not exhaust the operation of anthropological machine in its entirety. Wells seems to be fully cognizant of the complexities inherent in the biopolitical project of human engineering. The infliction of pain, which corresponds to the process of subtraction I discuss above, is then thrown in for good measure to account for why the biopolitical project falls through. The citizens in the polis or the able laborers on the shop floor would find their *doppelgänger* in Beast People, primarily because the humanity and animality in them are not just being added up and melded into a pleasing unity. Beast people is not a hybrid species which is at once human *and* animal, but neither human nor animal. As soon as Moreau's scalpel incision leaves its first painful mark on his victims, the fabric of Beast People thus created is ripped off. Alongside the self-declared process of addition, the extreme measures of subtraction gets underway at the same time, which are generally intended to search, isolate, and then exclude, or in Wells' phraseology, "burn out" the undesirable animal traits from the emerging qualified life. Thus created, Beast people are reduced to the mere existence deprived of the good form of human life, insofar as the incision amounts to the mutilation of *zoē qua bios*. Neither are Beast People animals any longer, in that the incision scar is testimony to the exclusion of *zoē* from within their being. Beast People hence are neither human nor animal, and that's why they are born with repulsive looks. The infliction of pain thus brings the biting critique inherent in the hideous make-up of Beast People to its completion. The pain requisite for the making of *bios* turns the benignity of bio-power inside out and shows us its horrid front. At this point in time, a joint venture of

bio-power and thanato-power rears its head, so much so that the well-meant creation of *bios* ends up becoming the ruthless chopping of the *bios* in the making. In view of this, it is for good reasons to take vivisection literally: vivi-section, the “life-dissecting.” Thus understood, vivi-section turns out to be a metaphor for the mutual implication of bio-power and thanato-power. Vivi-section, which involves a set of elaborate medical techniques for the creation of a qualified life, is at the same time a cutting which slits life open with a view to isolating and banishing *zoē* (animal traits) from the always already politicized *zoē qua bios* (the qualified life in the making).

Wells' polemics against bio-power do not leave off at this point. Moreau's failure is twice assured when the reversion of the Beast Folk is more and more perceptible. If the cross contamination of the power of life and power over life assures the first defeat of bio-power, it is then in the grip of another beating: the *zoē* it expels turns monstrous and persistently returns to harass and challenge the ordering it imposes on life. “The stubborn beast flesh” growing back on the Beast People is exactly the *zoē* which is excluded from the always already politicized *zoē qua bios*, the “naked corporeality” which cannot be explained, defined, and accounted for by the biopolitical grid of intelligibility. As animality is found waxing and humanity waning, the regrettable reversion of the Beast Folk is pretty conclusive. The reversion in question is actually an act of denudation that strips the Beast Folk of one human trait after another, and the animality they gradually regress toward is in turn created by this “event.” It is the increasing loss of humanity that makes for the increasing gain of animality, not vice versa. It cannot be argued the other way round because every sign of reversion is established with the “Law” as the ultimate point of reference. “Not to go on all-Fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men?” the Law thus dictates (Moreau, 59), so any Beast Man who is found “running on toes and finger-tips, and quite unable to recover the vertical attitude” is

diagnosed with reversion beyond any doubt (*Moreau*, 123). Every demeanor dictated by animality is interpreted as a deviation from the course of humanity, so that every revelation of animality is rendered possible by the deprivation of human traits. There is no such thing as unalloyed animality to go back to, precisely because it is the dwindling of humanity that brings animality into view. Thus created, animality is not a “state,” but a dynamic process in the midst of which “the stubborn beast flesh grows,” as if the flesh were freshly sprouted. By way of illustration, I quote the following passage at full length to see how the flesh of the Beast People develops *shortly after* they are denuded of “human semblance:”

It would be impossible to detail every step of the lapsing of these monsters; to tell how, day by day, the human semblance left them; how they gave up bandaging and wrappings, abandoned at last every stitch of clothing; how the hair began to spread over the exposed limbs; how their foreheads fell away and their face projected; how the quasi-human intimacy I had permitted myself with some of them in the first month of my loneliness became a horror to recall. (*Moreau*, 123)

Created in the midst of denudation, the gradually emerging flesh comes to trap the Beast Folk in a process that is even more liminal than the beast-man state. When Moreau’s scalpel incision leaves its first mark on his handpicked beasts, they become beast-men, coming into existence as a hybrid species which is neither human nor animal. Hideous though they may look, there is no shortage of the fleeting moments of “quasi-intimacy” in which Prendick may find solace during his lonely sojourn in the island. This is not to aver that Beast People are unambiguously human before the signs of reversion are in evidence. Nothing is further from his mind than the harmonious union of animality and humanity, *zōē* and *bios* in *Beast Men* when they are in his

company. The intimacy he then is luxuriating in is way more apparent than real. After all, it's "quasi-intimacy." The repulsiveness of the always-already-politicized *zoē qua bios* becomes tolerable, simply because "the stubborn beast flesh" just stepping into his view is more horrifying than ever.

If Beast People are neither human nor animal, the flesh just rapidly sprouting from their bodies transfigures them into non-Beast People, so to speak. The process involved in the making of the non-Beast People has nothing to do with "making a positive by multiplying two negatives." If Beast People is as far from being human as from being animal, non-Beast People are not the Beast People turning positive, either becoming Beasts or People as such. It goes without saying that non-Beast People can't possibly be human, insofar as their hideous existence is noticeably further removed from the category of humanity. Neither do the degenerating Beast People become ordinary animals, because "these creatures," as Prendick observes, "did not decline into such beasts as the reader has seen in zoological gardens" (*Moreau*, 124). In consequence, the being of non-Beast People are relegated to an ontological double bind, assuming an existence that is all the more liminal than the interstitial being of Beast People. If Beast People are non-human-and-non-animal, "the stubborn animal flesh" makes these pathetic degenerating creatures become non-non-human-and-non-non-animal. My self-coined epithet is pretty confusing, so is the being of non-Beast People. Such bearers of "the stubborn animal flesh" are unlikely to be rendered "intelligible" by any existent order. As the being exceeding the perimeters of human, animal, and Beast People, non-Beast People are the existence of excess par excellence. Getting stuck in the interstice of interstices, in the second-order "rip in the fabric" of being so to speak, the degenerating Beast Folk thus enters into a relentless process of absolute spacing. They are just there, being there *qua* being-there, and lack any attribute serviceable to pin them down; hence the "existence

deprived of life.” Due to the ongoing process of reversion, non-Beast People are deprived of the body which may gives them definite “form”; hence “the flesh without body.” The being-there of being thus finds its clearest illustration in non-Beast People. As with Adam and Eve who feel ashamed of their “naked corporeality,” non-Beast People in the circumstances have never been at ease with their bare flesh:

It is a curious thing, by the by, for which I am quite unable to account, that these weird creatures—the females I mean—had in the earlier days of my stay an instinctive sense of their own repulsive clumsiness, and displayed in consequence a more than human regard for the decencies and decorum of external costume. (*Moreau*, 84)

The “naked corporeality” of non-Beast People deals a deadly blow to bio-power, even more deadly than ever. Their ontological double bind does not simply unveil the cross contamination of bio-power and thanato-power. With the being qua spacing, they even go beyond the complicity in question and exceed altogether the perimeters of the biopolitical “order of things.” As a result, non-Beast People end up becoming the most dematerialized, unintelligible, and fuzzy existence which readily slips through the fingers of bio-power. Dumbstruck by what it creates, bio-thanatopower is at its wit’s end and suffering its all-time worst defeat. Such is the power of the “naked corporeality” of non-Beast People that it even widens the tear in the fabric of biopolitical network, enlarging it into a fault line which threatens to break the anthropological machine and suspend the operation of bio-power.

#### IV. Epilogue: The (Dis) Position of Moreau

Then, what does Moreau stand in the circuits of bio-power? As I have argued above, no matter whether it is Moreau or Prendick, pro-vivisectionists or anti-vivisectionists, all of them are standing on their respective nodal points spreading across the same biopolitical network. The only yet crucial difference is that Moreau, in comparison to Prendick, is a far more active administrator of the biopolitical dictates. Such is his immense passion for experimental physiology that he is the only person in the novella who can carry the dictates of bio-power to extremes, and follow them to their logical end. Who else can best serve as a synecdoche for the derailed bio-power but a deranged medical scientist? Who is more ready to turn bio-power inside out and shows us its bloody lining than an ahead-of-time vanguard?

For all his function as a mouthpiece for bio-power, it hardly escapes notice that Moreau is also a victim as “attenuated” as his creatures. Given Moreau is among the victim of the “blind fate” (*Moreau*, 96), it comes as no surprise that the evidence pointing in this direction can multiply. For example, just as Beast People is banished to dens that are not “designated” in advance to be their habitats, so that Moreau are expelled to an uncharted island that “hasn’t go a name” (*Moreau*, 12). After Moreau dies, Prendick takes over his “vacant scepter,” which serves obviously in this context as a metonymy for an heirless sovereign (*Moreau*, 117). In many places, Beast People are also described as “vacant” as Moreau’s precarious rule, to the extent their “offspring” is either engineered to “serve for meat,” or simply devoured by Beast People themselves (*Moreau*, 85). Still another example is the way Moreau is slaughtered, which makes him virtually a carbon copy of the brutes he has vivisected:

He lay face downward in a trampled space in a can-brake. One hand



was almost severed at the wrist, and his silvery hair was dabbled in blood. His head had been battered in by the fetters of the puma. The broken canes beneath him were smeared with blood. (*Moreau*, 105)

Being twisted out of shape, Moreau's body is battered into a mass as amorphous as "the stubborn beast flesh." As he lies out there with his face "downward" and his blood soaking the trampled cane-brake, the close proximity of his flesh and the earth is strongly suggestive of the "spacing" of his being, of the irreparable tear in "the fabric of existence."

In fact, way before he is crushed into a mass of "flesh without body," the being-there of Moreau's existence is already yet indiscernibly being described as "the existence deprived of life." When finishing expounding his theory with trenchancy and unrestrained passion, Moreau gets up to press Prendick to express his view. Dumbfounded and speechless, Prendick just sits there without making a sound, albeit because he is deeply struck by the placidity of Moreau's complexion and demeanor (*Moreau*, 79). With repeated emphasis on Moreau's composure—"calm eyes," "serenity," "his set tranquility"—and snow-white looks—"white-faced, white-haired"—Prendick tries leading his readers to believe the "magnificent build" looming large in front of him is a lifeless yet beautiful saint statue carved in a serene posture (*Moreau*, 79). Emerging as such a holy icon, Moreau is the "existence deprived of life" par excellence. He appears lifeless in the circumstances, precisely because he is larger and smaller than life at the same time. On the one hand, he is too saintly to be himself qua a pitiless scientist. On the other hand, since Moreau is such an avid researcher who "might have passed muster among a hundred other comfortable old gentlemen" (*Moreau*, 79), he is short on the prestige he deserves and appears far less prominent than he is supposed to be. Now too less, now too much—Moreau is in any case presented as nothing but the

self-nullifying non-coincidence. As an existence qua excess, Moreau's being is predicated on exceeding the established perimeters of his own life. Disowned by his own life so to speak, his being is cut across by a constitutive spacing and hence appears as dematerialized as non-Beast People. Moreau thus emerges at that point as another *zoē* that is excluded from the *zoē* qua *bios*, another remainder that can't possibly be settled on any grid of intelligibility. For this reason, it comes as little surprise that Moreau's extraordinary composure chills Prendick to the bone: "Then I shivered" (*Moreau*, 79). Stunned by the uncanny junction of sublimity and ignominy, Prendick must have gone pale with as much fright as when he runs into the degenerating Beast People.

All in all, Moreau is concurrently an administrator of bio-power and its victim, a sovereign and a member of non-Beast People. He stands firmly on a nodal point of the biopolitical network, and fashions himself as an instrumental cog in "the anthropological machine of the moderns." On the other hand, he is also the "flesh without body" which either stubbornly defies assimilation, or even proves to be a deadly hazard to the operation of biopolitical apparatuses. As a staunch adherent and a monstrous stranger to the bio-power at the same time, Moreau is another victim of "inclusive exclusion," ripped apart by his unlocalizable position in the circuit of bio-power. Inside and outside at the same time, Moreau (dis) positions himself on the biopolitical atlas. In other words, he is just being there qua being-there.

Then, it remains to be seen whether Moreau's ontologico-political (dis) position is a helpless gesture of resignation, or the gauntlet thrown down to the face of bio-power. The tragic end of Moreau seems to suggest it is more a case of the former. Moreau is battered into a lump of beast flesh by the puma he has vivisected. Such a sad ending adds a fatalist note to Moreau's (dis) position, encapsulating how a sovereign is consigned to the beast status by the biopolitical "Fate," and how a bio-engineer is entrapped and minced in the

anthropological machin. The gashed flesh of Moreau, in other words, speaks volumes about the untouchable mightiness of bio-thanato-power. As its operation is unhindered, every life within its reach is rendered precarious. Neither is there any measure to take when the predestined degeneration of good life into inconsequential being-there is irreversibly in progress.

Bio-thanato-power is truly pitiless, to be sure, but there is no lack of awkward moments in its operation. As I've discussed above, the anthropological machine would break down as it churns out the flesh that is too monstrous to be set in place in the biopolitical grid of intelligibility. Moreau's (dis) position marks the very embarrassing moment when bio-power comes up against its intractable excess and finds nothing can be done about it. Prendick's "shiver" arises as the corollary of the ultimate failure of bio-power to grasp, domesticate or press its excess into its service. To take a truly polemical stance against the inexorable bio-power, it is yet to be seen how the power of horror thus evoked can be mobilized to cause fatal failure to the operation of biopolitical apparatuses. It's a pity to find Wells' novella holds back before bringing the critical import of Moreau's (dis) position to its logical end. It is all thanks to Wells' ingenuity that the cross contamination of bio-power and thanato-power is brought into sharp relief. The ontological peculiarity consequent upon the operation of bio-thanato-power also attains its most crystalline epitomization in the figure of degeneration Beast People. Even more worthy of note and admiration is the presentation of Moreau's ontologico-political (dis) position, which actually hints at the much-sought-after possibility of breaking loose from the grip of bio-power. Despite all the revealing insight into the biopolitical mechanisms, Wells stops short, showing no intention of going further to scrutinize the radical front of Moreau's (dis)-position. This is not meant as a scathing comment on Wells' novella. On the contrary, any polemic against bio-thanato-power should start where Wells

leaves off. Moreau's (dis) position and the ontological predicament of the non-Beast People should be taken as the point of departure, and brought to bear in a uphill effort to release life from the restraints of bio-power.

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Being-There: The Ontology of Biopower in  
H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau*

**Abstract**

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In the epoch of biopolitical administration, it is noticeable that ontology has regained currency in the fields of literary, philosophical, and political studies. The “ontological turn” is an emergent trend of reorienting thinking toward the devastating yet indiscernible effect of bio-power on life. How does bio-power goes hand-in-hand with thanato-power to bring constraints to bear on life? How does bio-thanato-power engineer life? What is the ontological predicament consequent on the unfortunate marriage of bio-power and thanato-power? Is the predicament in question a sign of doom, or a beacon of hope? This article aims to read H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) as a philosophical novella that raises, analyzes, and answers these questions with stunning exactitude. From Moreau's grafting surgery to the uncanny existence of the degenerating Beast People, Wells traces clearly how bio-power and thanato-power dovetail in the biopolitical effort to produce the “stubborn beast flesh,” rather than the “well defined” form of qualified life as originally intended. For all the precise grasp of these core problems, this novella eventually fails to bring the radical observation to its logical end. It still remains to be seen if the “being-there” of the “stubborn beast flesh,” as Wells suggests, adds up only to a foreboding reminder of the precariousness of life.

► Key Words: H. G. Wells, Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault, bio-power, ontology, non-Beast People

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