

THE ECLIPSE OF THE PROMETHEAN DREAM: NEOLIBERALISM IMPERSONAL SYSTEMS AND THE PRODUCTION OF DISPOSABLE LIVES

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Abstract: *This paper examines the eclipse of the Promethean dream under neoliberalism political onslaught, which mark the beginning of a new era where the politics of collective agency and social self-transformation is replaced by an anonymous, self-reproducing, and impersonal system. While the concept of political Prometheanism is based on the idea of the subject who is capable of appropriating power, knowledge, and responsibility to transform social conditions, the neoliberal mindset judges concepts revolving around the state, society, and the subject by considering as benchmarks the so-called self-regulated market-pattern. In this system, the will to politics is progressively eliminated, and the logic of decision-making is replaced by the algorithmic, technocratic, and economic automatism, beyond the control of democracy. The analysis offered is that this replacement is accompanied by a deep process of desubjectivation, where the subject is no longer defined as a political subject but as a market subject, a bearer of risks, or a life that is surplus to the system. This system creates 'disposable lives', which are not produced as a contingent or secondary effect but are the very condition of the reproduction of the system, serving as the expendable materials of a system that privileges efficiency, competitiveness, and profitability over social cohesion and the construction of meaning. By inscribing the logic of neoliberalism within a broader biopolitical and political-theoretical framework, the study suggests that the eclipse of the Promethean dream is not only the crisis of a politics of imagination but a crisis of power, where impersonal systems replace both state and popular power.*

Keywords:

Prometheanism, Neoliberalism, Governance, Depoliticization, Precarity

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Introduction

Contemporary political regimes are marked by an increasingly paradoxical character insofar as power is both ubiquitous and elusive. On the one hand, decisions that shape social reality penetrate ever deeper into economic, institutional, and intimate spheres of social life. On the other hand, these decisions lead to technical necessity rather than political choice. The present paper will suggest that this transformation can be understood in terms of the decline of what will be termed here the Promethean dream: a political imaginary grounded in the idea that social reality is contingent, contestable, and open to conscious collective transformation.¹ The decline of this imaginary signals an important change in the vocabulary of the political, which reshapes the relationship between power, subjectivity, and social reality in the context of neoliberal regimes. The Promethean dream, as conceptualised by Theodosiadis, does not refer to any particular historical doctrine or political project, but specifically to an horizon of intelligibility that informed civic republicanism, grounded in the idea of political participation.² Its fundamental premise rests on the belief that collective action can shape history and transform unjust or arbitrary social relations.³ Apart from championing popular sovereignty, this imaginary underscores the importance of social rights⁴ and political responsibility that assumed the visibility and contestability of power relations.⁵ Its decline or disarticulation, therefore, should not be understood as an ideological or conceptual shift alone; it also an alteration in the conditions under which politics becomes thinkable as such.

Within these conditions, the political is further displaced from the arenas of collective deliberation and contestation to the domains of expertise, management, and procedural rationality. This shift best describes neoliberal politics, which Theodosiadis argued, are fundamentally anti-Promethean. In his view, ‘anti-Prometheanism’ stands for the refusal to

¹ M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, pp.3-4

² M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, pp.4-6. As Theodosiadis puts it, ‘[t]he name ‘Prometheus’ in Greek derives from the verb *promethévein* (‘προμηθεύειν’), that is, to supply, to diffuse, to disseminate, and to provide’ the power and knowledge of politics to the common people (5).

³ M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, chapter 3.

⁴ M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, p.24; Hickman, J. 2017. *Black Prometheus: Race and Radicalism in the Age of Atlantic Slavery*, New York: Oxford University Press, p.24, p.75.

⁵ M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, pp.100-1.

transfer the ownership of a political system the ‘common people’. Hence, it remains the property of a small elite.⁶ Decisions that directly affect social reproduction, security, and vulnerability are recast in terms of efficiency, sustainability, or optimization. In this way, the scope of contestation of these decisions as political decisions is diminished. Political power is no longer exercised based on justification in terms of norms; rather it is defined by terms of necessity, rationality, and constraint of the system itself, all of which serve to present existing conditions as necessary rather than as historically contingent and politically constituted.

This transformation also affects the temporal and emotional aspects of political life. Uncertainty becomes a normal state to be endured and managed, and stability means the capacity of a system and a subject to remain functional under constant pressure. In these circumstances, political imagination is limited by a mentality that prioritizes resilience over transformation and adaptability over critique, making it difficult to imagine other forms of society in a believable way.

As noted earlier, this displacement occurs within the framework of the neoliberal governmentality, which is characterized as a form of power exercised not by giving orders but by arranging conduct, norms, and opportunities. Rather than dismissing agency outright, neoliberal governance seeks to rearticulate agency in an adaptable and individualized form, linking freedom with self-management, risk absorption, and competitiveness.⁷ Political problems are converted into technical problems, social conflicts into performance problems, and collective obligations into individual obligations. Antagonism is, thus, negated but not addressed within the framework of power exercised through impersonal mechanisms that are undemocratically unchallengeable.

A central claim of the paper is that the production of disposable lives constitutes a structural effect of this transformation. Disposability does not denote mere marginality or exclusion, but a mode of governance through which certain lives are rendered socially non-essential and politically mute. Through practices of conditional inclusion, administrative delay, and managed abandonment, neoliberal rationality differentiates between lives that merit investment and those that can be tolerated only as residual. This process unfolds not at the margins of governance, but at its core, revealing how depoliticization and exclusion are mutually reinforcing.

⁶ M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, p.14, p.25.

⁷ This very logic is echoed in the writings of Hayek, widely considered one of the main founders of economic liberalism (or neoliberalism). Cf. Hayek, F. A. 1980. *Individualism and Economic Order*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.21; cf. Ibled, C., 2023, ‘The “Optimistic Cruelty” of Hayek’s Market Order: Neoliberalism, Pain and Social Selection’, *Theory, Culture & Society*.

Methodologically, the paper advances a conceptual and critical analysis situated within political philosophy and critical social theory. It does not seek to offer an empirical account of specific policy regimes, but to elucidate the rationalities and mechanisms through which contemporary forms of power reconfigure political life. The argument unfolds in three stages.

The first section reconstructs the Promethean dream as a political imaginary, emphasizing its conception of agency, conflict, and contingency. The second examines the transition from Promethean agency to neoliberal governmentality, focusing on the reorganization of power, subjectivity, and governance. The third analyzes the production of disposable lives as the culminating expression of this rationality, highlighting the mechanisms through which exclusion is normalized and abandonment institutionalized. By foregrounding the eclipse of the Promethean dream, the paper attempts to contribute to ongoing debates on depoliticization, neoliberalisation, and the transformation of political agency. Its central contention is that the erosion of this imaginary signals not the end of politics, but its reconfiguration in forms that deny their own political character. Understanding this shift is a necessary step toward critically interrogating a political order that presents adaptation as virtue, disposability as inevitability, and governance as neutral administration. The task, therefore, is not to restore a lost political form, but to reclaim the conditions under which collective agency and political responsibility can once again become thinkable.

The Promethean Dream as a Political Imaginary

The Promethean dream may be thought of as a political imagination that is rooted in the idea that through the mediation of reason, struggle, and institutional channels, collective agency is able to consciously intervene and transform the conditions of social existence. In particular, Theodosiadis associates this ‘Promethean imaginary’ with Hannah Arendt’s idea of *action*, which also revolves around the Aristotle’s concept of practical wisdom, which he understands as being synonymous with dialogue (public deliberation).⁸ Prometheus is not merely a mythological metaphor for the modern imagination; the concept of Prometheanism is rooted in a historically situated imagination of the political that does not bestow the ‘ownership’ of the political system to groups that make decisions without acknowledging the demands of society.⁹ A ‘Promethean’ political order appropriates and exercises power through agents who recognize themselves as the authors of their social world. At the core of the idea of the Promethean

⁸ M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, p.35

⁹ M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, p.25.

dream is the idea of a robust sense of the political will to act, to intervene, and to emancipate through the idea that history is not predetermined or self-regulating but is open to human intervention. The state is not seen as an administrative entity but as an arena through which the aspirations of the collectivity could be voiced and institutionalized, and social conflict was seen as a constitutive rather than pathological feature of the political.¹⁰

Within this horizon, power is not thought of primarily as a neutral capacity for coordination or optimization. Instead, it acts as a relational and conflictive force, moving through institutions, discourses, and practices, always in a state of potential reversal. Political rationality does not seek the elimination of disorder, but rather recognizes conflict as a constituent moment of social transformation, through which subjects are constituted, solidarities are articulated, and new norms are instituted. Hence, the Promethean imaginary therefore supports a vision of politics as an open field of forces, in which domination and emancipation are never predetermined results, but rather contingent effects of conflict. Rather than hiding power behind a veil of technical or objective efficiency, it makes power visible as a force exercised by concrete actors, subject to collective judgment.¹¹ Simultaneously, it posits a specific relationship between knowledge and power. Knowledge is not understood as an objective, disinterested representation of reality, but rather as one deeply embedded in political practices. Different understandings of social issues such as poverty, inequality, exploitation, and exclusion are inextricably linked to different understandings of how society should be organised. Thus, the construction of knowledge is associated with a specific capacity to name injustice, to problematize reality, and to legitimize practices aimed at transforming it. The Promethean perspective is unwilling to naturalize social practices, to understand them as necessary, but rather as historical, contingent, and transformable. What is perceived as necessary can always be re-read as a product of history.¹²

The Promethean dream, critically, framed both the government of subjects and the way they governed themselves. Political subjectivity is constituted through participation, conflict, and exposure to collective decision-making, not merely through adaptation to existing norms. The individual is not merely a holder of interests or functions; they are a member of a political body whose acts had ethical and historical implications. Responsibility, thus, is not reduced to the individual's own management but

¹⁰ M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024, p.67-9.

¹¹ K. Conboy, *Being Promethean*, *European Journal of Information Systems* 28 (2) pp. 119–25. 2019

¹² C. Dougherty, *Prometheus*. London: Routledge Press.2006

is extended to the collective consequences of political decisions. The risks produced by political acts are not disavowed nor delegated to anonymous forces; they are recognised as the cost of freedom and self-determination. In this manner, the Promethean imaginary articulates a form of subject formation, which is engaged rather than compliant and optimizing.¹³

Hence, the political reveals itself as a precarious but irreducible space in which social norms, configurations, and modes of life are subject to challenge and reconfiguration. Governance is seen as impossible without the ceaseless problematization of its own limits, while authority is never fully secured through appeals to expertise. The Promethean dream thus acts as a corrective to the forces of depoliticization that seek to represent social relationships as matters of technical adjustment, economic necessity, or systemic constraint. The importance of the Promethean dream lies not in the actual success of any particular political project but in the space of intelligibility that it enables. It is a space of collective agency, a space of action,¹⁴ that is of contestable power, and social life susceptible to alterity. It is this space that the following analysis reveals is lost in the face of power that is diffuse, impersonal, and self-legitimizing, substituting political contest for the need for adaptive conformity.¹⁵

In this new form of arrangement, power is no longer seen to impose itself as a force that either prohibits or orders, but rather as a set of regulatory environments that shape behavior by determining possibilities, providing incentives, and managing risks. Power is no longer seen to impose itself on the individual by confronting them with obvious coercion, but by determining the field within which choices appear to make sense, are rational, or even possible. Political issues are increasingly being reframed in terms of questions of optimization, resilience, and performance, and opposition is being understood in terms of maladaptation and inefficiency rather than legitimate opposition to norms. In such a situation, governance is no longer being understood in terms of clear and deliberate decision-making, but rather in terms of the continuous modulation of the conditions within which individuals are expected to adapt to the imperatives of the system.¹⁶

The change also means a re-working of how social problems are named and dealt with. Problems judged in terms of injustice, domination, or exclusion

¹³ N. Tsampazis, "The Natural Gift in Rousseau's Politics and Educational Theory". *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 15. pp. 139-52.2024

¹⁴ This view of action as being synonymous with the contestation of power is advanced by Hannah Arendt. Cf. Arendt, H. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1998.

¹⁵ D. Asimiadis, "The Witches of the Reich: The Dimension of Female Mysticism in Nazi Ideology". *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 17 (1), pp.271-94. 2025

¹⁶ P. Ågerfalk, *Getting Pragmatic*. *European Journal of Information Systems*. 19. pp.251-256. 2010

are approached as if they reflect a deficit in skills, flexibility, or competitiveness. Structural inequalities are made less transparent through a focus on individuals' potential for adjustment, and there is a shift in accountability, away from institutions and towards individuals. The politics of inequality is replaced by a politics of management, in which success and failure are described in terms of individuals' adaptability rather than in terms of political struggle. The scope for intervention is diminished, and the possibility of naming some things as politically unacceptable is diminished in turn.¹⁷

Adaptive conformity produces a subjectivity that is called upon to assess and adjust its own performance in relation to shifting requirements. Self-regulation is reconceptualized as an endless response to external imperatives of market conditions, whose ultimate concern is the maximisation and expansion of capital.¹⁸ In this context, performance indicators, and risk analysis that are perceived as objective limitations rather than political regulations. The capacity to dissent and critique is not abolished, but subtly redirected to self-optimization techniques that prompt the subject to read structural imperatives as challenges to be managed through the prism of personal change. Compliance is secured not by the suppression of agency, but by its redirection to forms of activity that reproduce the status quo.¹⁹

The rationality at issue works to dissolve the bases for sustained political contestation precisely by fragmenting the shared experience of exposure and risk. As security is individualized and normalized, solidarities are difficult to sustain in anything but episodic forms. Social bonds are reshaped in terms of competitive, benchmarking, and comparative forms, which dissolve the symbolic bases for collective identification.²⁰ The space created by the recognition of shared risk is reshaped as a landscape of differentiated trajectories, in which shared grievances are obscured by the narratives of success and failure.²¹

The transformation in question not only involves the implementation of different techniques of governance, but also the re-definition of what constitutes legitimate ways of being. The inadaptability of ways of being that cannot be readily incorporated into regimes of adaptability dependency, refusal, and non-productivity become less and less tolerable. They are not

¹⁷ M. Foucault, *The birth of biopolitics*. London: Palgrave Macmillian. 2008

¹⁸ Theodosiadis M. Republican perspectives on populism and hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch), Edinburgh: Doctoral Thesis, Goldsmiths University. 2021, p.11, p.123.

¹⁹ G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1998

²⁰ Theodosiadis M. Republican perspectives on populism and hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch), Edinburgh: Doctoral Thesis, Goldsmiths University. 2021, p.132; Deneen, P. J., 2018, *Why Liberalism Failed*, New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, p.34.

²¹ A. Kioupiolis, *Towards a regime of post-political biopower? Dispatches from Greece, 2010–2012*. Theory, Culture & Society. 31(1). Pp.143–158. 2014

subject to political negotiation, but to practices of marginalization, confinement, and abandonment. The loss of the Promethean space of intelligibility is accompanied by the constitution of a normativity in which adaptability is one of the key criteria of social value.²² Most importantly, political Prometheism carries with it a particular ontology of the subject that identifies individuals and collectives as reflexive, responsible, and solidary actors who share a common experience of exposure to the decisions of politics. As such, the very concept of political agency confronts the risk of sacrifice, recalling the Promethean gesture of appropriating the gift of fire that is at once empowering and punishable.²³ It is precisely this tension that grants the Promethean imaginary its emancipatory capacity insofar as it asserts the indivisibility of freedom from conflict and the necessity of assuming responsibility for the destabilizations that social progress entails. Against the backdrop of fatalistic and naturalistic theories of social order, the Promethean perspective asserts that economic relations, social stratification, and institutions are the products of historical struggle and hence open to challenge. As such, the very concept of the political is one in which contingency is made visible and negotiable.²⁴

As a political imaginary, the Promethean dream is not merely a normative ideal, but also a new political horizon that makes particular forms of action thinkable and legitimate. It sustains the view that democratic participation can make a difference to economic and social outcomes, that inequality can be addressed politically, and that exclusion and marginalization are injustices to be confronted rather than necessities to be lived with. Hence, the decline of the Promethean dream is not simply a matter of a change in ideological preference; it echoes a more profound shift in the very grammar of political thinking, in which agency gives way to necessity, will to adaptation, and conflict to administration. To understand the current configuration of neoliberal power, it is therefore necessary to start from the Promethean dream not as a nostalgic invocation of ancient Athens, which is often considered the historical milestone of democratic

²² Y. Stavrakakis, *Green ideology: A discursive reading*. *Journal of Political Ideologies*. 2(3). Pp.259-279. 1997

²³ This is particularly emphasised by Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. Cf. Aeschylus. 2009a. *Persians, Seven against Thebes, Suppliants, Prometheus Bound*, ed. and trans. A. H. Sommerstein, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (Loeb Classical Library).

²⁴ D. Asimiadis, *Discipline and Subjectivity in Religious Education*. *Greek Journal of Religious Education (GjRE)*, 8(1) pp.78–87.2025

politics,²⁵ but as a critical vantage point from which the extent and importance of its loss can be properly gauged.²⁶

From Promethean Agency to Neoliberal Governmentality

The movement from Prometheism to neoliberal governmentality marks a significant change in the articulation of power that is not limited to the level of political institutions. It involves a reconfiguring of the underlying rationality. In contrast to the Promethean notion that presupposed the ability to act upon history through the collective will and conflictual engagement, neoliberal governmentality is based on reconfiguring the underlying conditions upon which action is first intelligible. Power is no longer primarily concerned with articulating political projects or mobilising collective demands; instead, it is focuses on the continuous regulation of action through the normative requirements of efficiency, competition, adaptability, and rapid maximisation (or expansion) of the forces of production.²⁷ This marks a movement from the politics of decision and contestation to the politics of management and optimization, whereby the task of government is the alignment of the underlying conditions of the social with the requirements of the market.²⁸

Neoliberal governmentality does not establish itself through repression or mandate; instead, it is based on the propagation of a specific logic that shapes the framing of problems. Social problems such as unemployment, poverty, or exclusion are no longer framed as problems that involve the collective; they are instead framed as problems that need to be addressed individually. As Ibled wrote, those who fail to advance their own standards of living and confront the problem of pauperisation are often ‘defame’ by the neoliberal standards as outcasts; they are projected as negative examples in order to inspire fear and obedience.²⁹ In such a context, the purpose of governance is not to deliberate on the best form of society, but to create an environment that coerces the subject to perform in specific ways.

²⁵ Theodosiadis, Castoriadis, Arendt, and other scholars who draw on democratic politics often treat the ancient Athenian *polis* a historical creation of utmost significance to propose political alternatives to the modern idea of political participation. Cf. Castoriadis, C. *Figures of The Thinkable*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, chapters 6 and 7. 1997.

²⁶ F. Vaki, *Adorno contra Habermas: The Claims of Critical Theory as Immanent Critique*. *Historical Materialism*. 13(8), pp.79-120. 2005

²⁷ M. Theodosiadis, Republican perspectives on populism and hope (Beyond Christopher Lasch), Edinburgh: Doctoral Thesis, Goldsmiths University. 2021, p.132; Theodosiadis M. *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, pp.94-5.

²⁸ H. Lloyd-Jones, *Zeus, Prometheus, and Greek Ethics*. *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 101(1). pp. 49–72. 2003

²⁹ C. Ibled, ‘The “Optimistic Cruelty” of Hayek’s Market Order: Neoliberalism, Pain and Social Selection’, *Theory, Culture & Society*. 2023.

Political rationality is, thus, reoriented toward the creation of an environment that is conducive to the calibration of incentives, risk management, and the normalization of uncertainty.³⁰

The replacement of political judgment by managerial rationality implies a fundamental 'neutralization of antagonism' insofar as the very distinction between friend and enemy, as the fundamental boundary through which the unity and conflict of the political are constituted, is systematically suppressed. Political disagreement is no longer acknowledged as a fundamental dimension of the political but is redefined as a deviation from optimal functioning, a disturbance to be corrected rather than a conflict to be confronted. In this way, antagonism is dissolved into a plurality of technical problems and the moment of decision which was once constitutive of the political authority is replaced by a universality which conceals its own partisan effects.³¹

The effect of this neutralization is a transformation of sovereignty; it is no longer exercised as a series of definitive actions that openly assume responsibility for exclusion, conflict, or exception. Instead, it becomes an ongoing rule-production that openly presents itself as impartial administration. Decisions that have the effect of determining the distribution of resources, security, and risk are displaced to domains that are closed off to contestation, where they appear as the effect of objective necessity. The political community is denied the capacity to recognize itself as a community of subjects that is capable of deciding on its own boundaries and priorities. Instead of a shared horizon of belonging that is produced as conflict and commitment, a unity of governance is produced as compliance with abstract norms.³²

The position of conflict in the social order is, thus, renegotiated. Conflict ceases to be recognized as a constitutive feature of the political and is externalized or moralized, being attributed to the irrational behavior of those who fail to adapt or to the pathologies that require technical solutions. The possibility that social divisions are the result of irreconcilable interests or values is replaced by a discourse that assumes consensus to be the default position of rational rule. Thus, power avoids the need to make decisions in a situation where no neutral position is available, and the exclusionary nature of the political is obscured.³³

The invisibility of antagonism does not mean that exclusion has disappeared, but rather that it has become harder to see and to contest. The

³⁰ D. Asimiadis, & F. Kagioglou, *The Trauma of Autonomy: Neoliberalism and the Forms of the Subject's Exile*. *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 18(2). pp. 63–82. 2025.

³¹ R. Plant, *Neo-liberal State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2010

³² D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005

³³ O. James, *The Selfish Capitalist*. London: Vermilion. 2008

boundaries remain in place, separating the productive from the unproductive, the adaptable from the non-adaptable, and the integrated from the surplus, but in a form that claims to be technical rather than political. Those who are outside the normalizing frames of performance and adaptability are not presented as political antagonists in a shared political space, but rather as failures, risks, and burdens to be managed. The absence of a political antagonism makes it easier to enact a form of politics that excludes without acknowledging exclusion, that governs without taking responsibility for conflict.³⁴

This transformation also includes a transformation of the state. The latter does no longer function as a center of political mediation or social arbitration, it increasingly functions as a facilitator of the processes of the market, tasked with the responsibility of protecting the conditions of the competition and the flow of the economic activity. The state is restructured along the lines of a management logic that emphasizes quantification, evaluation, and benchmarking, with democratic discussion subsumed to the dictates of expertise. Political power is not concerned with the articulation of ends, but with the permanent evaluation of means, substituting technical correction for political judgment. Legitimation here is no longer a function of popular agreement or normative validation, but rather a function of necessity, efficiency, and systemic constraint.³⁵

A specific agency is created by neoliberal governmentality that is profoundly different from the Promethean ideal. Individuals are constructed as autonomous and responsible agents; yet, their autonomy is limited by the imperative of self-management within the constraints that are externally set. Freedom is redefined as the ability to cope with uncertainty, absorb risk, and stay competitive in an environment that is deemed unchangeable. Rather than seeing power as a relation that is subject to challenge, individuals are asked to internalize the imperative of power and translate it into personal goals. Hence, agency is preserved but emptied out in terms of content, instead being geared toward self-adjustment. The cumulative effect of all these processes is the depoliticization of social life, which does not eradicate power but makes it more impersonal and opaque. Decisions that determine collective life are transferred to sites that are beyond the reach of any kind of democratic control, while conflict is redefined as a problem of dysfunction or inefficiency. The space that was occupied by collective conflict is replaced by a system of governance that uses diffuse forms of evaluation and normalization to secure compliance by

³⁴ M. Prasad, *The Politics of Free Markets: The Rise of Neoliberal Economic Policies in Britain, France, Germany, and the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2006

³⁵ D. Asimiadis, *The Political Economy of Neoliberalism in the Global South*. Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean Review. 2(1). pp.39-53. 2025

shaping the horizon of the possible. Unlike the Promethean concern with the contingency of the past and the politics of the present, the logic of neoliberal governmentality is one that replaces agency with adaptation, contestation with conformity.³⁶

To make a long story short, the disappearance of Promethean agency does not mean the end of governance but rather its transformation into a form of governance that governs through freedom, responsibility, and choice, but at the same time negates their political exercise. It is in this context that one should understand the production of surplus and disposable lives as a systematic outcome of a rationality that privileges adaptability over solidarity, system reproduction over collective self-determination.³⁷

The Production of Disposable Lives

The making of disposable lives describes a product of a structure of neoliberal governmentality rather than a moral failure or a deviation from a presumably inclusive order. Disposability describes the state of those individuals and groups who are made politically and socially non-essential, tolerated only insofar as they can be incorporated into systems of value, and otherwise discarded. The critical point here is that disposability is not merely a product of poverty or marginality; it is a product of the regulation of social value through standards of legitimacy that value performance, adaptability, and contribution, while failing to value those individuals and groups whose lives cannot be translated into the languages of competitiveness or efficiency. The critical question here is not merely who is excluded, but rather how exclusion is produced, reproduced, and naturalized through quotidian practices of governance that are represented as neutral, technical, and necessary.³⁸

Disposability is produced through a regime that is constantly distinguishing between lives that are investable and those that are not. This is done through institutional arrangements that provide opportunity, protection, and risk of harm in a way that appears to be based on objective criteria such as skills, employability, risk profiles, and cost/benefit analyses. However, these criteria are actually normative filters that determine whose risk is of public concern. What looks like a rational classification of lives is actually a social ontology, a way of sorting lives into categories of promise and burden. Lives on the wrong side of the burden line are not discarded;

³⁶ M. Theodosiadis, *Ancient Greek Democracy and American Republicanism*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 2024, chapter 2.

³⁷ A. Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2018

³⁸ T. Rutar, *What is neoliberalism really? A global analysis of its real-world consequences for development, inequality, and democracy*. Social Science Information.62(3). pp.295-322. 2023

rather, they are kept in a state of managed precarity, held close enough to function as a reserve of cheap labor, a cautionary example of what happens if one is not careful, or a statistical outlier that justifies further reform. Disposability is a matter of degree: degrees of access, degrees of protection, degrees of risk of harm, degrees of visibility, and degrees of voice.³⁹

The processes that create disposable lives are often mundane and incremental. Budget constraints are transformed into ethical excuses that promote prudence and present the reduction of social rights as realism. Eligibility processes are intensified, transforming rights into conditional entitlements that require constant verification of deservingness. Surveillance is recast as assistance, evaluation as care, and exposure to uncertainty as an opportunity for self-improvement. These processes individualize and moralize vulnerability in that adversity is attributed to insufficient effort, insufficient self-investment, or a lack of flexibility. The social is fragmented into a landscape of personal trajectories that are answerable to metrics that obscure the political in their construction.⁴⁰

Essential to this production has been the transformation of work as a social relation into a measure of legitimacy. Employment is no longer a means of survival but a measure of one's worth. As secure employment is replaced by unsecured employment, being employable is an ongoing requirement rather than an attribute that can be delivered through the machinery of governance. Individuals must view themselves as a work of art in constant production, while the conditions that create unsecured employment are protected from critical review. Those who are unable to keep up with the requirements of this production through sickness, age, disability, caregiving, immigration status, or simple burnout are constructed as exceptions to the rule of adaptability. Exclusion is not achieved through aggression but through apathy, delay, procedural rejection, or administrative limbo.⁴¹

At the heart of this production lies the conversion of work—from a social relation—into a measure by which legitimacy is granted or denied. Employment is no longer merely a means of survival but has become a measure of one's worth. As secure employment is replaced by insecure income earning, employability is no longer something governance can deliver; it must be continuously produced and maintained by the subject. One must see oneself as a work of art in constant production, and those conditions which create unsecured employment must be safeguarded from

³⁹ C. Schmitt, *Dictatorship*. London: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.2013

⁴⁰ R. Condon, *Reconsidering Habermas's Colonization Thesis A Critical Theory of Neoliberalism*. London: Routledge.2025

⁴¹ T. Boas, Gans J. Morse, *Neoliberalism: From New Liberal Philosophy to Anti-Liberal Slogan*. Studies in Comparative International Development. 44(1). pp.137-161. 2009

critical review. Those who are unable to keep up with the requirements of this production, through sickness, age, disability, caregiving, immigration status, or merely burnout, are seen as exceptions to the rule of adaptability. Exclusion is not achieved through aggression but through apathy, delay, procedural rejection, or administrative limbo.⁴²

The production of disposable lives also relies on a particular economy of visibility, wherein some forms of suffering are made hyper-visible as objects of fear, morality, etc., while others are not visible due to bureaucratic fragmentation and spatial segregation. The precarious are represented as either a risk to be controlled or a failure to be corrected, never as a political agent with a right to contest the terms of their existence. When the precarious do make an appearance in the public domain, they do so often in the form of individualized stories that pathologize their existence or heroize their resilience, which effectively depoliticizes the structural aspects of their disposable existence. Visibility, therefore, becomes a tool of governance, to show enough to justify control, but not enough to provoke responsibility.⁴³

In this context, abandonment is not understood as a failure of care delivery but rather as an independent form of governing. It can take various forms, such as delayed access, underfunded services, procedural exhaustion, and the transformation of rights into conditional privileges. This creates a social condition in which institutions are no longer felt to secure belonging but rather as obstacles to be negotiated, contested, and endured. This, in turn, has a profound impact on the way in which individuals experience themselves, such that trust, horizons, and the future are no longer felt as a collective endeavor but rather as an individualized burden. Disposability thus sustains itself as a form of governing, precisely insofar as lives in a state of destabilization are understood as a risk, which in turn legitimates greater control and investment.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The analysis developed in this paper has aimed to reconstruct the conditions under which the Promethean dream as a form of political imaginary is substituted by a new form of governance characterised by impersonal rationalities, adaptive norms, and the systematic production of

⁴² O. Babelyuk, & O. Koliassa, Trauma, War, Loss, Forced Exile, and Cul-tural Displacement in Australian Aboriginal and Ukrainian Stories from Children's Perspectives: Exploring Cultural Identity. *Dia-Noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 18(2). pp.83–110. 2025

⁴³ D. Asimiadis, *The Occult Dimension of Nazism: Magic, Mysticism, and Millenarian Expectations in the Third Reich*. *Mos Historicus: A Critical Review of European History*, 3(1). pp. 91–107. 2025

⁴⁴ C. Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.2006

disposability. By examining the shift from Promethean agency to neoliberal governmentality, and by considering the forms of subjectivity, power, and exclusion produced by this shift, this paper has argued that what is at stake is not merely a shift in policy paradigms and forms of governance, but rather a transformation in the grammar of the political. The eclipse of the Promethean dream represents a transformation in how collective agency, political conflict, and social responsibility are rendered intelligible in contemporary society.

At the heart of this change lies the replacement of politics as a space of contestation and decision-making by governance as a regime of normalization and management. Thus, while the Promethean imaginary posited subjects able to confront contingency through a collective will to willfulness, neoliberal governmentality organizes social life around the imperative of adapting to a situation presented as necessary. Power relations no longer require the imposition of dominance or decision-making to be exercised; rather, it is exercised through a multitude of mechanisms that shape behavior, define the horizon of possibilities, and translate political problems into technical problems. Under such a regime, antagonism is eliminated not through resolution but through invisibilization as a political category. Conflict remains, but it is translated into individual experiences of failure, risk, or maladaptation.

The consequences of this change are most visible in the production of disposable lives. Disposability is not an unintended side-effect of an otherwise effective system; it is an integral part of a rationality that measures social value in terms of performance, adaptability, and measurable contribution. Lives that cannot easily be integrated in such terms are not entirely excluded, nor are they entirely included; they are managed through precarious inclusion, administrative delay, and managed abandonment. In this way, exclusion is performed without ever being named as such, and abandonment is used as a mode of governance that denies its own political nature. The production of disposable lives is thus where depoliticization and governance come together most forcefully, making vulnerability a technical issue and suffering an acceptable side-effect.

What this configuration ultimately forecloses is the Promethean space of intelligibility itself: a space in which social arrangements are apprehensible as contingent, power relations apprehensible as contestable, and collective action apprehensible as meaningful. As a consequence of substituting adaptability for agency and conformity for contestation, the ability to collectively articulate common grievances and imagine alternative forms of life is progressively undermined. The foreclosure of this space is not equivalent to the foreclosure of politics as such; rather, it is equivalent to a politics that denies its own political nature. Governance continues,

exclusion persists, and decisions are made, yet the possibility of collectively assuming responsibility for these decisions is increasingly displaced.

The importance of the Promethean dream, it has been argued, rests neither in its actualization nor its completion as history, but in its critical position for understanding the present. Its decline reveals the outlines of a politics that rules through its neutrality, administers through abstraction, and excludes through procedure rather than confrontation. To speak of political Prometheanism is, thus, not to advocate a resurrection of a historical past; instead, it is politic to speak anew of the need for a politics that names power, faces conflict, and resists the naturalization of suffering and inequality. In an order that presents disposability as inevitable and adaptation as desirable, the Promethean politics of collective action and responsibility remains imperative no longer as an ideal, but as a critical tool against the foreclosure of the political itself.

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