

Chapter 14

Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics

“[Our approach] consists of not – of no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe” (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 49)

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was the son of a physician. He studied psychology and philosophy as a student, was a cultural attaché in Sweden, Poland, and West Germany, and taught in France, Tunisia, and the University of California, Berkeley. His work includes *Madness and Civilization* (1961); *The Order of Things* (1966); *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969); *Discipline and Punish* (1975); and *History of Sexuality* (3 volumes: *Introduction*; *The Uses of Pleasure*; and *Care of the Self*, 1988-90).

The third approach to critical inquiry we shall consider is that of Michel Foucault. Foucault developed a historical form of critical inquiry that explored knowledge, power, and human being itself as products of history and culture. Foucault reversed Kant’s critique: where Kant claimed to show how seemingly contingent aspects of human experience, such as causality, are actually necessary and universal, Foucault aimed to show how seeming necessities are actually contingent. Unlike Habermas, he didn’t view language as a transcendental or quasi-transcendental domain. Unlike Bourdieu, he didn’t view science as a field that produces knowledge that can transcend its circumstances. Indeed, Foucault’s historical critique was directed especially at the ‘universal truths’ of the modern biological, psychological, and social sciences. These turned out, in his analysis, to be outcomes of contingent historical events. But we shall see that Foucault didn’t consider truth to be indistinguishable from opinion, or politics to be merely the play of power, or ethical judgments to be culturally relative. Where Habermas focused on individual know-that, on reflection and decision-making, and Bourdieu emphasized know-how, the embodied knowledge of habitus, Foucault recognized *both* formal knowledge and

informal practical know-how and explored the relationship between them, especially their constitution in discourse.

Foucault is sometimes described as a postmodernist and sometimes accused of being antimodern. It is more accurate to say that all his work was motivated by the aim to understand how modern society operates. He was interested not in telling a history of the failure of what he calls “our modernity,” any more than a history of its successes, but in understanding how modernity works as a game of truth, as an exercise of powers, and as the place for specific ways of being human. Modernity “endlessly reformulates” its thematics: it won’t inevitably exhaust itself, or automatically replace itself. But nor will it resolve its central contradictions, because these in fact define it. Society is not advancing through a process of “learning,” for it defines what counts as learning. It is a game without a clear end.

Foucault’s approach to history is novel. He rejected the traditional historical focus on individual agents – especially ‘great men.’ He was equally critical of the focus on subjectivity in Husserl’s phenomenology and Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism (which Foucault called “transcendental narcissism”). But his work clearly drew from Hegel, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, and in many ways it was a reply to Immanuel Kant. Foucault himself said:

“What I have studied are the three traditional problems: (1) What are the relations we have to truth through scientific knowledge, to those ‘truth games’ which are so important in civilization and in which we are both subject and objects? (2) What are the relationships we have to others through those strange strategies and power relationships? And (3) what are the relationships between truth, power, and self?” (1982/1988 interview)

These “three traditional problems” correspond to the three Kantian critiques: of *pure reason* (our relationship to objects), *practical reason* (our relationship to other people), and *judgement* (our relationship to ourselves). These three – truth games, power, and formation of the self – are not independent topics of inquiry, they are three “axes” (1983/1997, p. 202) which each of Foucault’s investigations explored with shifting emphasis.

Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics

Foucault developed first an “archaeology,” then a “genealogy,” and finally an “ethics.” The archaeology was a way of studying the different “games of truth” of a society. The genealogy

studied the power relations in these truth games. It did not replace archaeology, but it shifted the emphasis of analysis. Towards the end of his life Foucault began to study the *ethos* of how people form themselves. In a manuscript published posthumously Foucault defined a program of research – he called it “a historical ontology of ourselves” – which was “genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method” (Foucault, 1984b), with an ethical interest or aim.

Foucault insisted that he was not writing histories of ideas but histories of *thought*, and we will need to look more closely at what he considered *thinking* to be. He proposed “the proper task of a history of thought, as against a history of behaviors or representations: to define the conditions in which human beings ‘problematize’ what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live” (Foucault, 1984/1986, p.10). This involves “analyzing, not behaviors or ideas, nor societies and their ‘ideologies,’ but the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought – and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed” (p. 11). Central to this kind of history was a view of language not merely as representing things but as doing something “more”:

“Of course, discourses are composed of signs; but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this *more* that renders them irreducible to language (*langue*) and to speech. It is this ‘more’ that we must reveal and describe” (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 49)

Just as Garfinkel asked of formal analysis, “‘what more?’” can we see, Foucault too was interested in what is missed in the typical analyses of scientific knowledge and ethical practice. Just as Wittgenstein insisted that speech can be used in many ways in the language games of everyday life, Foucault set out to describe the uses of discourse in forms of life.

The Archaeology of Knowledge

An “archaeology of knowledge” is an investigation that examines artifacts unearthed in an excavation, but the kind of artifact is not bone, pottery, or metalwork, it is what people said and wrote in the past: their “statements” (in French, *énoncé*: what has been enunciated or expressed). Foucault was interested not in commonplace things said or written, but in “serious speech acts” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982), pronouncements made by figures of authority in positions of power. Such statements are noticed, collected and passed around, and they are preserved, so they can

later be excavated. The archeologist's task is to try to reconstruct an understanding of the past by asking what made it possible to make *these* statements but not others.

The archaeologist does this by studying the *space* within which statements circulated. Archaeology is “an enquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within what space of order knowledge is constituted” (Foucault, 1966/1973, p. xxi-xxii). It is a *critical* investigation that aims to discover the social and historical conditions for the possibility of specific forms of knowledge. It is the study of “games of truth.” Foucault used archaeology to study those games of truth in which the objects of knowledge were also subjects. His initial interest was the human sciences – the “sciences of man” – such as medicine, psychiatry and penology; his intention was to write a history of the ways in Western culture that humans have developed knowledge about ourselves. How is it that a human being can become constituted as an object of knowledge? Foucault proposed that the human sciences define both their objects of study and the experts who may speak about these objects. They give status to those who may speak, and deny it to those who must remain silent. They exclude and suppress certain people, certain *types* of people: those who are identified as the mad, the sick, or the criminal. It is important not to take the knowledge of these sciences at face value but reconstruct the conditions that made it possible.

Discourse

Foucault called the variety of statements that characterize a particular human science its “discourse.” Each science has its particular mode of discourse, and archaeology studies how statements circulate, gain value, are attributed, and are appropriated. For example, one finds various kinds of statement in the discourse of nineteenth century doctors: “Qualitative descriptions, biographical accounts, the location, interpretation and cross-checking of signs, reasonings by analogy, deduction, statistical calculation, experimental verifications” and more (Foucault, 1973/1975). These statements, these “facts of discourse,” amount to a “population of events” which can be studied in their existence and their relations to one another. Such statements show a systematicity that is neither logical nor linguistic.

One then asks what defines the unity of the discourse. In any set of statements one can undoubtedly find objects referred to, concepts used, a style of writing, themes and theories. Can we define the discourse in terms of these elements? Foucault examined each in turn and rejected

it as a straightforward basis for the identity of a discourse. There is no common object, no shared concepts or themes, no single style. What we find instead is a *dispersion* of each of these elements. They are spread over and move in “a common space” (Foucault, 1966/1973, p. 37) which Foucault called a “discursive formation” (p. 38). This space “is not a form of knowledge,” it is the “truth game” that unites and dictates what counts as knowledge (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 191). It is a “thematic complex” (Foucault, 1984/1988, p. 23).

Many languages draw a distinction between two kinds of knowledge which is difficult to express in English. Spanish has *saber* and *conocer*; French *savoir* and *connaissance*. The former is a tacit, practical *know-how*; the latter a theoretical knowledge that one might call *know-that*. Foucault came to see that the theoretical and scientific discourse about, for example, madness, was dependent upon a different kind of knowledge, practical and embodied in complex institutional systems. Foucault (like Merleau-Ponty) called this practical know-how *savoir*, and the official knowledge *connaissance*. *Savoir*, implicit knowledge, is the condition for the possibility of the professional theories, opinions and judgments – the *connaissance* – of a truth game. As Foucault put it later, “Thus the theoretical problem that appears is that of an autonomous social knowledge [*savoir*] which does not take individual conscious learning [*connaissance*] as a model or function” (Candidacy Essay, p. 8).

A discursive formation itself is neither true nor false, it defines which statements *count* as true and false. What is important is not what statements *say* or *mean* – their images, themes, or concepts – but what they *do*. What a statement does depends on its location among other statements within the discursive formation. In his early writing Foucault proposed that a discursive formation could be viewed as a set of rules:

“Archaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules.” (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 138)

Later he described the task as that of grasping the “problematization” of some particular aspect of “labor, life, and language”. What was seen as a problem? What did anxiety, discussion and reflection focus on? What were the “thematics” of the discourse?

The Archaeologies

Foucault undertook a series of archaeological studies of the “disciplines” of the sciences of man. *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 1961/1965) explored psychiatry, and Foucault argued that what professionals and the public see as an objective scientific fact – that madness is mental illness – is a product of the interventions of a specific disciplinary institution, which exercised its power from the 17th to the 19th century. Psychiatry excludes through confinement, and imposes a silence on those whom it diagnoses as insane. Foucault saw this as a problematization of madness through specific social and medical practices:

“I tried to analyze the genesis, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of a system of thought as a matter of possible experiences; first, the formation of a domain of recognitions [*connaissances*] that constitute themselves a specific knowledge [*savoir*] of ‘mental illness,’; second, the organization of a normative system built on a whole technical, administrative, juridical, and medical apparatus whose purpose was to isolate and take custody of the insane; and finally, the definition of a relation to oneself and to others as possible subjects of madness” (1983/1997, p. 202).

The Birth of the Clinic (1963/1975) offered a similar analysis of medicine and the “medical gaze.” *The Order of Things* (subtitled *An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*) (1966/1973) explored the distinct historical periods of social science, each with its own conditions for knowledge and truth. Where his other books of this period dealt with forms of ‘difference,’ Foucault looked here at the shifting criteria by which professionals decide what things are ‘identical.’

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969/1972) Foucault reflected on his methodology and described his earlier books as “a very imperfect sketch” of the newly-emerging enterprise of archaeology, in which “questions of the human being, consciousness, origin, and the subject emerge, intersect, mingle, and separate off.”

Episteme

In *The Order of Things* Foucault suggested that the various different serious bodies of learning that exist in a society at a particular time share “common, but transformable criteria” (1983/1997, p. 203). Nineteenth-century natural history, economics and philosophy shared an

overall configuration, a common “archaeological system” (1966/1973, p. xi) – an *episteme*. Psychiatry appeared in the 1700s when changes also occurred in law, literature, philosophy and politics. A history must pay attention to these broader conditions. Foucault explained, “what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge... grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility” (p. xxii). Foucault used the French word *épistémè* rather than *épistémé* (notice the different accent on the last letter; *epistémê* is the Greek word most often translated as knowledge, in contrast to *technê*, translated as either craft or art.) An *épistémè* is not explicit or theoretical knowledge, it is:

“the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within, I won’t say a scientific theory, but a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false. The episteme is the ‘apparatus’ which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific” (Foucault, 1980, p.197)

Foucault identified three major epistemes in the history of Western culture: the medieval, the classical, and the modern. He granted that where one locates the breaks is “relative to the field of one’s enquiry”; there is no *single* history, either of continuity or discontinuity – history and time are themselves multiple and of historical origin (cf. Mohanty, 1993, p. 39). The shift from one episteme to another is not a smooth transition. Just as an archeologist finds distinct layers in the historical record whose boundaries mark sudden reorganizations in the arrangements of life, Foucault found that epistemes were separated by breaks, ruptures, and disjunctions. He proposed that archaeology is a kind of history in which “the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations, but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations” (ref?). Traditional history tries to eliminate discontinuity and disclose a hidden continuity to events; Foucault’s archaeology looked for rupture and discontinuity. Rather than tracing events back to their origins and “silent beginnings” he looked for displacements and thresholds among the “various fields of constitution and validity.” Discontinuity was no longer an obstacle to the work of the historian, it was “the work itself,” both an instrument and an object of research. This was an end to “total history” in which homogenous relations are assumed to

underlying seemingly disparate events, and the beginning of a “general history” which distinguishes different “series” – the economy, religion, science – and tries to determine the relations, the “interplay of correlation and dominance,” among them. A total history organizes all phenomena around a single centre – “a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape.” A general history, in contrast, will “deploy the space of a dispersion.” This new history raises new questions, about “threshold, rupture, break, mutation, transformation.”

Foucault was not claiming that nothing has changed since the eighteenth century. His point was that we shouldn't *assume* that things have changed simply because time has passed. Perhaps the human sciences have merely moved around the board of their truth games, occupying different positions but not creating anything new. To find out we need to study them carefully. Nor did he claim that the move from one episteme to another was progress. For example, in the rupture between the Classical and Modern ages it is “Not that reason made any progress: it was simply that the mode of being of things, and of the order that divided them up before presenting them to the understanding, was profoundly altered” (1966/1973, p. xxii).

Table 14.2 An Episteme

Table 14.3 The Epistemes

Foucault considered Immanuel Kant to have occupied an important position and status in the modern episteme:

“the Kantian critique... marks the threshold of our modernity: it questions representation... on the basis of its rightful limits. Thus it sanctions for the first time that event in European culture which coincides with the end of the eighteenth century: the withdrawal of knowledge and thought outside the space of representations. That space is brought into question in its foundation, its origin, and its limits” (p. 242)

Kant's critique “opens up the possibility” of raising the question of “all that is the source and origin of representation” (p. 243). The problematic of the modern episteme became, What makes representation possible? What makes *valid* representation possible? What makes *knowledge* possible? As we have seen, ever since Kant, “human knowledge seems not to stand in an empirically valid relationship with reality”(Rawls 1996, p. 431). Foucault proposed that “Kantian doctrine is the first philosophical statement” of the “displacement of being in relation to

representation” (1966/1973, p. 245), a displacement which created the possibility for natural sciences of the ‘hidden depths’ of objects, and for philosophies of the ‘hidden depths’ of the knower. It was now possible to explore the *basis* for representation and consider that knowledge might itself be historical and cultural. New empirical fields emerged with “a transcendental theme” – fields such as sociology and anthropology. New philosophical analyses – such as those by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty – explored what makes representation possible, and the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. The danger in taking these steps was of undermining the validity of genuine knowledge: “even when modern thought makes knowledge essentially historical, it must retain some functional equivalent of Kant's transcendental realm to guarantee the normative validity of knowledge.”

At the same time, empirical inquiry “questions the conditions of a relation among representations from the point of view of the being itself that is represented” (p. 244), in explorations of the “enigmatic reality” that constitutes the objects of human knowledge, prior to knowledge, in “the force of labor, the energy of life, the power of speech” (p. 244). These explorations of subject and of object defined the episteme of modernity. What followed was a divide between the formal and the empirical sciences (followed by both repeated efforts to reunite them and protests that this was impossible) and the appearance within empirical science of reflections on “subjectivity, the human being, and finitude” (p. 248) as it took over this task from philosophy.

Foucault had a jaded view of the human sciences because they have adopted a view of ‘Man’ that is doubly essentialist. They assume, paradoxically, that humans are at one and the same time both objects and subjects; that people are both determinate and have free will. They study humans merely as the being that forms representation. They investigate humans within the systems of life, labor and language and explore what humans know (albeit often unconsciously) within these systems. That’s to say, they study ‘subjectivity.’ But they fail to consider life, labour and language as “the basis on which man is able to present himself to a possible knowledge” (p. 362). They fail to ask what makes subjectivity possible. They merely *duplicate* the sciences in which the human being is given and studied as an object. They are “sciences of duplication, in a ‘meta-epistemological’ position” (p. 355).

At this time Foucault identified two “counter-sciences” that avoid the study of representations and instead explore what makes representation possible. Psychoanalysis traces the birth of representation in desire, the law of the father, and death. And ethnology explores the origin of representation in social norms, rules and systems. Foucault envisaged not exactly a “cultural psychology” but a kind of “psychoanalytic anthropology” which would offer “the double articulation of the history of individuals upon the unconsciousness of culture, the historicity of these cultures upon the unconscious of individuals” (p. 379).

Objects are Constituted

Foucault famously proposed that the discourses of the human sciences do not simply represent an independent world, they *form* the objects that define their domains of inquiry. For example, nineteenth century psychopathology dealt with objects such as hallucinations, hypnosis, sexual deviations, lesions of the brain, mental deficiencies and so on. Each science forms its own objects of study (*empiricites*), the way these objects are related to one another (*positivities*), and the way the science relates to them:

“the object does not await in limbo the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity; it does not preexist itself, held back by some obstacle at the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations” (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 45)

For Foucault, knowledge is always a linking of the articulable and the visible (Deleuze, 1986/1988, p. 39). His interest lay not merely in what can be said, but in how what we can say organizes what we can see. His book *The Order of Things*, originally titled *Word and Things*, is about neither words nor things but about how they are linked: how an ordering of words is used to order what can be seen. This interest in the link between how we can speak and what we can see – and think – becomes clearer in the genealogies, where Foucault explored spaces like the prison as material organizations of visibility, but it began in the archaeologies.

This means that archaeology is not a history of the *referents* of statements (asking questions such as, Who was mad?). Its aim is “to dispense with ‘things.’ To ‘depresentify’ them” (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 47); to abandon the notion that things were there “anterior to discourse.” Archaeology is certainly not the phenomenology whose slogan was “to the things

themselves!” But equally, it is not the study of the meaning of words (asking questions like, What did ‘madness’ mean?) Archaeology studies neither ‘words’ nor ‘things.’ Foucault explained:

“I would like to show that discourse is not a slender surface of contact, or confrontation, between a reality and a language (*langue*), the intrication of a lexicon and an experience” (Foucault, 1969/1972, p. 48)

Recall that an episteme is a “mode of being of things, and of the order that divided them up before presenting them to the understanding.” Kant proposed that the *a priori* categories of mind order things before we can reason about them, and constitute what we take to be “reality.” Foucault – like Hegel, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Garfinkel – located the power to constitute in the *practices* of discourse, as something ontological. The discursive practices “order” objects and thereby *form* them. Foucault proposed that the space of a discursive formation imposes certain conditions on the statements that can be made within it and on the “elements” of these statements: their objects, subjects, concepts, and theories. He called these conditions the “rules of formation” (p. 38) (though later, as we’ll see, he came to view them as relations of power). “The rules of formation are conditions of existence (but also of coexistence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance) in a given discursive formation” (p. 38). The rules define neither the things nor the words but “the ordering of objects” (p. 49). They are “a priori” but this “does not elude historicity” because, in Foucault’s view, they are not fixed and unchanging:

“these rules are not imposed from the outside on the elements that they relate together; they are caught up in the very things that they connect; and if they are not modified with the least of them, they modify them, and are transformed with them” (Foucault, 1969/1972, p.127)

Let us consider an example in more detail:

“the unity of discourses on madness would not be based upon the existence of the object ‘madness’, or the constitution of a single horizon of objectivity; it would be the interplay of the rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time: objects that are shaped by measures of discrimination and repression, objects that are differentiated in daily practice, in law, in religious casuistry, in medical diagnosis, objects

that are manifested in pathological descriptions, objects that are circumscribed by medical codes, practices, treatment, and care. Moreover, the unity of the discourse on madness would be the interplay of the rules that define the transformations of these different objects, their non-identity through time, the break produced in them, the internal discontinuity that suspends their permanence” (p. 32-33)

Each human science employs its own mode of representation, which it regards as the only valid way of relating words to things in the human world. Each science claims to have a neutral language that merely reflects how things are ordered. But for Foucault each mode is a version of the compulsion to use the order of words to order things. Words themselves are things, and to privilege one kind of representation is inevitably to misunderstand the power of language. Recall Garfinkel’s list of the *ways* that language can be used to represent, the “multitude of sign functions”: marking, labeling, symbolizing, indicating, miniaturizing, simulating, analogies, anagrams and more. Recall Wittgenstein’s invitation to “Think of how many different kinds of thing are called ‘description’: description of a body’s position by means of its co-ordinates; description of a facial expression; description of a sensation of touch; of a mood” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 11-12).

Hayden White suggests that “What Foucault has done is to rediscover the importance of the projective or generational aspect of language, the extent to which it not only ‘represents’ the world of things but also constitutes the modality of the relationships among things by the very act of assuming a posture before them” (White, 1973b, 48). Before language can “represent” things it first “constitutes” things and how they relate, how they are ‘ordered.’ In this sense there is no “ontological category of reality behind and prior to discourse” (Mohanty, 1993, p. 35).

Later, Foucault would make the point very clearly: his history was an analysis of:

“the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as experience; that is, as something that can be and must be thought” (1984/1986, p. 6-7)

It is important to recognize that to say that a discursive formation defines “the ordering of objects” is not to say something negative. It is true that within a discursive formation “it is not easy to say something new; it is not enough for us to open our eyes, to pay attention, to be aware,

for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground” (p. 44-45). But at the same time a discursive formation provides the “positive conditions” for objects to become apparent.

Subjects are Dispersed

Foucault had two principal goals in his archaeological investigations. The first was to challenge the assumption that scientific *knowledge* is the result of an entirely logical process whose history is some kind of formal progression. Instead, he emphasized the irrational space within which science operates, and the discontinuous way this space has changed. The second goal was to question the *subject* who engages in scientific investigation. When one surveys the variety of different statements in a discourse, one can ask about who is speaking and their status. One can ask about the sites in which they speak, and one can ask about their position: as questioning, listening, or observing subject. The answers to these questions show not *the* unifying function of *a* subject, but the *dispersion* of subjectivity in “various enunciative modalities.” Foucault explains that “I shall look for a field of regularity for various positions of subjectivity” (1969/1972, p. 55):

“I showed earlier that it is neither by ‘words’ nor by ‘things’ that the regulation of objects proper to a discursive formation should be defined; similarly, it must now be recognized that it is neither by recourse to a transcendental subject nor by recourse to a psychological subjectivity that the regulation of its enunciation should be defined” (p. 55)

This is not a complete rejection of the human subject but an insistence that humans are not the origin or center of the practices in which we participate. Subjectivity is not the *source* of meaning. Foucault emphasized that conceptions of human being are local constructions which have appeared and disappeared abruptly. Humans act with initiative, but within specific conditions:

“The positivities that I have tried to establish must not be understood as a set of determinations imposed from the outside on the thought of individuals, or inhabiting it from the outside, in advance as it were; they constitute rather the set of conditions in accordance with which a practice is exercised, in accordance with which that practice gives rise to partially or totally new statements, and in accordance with which it can be modified. These positivities are not so much limitations imposed on the initiative of subjects as the

field in which that initiative is articulated... rules that it puts into operation... relations that provide it with a support.... I have not denied – far from it – the possibility of changing discourse: I have deprived the sovereignty of the subject of the exclusive and instantaneous right to it” (1966/1973)

Concepts are Put in Play

Content-analysis presumes that the concepts in a text form a coherent whole, an edifice whose architecture can be described, or that they are sufficiently abstract and general to apply to all the statements under investigation. When he considers concepts, Foucault again finds *dispersion* rather than coherence: a unity “in the distance that separates them and even in their incompatibility” (1969/1972, p. 35). But this dispersion occurs on an “enunciative field” that can be described. Concepts don’t operate on a deeper, ‘underlying’ level from which they must be ‘unpacked,’ they circulate upon a “preconceptual” level that is “the most ‘superficial’” (p. 62). The archaeologist aims to describe the specifics of the concepts circulating in a mode of discourse. One “stands back” from “the manifest set of concepts” to study their “anonymous dispersion.” One asks how statements are ordered, in succession and dependence. How do they coexist? Which are accepted, which are rejected, verified, or analyzed? Which are used as analogies, premises, models, or authorities? Which are forgotten and which transformed? And one asks about “procedures of intervention”: how statements are rewritten, transcribed, translated, and systematized. The aim is not an exhaustive characterization or classification of concepts, but a determination of by what “schemata” statements are related to one another and to themselves.

Themes and Theories

Not all the possible alternatives in a discursive field are in fact realized. There are “strategic choices” which stem in part from “the *function* that the discourse... must carry out *in a field of non-discursive practices*” (1969/1972, p. 68), and by what Foucault called “the *economy of the discursive formation*” (p. 67, original emphasis). These choices result in sub-groupings in the arrangements of objects, concepts, and enunciations. These sub-groupings form themes or theories, but Foucault refers to them as “strategies.” These strategies should not be confused with external projects or personal opinions; they “are regulated ways (and describable as such) of practising the possibilities of discourse” (p. 70).

Double Bracketing

Archaeology requires what one might call a “double bracketing”:

“Not only must the investigator bracket the *truth* claims of the serious speech acts he is investigating – Husserl’s phenomenological reduction – he must also bracket the *meaning* claims of the speech acts he studies; that is, he not only must remain neutral as to whether what a statement asserts as true is in fact true, he must remain neutral as to whether each specific truth claim even makes sense, and more generally, whether the notion of a context-free truth claim is coherent” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 49)

Husserl in his transcendental phenomenology bracketed the *reference* of his experiences, beliefs, and perceptions, that’s to say the objects towards which these seemed to be directed. Foucault did the same, refusing to assume that the objects referred to by a statement are real. But Foucault also went a step further: he refused to assume that a statement has a stable *meaning*. He called into question the very notion that there *is* a meaning or ‘content’ to a statement. Statements have meaning only in their relationship to other statements within a specific discursive formation. Foucault was very clear that an analysis of the meaning or content of a statement was insufficient:

“The analysis of lexical contents defines either the elements of meaning at the disposal of speaking subjects in a given period, or the semantic structure that appears on the surface of a discourse that has already been spoken; it does not concern discursive practice as a place in which a tangled plurality – at once superposed and incomplete – of objects is formed and deformed, appears and disappears” (1969/1972)

The notion of ‘content’ is, of course, part of the conduit model of language. Foucault focused instead on the “mode of existence” of statements: the basis upon which they appear and circulate. The first question to ask of discourse, he insisted, is not about its structure, organization or coherence but, What is it? And this amounts to asking, by what right, on the basis of what conditions, does a science manage to *claim* to have ‘unity’ and ‘coherence’? For Foucault (as for Iser, Barthes, and Gadamer and Garfinkel) meaning and truth are *effects*. What a statement ‘means’ depends on its linkages and affiliations to other statements, as well as to the social institutions in which it is produced and received. Whether a statement is ‘true’ is a matter

for debate, contention, and even retribution. The discursive formation is what makes it possible for a statement to appear meaningful, and what an archaeologist must pay attention to. In his archaeological studies, then, Foucault was “simply describing an open logical *space* in which a certain discourse occurs” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 51). Rather than focus on either the content (meaning) or the referent (object) of statements, Foucault focused on their historical conditions. Archaeology required that the researcher be doubly detached and neutral.

Truth

Foucault has been accused of suggesting that knowledge and truth are completely relative, that “all possible truth-conditions are equal, depending merely on context or interpretative perspective” (Hook, 2001). But such an interpretation is “ludicrous,” because “Foucault views truth-conditions as extremely stable and secure, as situated in a highly specific and idiosyncratic matrix of historical and socio-political circumstances, which give rise to, and are part of, the order of discourse” (Hook, 2001). We’ve seen that an *episteme* is “~~the space of a dispersion,~~” a way of ordering the world and a way of speaking about the world. It is a distinct “regime of truth” with its own specific systems of possible discourse – the discursive formations – which dominate a historical era. Sometimes a resemblance has been noted with Kuhn’s notion of paradigm (cf. Piaget, 1970/1988; Brenner, 1994). Truth for Foucault is not merely the legitimation of power nor mere ideology. Although he emphasized that the grounds upon which knowledge becomes stable and statements become meaningful and true are not fixed, that they have changed abruptly in the past and will undoubtedly change again, he insisted that these grounds can seem rock solid. Foucault described his aims in these terms:

“What I am trying to do is grasp the implicit systems which determine our most familiar behavior without our knowing it. I am trying to find their origin, to show their formation, the constraint they impose upon us; I am therefore trying to place myself at a distance from them and to show how one could escape” (Simon, 1971, p. 201)

It has been said that Foucault’s genealogies tell us “the truth about truth” (Margolis, 1993). This is “the truth that there is no capitalized ‘Truth,’ no ‘truth of truth’” (Caputo, 1993). Foucault’s inquiry may be directed towards the question, Who are we?, but he wants to keep the question open and avoid giving a *single* true answer. Any positive theory of the individual will have us “trapped by our history” (The Subject and Power;). The aim instead is “to promote new

forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries” (TSP, p. 216).

The Genealogy of Power/Knowledge

An archaeology could compare different discursive formations and show that previous ages had written and talked very differently but equally effectively. But it could not explore the transitions from one episteme to another, or explain how an episteme becomes firmly established and difficult to change. By 1971 Foucault was developing an approach he called “genealogy” (from the Greek γενεα, genea, ‘family’; and λογος, logos, ‘knowledge’) which traced the pedigree or line of descent of currently accepted systems of thought (disclosed by archaeology). Traditional history tells a story of progress, development and fulfillment. Although Charles Darwin wrote of “the origin or descent of man” (1871), most evolutionary accounts see humans as rising above our primate ancestors. But a family tree is a record of chance encounters, irrational attractions, and accidents of fertility and mortality. A genealogy discloses these accidents and the coincidences, surprises and struggles that produced a descendent. It involves writing “histories of the present” with an emphasis on “the ensemble of historical contingencies, accidents, and illicit relations.” This is history not as “an acquisition, a possession that grows and solidifies; rather, it is an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within and from underneath” (1971/1984, p. 82).

Foucault was influenced by the historical critique of moral and religious prejudices in Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1877):

“A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their ‘origins,’ will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning; it will be scrupulously attentive to their petty malice; it will await their emergence, once unmasked, as the face of the other” (Foucault, 1971/1984)

Such histories cast doubt on the legitimacy of contemporary concepts and theories, and they celebrate forgotten forms of knowledge that were spurned or declared illegitimate:

“Let us give the term ‘genealogy’ to the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today” (Genealogy and Social Criticism, p. 42)

Foucault now rejected the search for “depth” in the form of either “underlying” rules and structures or the hidden truth sought by a depth hermeneutics. His genealogy has been described as moving *beyond* both structuralism and hermeneutics (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982). His focus broadened from the study of the production of statements to include the relations between “systems of truth and modalities of power” (Davidson, 1986, p. 224). This meant studying the struggles, conflicts, and battles in which forms of knowledge become dominant.

Like the archaeology, this was an approach in which the historian explored a level more fundamental than the individual subject. Foucault was directly taking up the issue of “constitution.” He wrote:

“I wanted to see how these problems of constitution could be resolved within a historical framework, instead of referring them to a constituent object (madness, criminality, or whatever)... I don’t believe the problem can be solved by historicizing the subject as posited by the phenomenologists, fabricating a subject that evolves through the course of history. One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledge, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in empty sameness through the course of history” (1980, p. 117)

With the view that history is struggle and accident, it is no surprise that Foucault broadened his attention from the discursive formations of games of truth to include a new dimension, that of power. He began to explore the interconnection between knowledge and power.

The Genealogies

Discipline and Punish (1975/1977) showed Foucault’s shift in emphasis from archaeology to genealogy. This book explored how the ‘criminal’ has been marked as different and managed

in various ways. Foucault told the history of the penal system and of the radical shift from torture to imprisonment. He highlighted Jeremy Bentham's design for the "Panopticon," an ideal prison in which prisoners are isolated and cannot see one another, but are always visible to an unseen guard in a central tower. Since the prisoners never know when they are being observed they must develop internal control of their activities. Foucault considered this an illustration of the way criminology – like psychology and medicine – had become a "discipline" in a double sense: as a system of knowledge and a system of management. Together such disciplines formed a vast "carceral system" intent on "normalizing" people by molding their conduct and creating "docile bodies." Submitting people to norms through examination and diagnosis, they defined who was "normal" and disciplined those who were not. Their new ontology of "man as machine" was ideal for a society of industrial production.

In *Volume 1 of The History of Sexuality* (1976/1980) Foucault traced the genealogy of sexuality, in the practices of confession to priest, doctor, and psychiatrist. He called these practices "*technologies of the self.*" Foucault focused on sexuality because he considered it a historically singular mode of experience, one which illustrated the formation of subjectivity. At the clinic, in the confessional, and on the psychiatrist's couch the person is exhorted to objectify themselves to self and others through specific procedures of "government." He or she is required to discover the 'truth' about their sexual desires. Sexuality exemplifies technologies in which subjects become objects for others and for themselves, and in which subjectivities are formed.

How did psychoanalysis go from being an exemplary "anti-science" to being a "timid" enterprise? The answer seems to lie in Foucault's recognition of the "normalizing functions" (p. 5) of psychoanalytic discourse about sex and repression. The institutionalized practices that claim to search for hidden truths (the clinic, the psychotherapy session, the confessional) must themselves be analyzed. They turn out to establish a relation between an authority and a submissive and to practice a depth hermeneutics that damages both parties.

In *I, Pierre Riviere, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother...* (Foucault, 1973/1975) Foucault and his students compiled a dossier of documents from multiple discourses: a memoir that was part autobiography, part confession; witnesses' statements and other court documents; medical reports. Their focus was how these diverse and incompatible discourses

struggled with one another to define and obtain their principal object: a French peasant tried for parricide in the 1830s. Was he a criminal, or insane...?

Power and Biopower

Foucault's conception of power challenges the traditional view that power is concentrated in an authority. He argued that the sovereign's power to take life has been replaced by a power to *foster* life, as society's capacity for control and manipulation has grown to include the life processes of both individuals and populations. Power should be viewed as something positive as well as negative. The "threshold of modernity" was crossed when life processes became subject to political changes. The mechanisms of power now generate and order personal and social forces rather than repressing them, "working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize" these forces (1976/1980, p. 136).

"methods of power and knowledge assumed responsibility for the life process and undertook to control and modify them. Western man was gradually learning what it meant to be a living species in a living world, to have a body, conditions of existence, probabilities of life, an individual and collective welfare, forces that could be modified, and a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner. For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence" (p. 142)

Life is no longer a purely biological process; society can now direct the life of both individual and species, and the political process of modern society now "places [human] existence as a living being in question" (143). Power is no longer dealing merely with legal subjects, but with living beings whose life processes it can master. Life and history have intersected and both are now topics of explicit calculation and planning.

This "biopower" has grown in two ways. Scientific disciplines have appeared that focus on the body as machine, disciplines whose procedures of power seek to maximize the body's productivity and render it useful and docile. And institutions to intervene and regulate populations now focus on the life of the species rather than individuals. Political power now has "the task of administering life" (p. 139); we now have the knowledge to transform our lives, or destroy our species. State institutions are the great instruments of society that insert bodies into the economy as producers and consumers, though the techniques of biopower operate "at every

level of the social body” (p. 141), from family to school to military. Foucault challenged the view that the state exercises power only in the interests of the totality, or a particular class. He emphasized that “the state’s power ... is both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power” (Foucault, 1982, p. 213):

“I don’t think that we should consider the ‘modern state’ as an entity which was developed above individuals, ignoring what they are and even their very existence, but on the contrary as a very sophisticated structure, in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns” (p. 214)

This “tricky combination” is perhaps unique in human history, and reflects the way the state has adopted techniques of “pastoral power” which focus on the individual, their inner truth, and their ability to direct their own conscience. This power, once limited to the Christian church, has now “spread out into the whole social body” (p. 215).

The two sides of biopower can be seen in the expansion of institutions to educate, train, reform and discipline, and in the concern with problems of birthrate, migration, public health, and so on. These two techniques of power have been linked by concrete arrangements to form “the great technology of power in the nineteenth century” (p. 140). One of these arrangements is the “deployment of sexuality,” an important illustration of the way “individualization” is accomplished through a combination of “subjectivation” and “objectivation.” Human beings become objects for medicine and the social sciences, and subjects for the interpretive sciences such as psychiatry. Foucault now viewed the human sciences as instruments of biopower. The traditional social sciences objectify people, and while the interpretive social sciences seek a new approach, they “subjectify” people in ways that are equally problematic. These interpretive social sciences claim to reveal hidden truths about the ‘subjects’ of their research and at the same time to stand outside the operations of power. Their claims to neutrality, disinterestedness and objectivity would make it appear that power is irrelevant to their practices, but Foucault was skeptical. To offer this kind of ‘deep’ interpretation, he argued, *is* to exert power. The interpretive social sciences take for granted the particular historical practices they operate within – those of academic psychology, for example. These practices include acts that confer academic

status and prestige – graduation; hiring; tenuring, and so on – acts in which power is undoubtedly involved.

Power is Everywhere

Although state institutions certainly employ power, power is dispersed throughout society, not focused at central points. While it is perfectly legitimate to study power by looking at institutions, there are limits to such an approach. First, the picture is muddled by the mechanisms of reproduction that institutions need to employ. Second, the temptation is to see the institutions as the source of power, when the reverse is the case. Third, there is a tendency to assume that power always reflects the regulations and apparatus of an institution. Although power relationships are “embodied and crystallized” in institutions, their origins are elsewhere: “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (1976/1980, p. 93). It is “always local and unstable” (p. 93). Power relations are to be found “rooted deep in the social nexus” (1982, p. 222), “rooted in the system of social networks” (p. 224). What makes power possible is “the moving substrate of force relations” (1976/1980, p. 93).

Power relations, then, are at the root of the order of any society, as much in the details of intimate interaction as in the scale of large state institutions. But Foucault is not *reducing* social relationships to relations of power. He acknowledges that there are relationships of communication, along with activities of “work, and the transformation of the real.” These are three *aspects* of relationships, and they overlap, interact, and are coordinated in changing ways. Foucault views power as one aspect of any interaction, just as Habermas saw an emancipatory interest everywhere.

But Foucault emphasizes “domination” rather than “emancipation”: the possibility of a confrontation like that between Hegel’s master and slave. Power relations are relations of strategy and even force: “power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations” (p. 92). But power is a kind of force which, unlike violence, grants the other the freedom for defiance and disobedience: “at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom” (1982, p. 225). The “strictly relational character of power relationships” (1976/1980, p. 95) can be seen in the fact that power *needs* resistance in some form or another: as “adversary, target, support....” (p. 95); these are power’s “irreducible

opposite” (p. 96). In a relationship of power the other is always “thoroughly *recognized* and maintained to the very end as a person who acts” (1982, p. 220, emphasis added). In a power relationship one person acts *on the actions* of another: “what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or in the future” (p. 220). The basis of power is not violence, though this may be its instrument or its result. Power “is always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action” (p. 220).

Foucault is careful not to push the emphasis on confrontation too far. This action on another’s action should not be viewed as negative. “The term ‘power’ designates relationships between partners... an ensemble of actions which induce others and follow from one another” (p. 217). Power “is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government” in the sense of the 16th century use of this term: “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick” (p. 221). “To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of actions of others.... Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free” (p. 221). Power always grants the possibility for the refusal to submit.

This action on another’s action is everywhere, it is continual, and it is essential to participation in a society. “[T]o live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible – and in fact ongoing” (p. 222); “the possibility of action upon the action of others” is “coextensive with every social relationship” (p. 224). So while “power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated, rationalized, and centralized in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions” (p. 224), the origin of power and the best place to study power relations is in the interactions of the ‘social nexus.’

How do we study power? We have legal models that address legitimation, economic models that treat power as a commodity, and institutional models of state power. Foucault recommends that instead we begin with resistance, “using this resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used (1982, p. 211). For example, “to find out what our society means by sanity, perhaps we should investigate what is happening in the field of insanity” (p. 211). We will find

“mobile and transitory points of resistance” which have profound consequences: “producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and remolding them, marking off irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and mind” (1976/1980, p. 96). We should start with those “oppositions” that assert the right to be different, “struggles against the ‘government of individualization’” (1982, p. 212). These oppositions and resistances question and attack a technique or form of power, one “which makes individuals subjects” in the dual sense of “subject to someone else by control and dependence” and “tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (p. 212). Here again we hear echos of Hegel, both in Foucault’s suggestion that it is with those who have been subjected and who resist this subjection that we will come to understand how power operates, and in his proposal that “individualization” is a process that makes people both dependent *and* self-conscious.

Power and Knowledge: Power Produces Reality

Let’s return to the relationship between power and knowledge. The famous formula “power/knowledge” (Fr: *pouvoir-savoir*; literally “to be able-to know”) refers to the way the two axes of knowledge and power define a space within which discourse can exist. The “*régime du savoir*” is “the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relations to power” (p. 212). As Foucault explained:

“No knowledge is formed without a system of communication, registration, accumulation, and displacement that is in itself a form of power, linked in its existence and its functioning to other forms of power. No power, on the other hand, is exercised without the extraction, appropriation, distribution, or restraint of a knowledge. At this level there is not knowledge [*connaissance*] on one side and society on the other, or science and the state, but basic forms of ‘power-knowledge’ [*pouvoir-savoir*]” (1994 [Penal Theories], p. 17)

Foucault continued to explore the “peculiar level among all those which enable one to analyze systems of thought – that of discursive practices. There one finds a type of systematicity which is neither logical nor linguistic. Discursive practices are characterized by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge, by the setting of norms for elaborating concept and theories” (1997c, p. 11). But he came to see that “Discursive practices are not purely and simply modes of manufacture of discourse. They take

shape in technical ensembles, in institutions, in behavioral schemes, in types of transmission and dissemination, in pedagogical forms that both impose and maintain them” (p. 12). The genealogist looks at discourse as it is immersed “in the field of multiple and mobile power relations” (p. 98). For “It is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (p. 100). The concept of power/knowledge combines and unifies “the deployment of force and the establishment of truth” (Foucault, 1975/1977, p. 184). Critical theory before Foucault recognized linkages among truth, power, and subjectivity, but it viewed them in limited terms: power leads to ideology, which is a distortion of the truth; power, exercised as domination and exploitation, deforms subjectivity. What Foucault saw was that power is at the heart of the *production* of truth, and the *production* of human beings who understand themselves to be particular kinds of subject. Power can be productive and enabling:

“We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (p.194)

Attention is still paid (as in the archaeology) to what is said and what not said, to who speaks and from what positions, but now attention is also paid to the power relations that are involved. Discursive elements are used both strategically and tactically. “Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations. There can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy: they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy” (1976/1980, p. 101). Foucault’s analysis was a relational one, exploring how knowledge and politics are interwoven. One might study the relationship between psychiatry and political institutions as independent entities, or explore the ethical implications of psychiatric treatment of patients:

“But my goal hasn’t been to do this; rather I have tried to see how the formation of psychiatry as a science, the limitation of its field, and the definition of its object implicated a political structure and a moral practice: in the twofold sense that they were presupposed by the progressive organization of psychiatry as a science, and that they were also changed by this development” (interview)

For example, in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* Foucault's "objective" was "to analyze a certain form of knowledge regarding sex, not in terms of repression or law, but in terms of power" (1976/1980, p. 92). His interest was to explore specific discourses on sex, in terms of "the most immediate, the most local power relations at work" (p. 97). He concluded that as a political issue, sex lies "at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life" (p. 145). At the intersection of the disciplines of the body and the regulation of the population, a problem for both the productivity of the individual body and the well-being of the entire social body, sex gave rise to "an entire micro-power" as well as "comprehensive interventions." "Broadly speaking, at the juncture of the 'body' and the 'population,' sex became a crucial target of a power organized around the management of life rather than the menace of death" (p. 147).

The linkages between knowledge and power are not unidirectional or static. "Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (p. 101). This means that we cannot 'read off' the strategy from discourse: "We must not expect the discourses on sex to tell us... what strategy they derive from, or what moral divisions they accompany, or what ideology – dominant or dominated – they represent" (p. 102). Instead, we must "interrogate" the discourse, at two levels: that of "tactical productivity (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they ensure)" and "strategical integration (what conjunction and what force relationship make their utilization necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur)" (p. 102).

Tactics and *strategy* are two sides of a single coin: "on the one hand, rational forms, technical procedures, instrumentations through which to operate, and, on the other, strategic games that subject the power relations they are supposed to guarantee to instability and reversal" (Preface to HS2 in Rabinow, p. 203).

A Response to Kant

If Foucault's archaeology was a response to Kant's first critique and the image of the individual constituting the world by making mental models, his notion of power was a response to Kant's second critique and the view that moral action is achieved by a universal subject who comes to recognize their abstract duties. Foucault writes of Kant in the context of his discussion of pastoral power. He suggests that Kant (in *What is Enlightenment?*) was the first philosopher to

ask the question Who am I? in, and of, “a very precise moment in history” (p. 216). The suggestion is that Kant was articulating (and legitimating) precisely the tactics of individualization which were becoming central to the pastoral power of the Enlightenment. Each person now had to ask him or herself, ‘Who am I?’ And they had to answer the question, ‘I must *become* “a unique but universal historical subject” (p. 216). ‘I must *become* the individual that I know I am. Within the totalization of the modern state, I must become rational and free.’

A double bind is a paradoxical injunction; an order by someone in a position of power to do something freely. The order “be spontaneous!” is a classic double bind (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967;). Double binds have been seen at the root of mental illness (Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland, 1956). Foucault counters Kant with the recommendation that we challenge the injunctions of individualization and totalization in modern society:

“Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get rid of this kind of political ‘double bind,’ which is the simultaneous individualization and totalization of modern power structures” (1982, p. 216)

The Role of the Researcher

With genealogy Foucault had moved away from the notion that the researcher can be a detached spectator of excavated discourse. “Foucault introduces genealogy as a method of diagnosing and grasping the significance of social practices from within them” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p. 103). He “realizes and thematizes the fact that he himself – like any other investigator – is involved in, and to a large extent produced by, the social practices he is studying” (p. 103). Genealogical investigation has a practical, a political, aim: a genealogy aims not for knowledge for its own sake but for its critical or political potential, its capacity to produce effects of contestation to what is taken to be ‘truth.’ As a critical inquiry, genealogy tells “effective history.” A genealogist writes history aware of their own position and interests; there can be no objective, disinterested account. This requires “someone who shares the participant’s involvement but distances himself from it and does the hard historical work of diagnosing the history and organization of our current cultural practices. The result is a pragmatically guided reading of the effect of present social practices which does not claim to correspond either to the

everyday understanding of being in those practices nor to a deeper repressed understanding” (Dreyfus, 1984, p. 80).

On the one hand the genealogist questions and tries to unsettle the knowledge that has achieved the accepted status of ‘truth,’ and challenges the power that this knowledge exercises. “A certain fragility has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence. . . in those aspects... that are most familiar, most solid and intimately related to our bodies and everyday behaviour” (1980a, p. 80). For example, “it wasn’t as a matter of course that mad people came to be regarded as mentally ill; it wasn’t self-evident that the only thing to be done with a criminal was to lock him up; it wasn’t self evident that the causes of illness were thought to be sought through the individual examination of bodies” (cited in Smart, 1982, p. 77). Foucault considered that, “the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has... exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them” (Foucault, 1974, p. 171).

A central part of his examination of technologies of the self was Foucault’s criticism of depth hermeneutics, both as a form of government and as a method in the human sciences. This was a focus in the genealogy, as Foucault considered the way that the institutions that established and supported interpretation (institutions such as the church, with confession, and the medical profession, with therapy), have involved exercise of power. The *alleged* hiddenness of what is sought plays, Foucault now saw, a directly visible role (1976/1980, p. 107):

“Whereas the interpreter is obliged to go to the depth of things, like an excavator, the moment of interpretation [in genealogy] is like an overview, from higher and higher up, which allows the depth to be laid out in front of him in a more and more profound visibility; depth is resituated as an absolutely superficial secret” (Foucault, 1997d)

“If interpretation is a never-ending task, it is simply because there is nothing to interpret because, when all is said and done, underneath it all everything is already interpretation” (1997d, p. 189)

On the other hand, the most powerful form of critique comes, in Foucault’s view, not from the overarching hermeneutics of suspicion such as Marxism and psychoanalysis but from local

and specific settings, from microcontexts. Critique should arise from “subjugated knowledges,” not from totalizing theoretical systems. Foucault rejected the notion that a critique could be transcendental; it can only be immanent, local. Like Marx, critique for Foucault combined an interest with the conditions for the possibility of truth with an interest in freedom. He wrote that “criticism – understood as analysis of the historical conditions that bear on the creation of links to truth, to rules, and to the self – does not mark out impassible boundaries or describe closed systems; it brings to light transformable singularities” (Preface to HS2 in Rabinow, p. 201).

But Foucault’s version of critique doesn’t aim to emancipate the oppressed or remove their false consciousness. Foucault suggests that to view the exploited and marginalized as analogous to patients in psychoanalysis, as Habermas does, is to perpetuate their problems. The assumption that they need an expert to tell them what their own actions really mean and where their interests truly lie is another form of domination. An effective history opposes an oppressor by challenging their authority.

The Body

The body has a central place in genealogy. Foucault explicated a knowledge and mastery that amounted to a “political technology of the body” (1975/1977, p. 26). The genealogies focus on the body – tacit, embodied and sentient – rather than the ‘subject’ – cognitive, disembodied, and conscious. Foucault insisted that the operation of power requires no representation: “Power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject’s own representations. If power takes hold of the body, this isn’t through its having first to be interiorized in people’s consciousness” (1980, p. 186). The body is the locus of practices of subjectification and objectification. Genealogy maps a historical descent whose primary object is the body:

“Finally, descent attaches itself to the body. It inscribes itself in the nervous system, in temperament, in the digestive apparatus; it appears in faulty respiration, in improper diets, in the debilitated and prostrate bodies of those whose ancestors committed errors.... the body maintains, in life as in death, through its strength or weakness, the sanction of every truth and error, as it sustains, in an inverse manner, the origin – descent” (1984, p. 375)

A body is a location with a surface and a volume, which become articulated and inscribed. The location becomes to basis for an illusory unitary subject, the surface is marked by the passage of events, and the volume bears the impact of the force:

“The body is the surface of the inscription of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of the dissociation of the Me (to which it tries to impart the chimera of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history’s destruction of the body” (1984, p. 375-376)

The task of genealogy is to “expose” the body as site and surface, but also as agency.

An Ethics of Care of the Self

For some critics something important was missing from Foucault’s histories: human freedom. In both his archaeologies and his genealogies Foucault had insisted that there is no ‘subject’ – either individual or collective – who moves history. The benefit of this assumption was to avoid seeing history as the work of a few powerful people, as in much historical writing. The danger was that it seemed to preclude the possibility of people acting freely.

Foucault came to focus on the ways in which the human subject becomes an object to him/herself. This called for attention to the variety of ways in which someone “is led to observe himself, analyse himself, interpret himself, recognize himself as a domain of possible knowledge” (1984c). Sex and sexuality remained a central case, but Foucault recast subsequent volumes of *The History of Sexuality* to focus on the techniques in which subjectivity has been fostered, “if by ‘subjectivity’ one means the way in which the subject experiences himself in a game of truth where he relates to himself” (Foucault,).

The basic question was why for Western society sexual practices have been for such a long time a *moral* concern. Why should sexuality, but not say digestion, be a moral issue? Foucault’s interest was not so much in sexuality as in morality: he wrote “I am much more interested in problems about techniques of the self and things like that than sex... sex is boring” (1983/1997, p. 253), and “The general framework of the book about sex is a history of morals” (p. 263).

His focus was on how a person becomes – in their sexual activity – an “ethical subject,” or, as Foucault phrased it, the “reflective practice of freedom” (see Poster, 1993). In various “practices of the self,” models are offered for how a person should examine and come to know him or herself, and the transformations they should try to accomplish. *Ethics* should be understood in the sense of *ethos* (Gk: nature or disposition). This third phase of Foucault’s work connects with Kant’s third critique, *The Critique of Judgement*, and indeed he called it “an aesthetics of existence” (1984/1986, p. 12). But it was still a genealogy, and it incorporated the archaeological study of forms of problematization of sexuality. The focus was on the history of “forms of moral subjectivation”: how people “not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria” (p.10-11). These forms amounted to a “cultivation of the self” and “a stylistics of existence” (1984/1988, p. 71). Volume 2 of *The History of Sexuality* became a study of carnal pleasure in ancient Greece (the original plan had been for a study of female hysteria in C19). The domain of analysis was those “practical texts” which gave advice to the reader, viewed as “functional devices that would enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over and and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects” (1984/1986, p. 13). Once again the body was of central importance: it is the central focus of work of self-creation; the ethical substance that we work on to become humans.

Subjectivation

In *Volume 3*, a study of “care of the self” in later antiquity (volume 4 was unfinished at the time of his death), Foucault began to elaborate an account of human being as a site of multiple practices. In the various games of truth, humans come to understand themselves, to grasp their ‘nature’ - the ‘truths’ about what it is to be a subject. But being human is also the product, the effect, of a variety of technologies: the practices and apparatuses of home, work, medicine, etc.. And, not last, it is the result of projects of self-management, of self-governing, in terms of physical and mental health, education and training, religious and spiritual well-being. This third dimension is what Foucault referred to as “the care of the self.”

Kant argued that moral conduct requires that the individual recognize that they are a universal subject. Foucault proposed that what Kant actually describes is a process of self-

constitution, not just “self-awareness” but “self-formation as an ‘ethical subject’” (1984/1986, p. 28). This “mode of subjection” is “the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule [of moral conduct] and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice” (p. 27).

As we have seen, Kant took on the problem of how valid knowledge is connected to ethical action. As Foucault notes, this connection was greatly debated in the Enlightenment. Kant argued that the universal capacity for reason enabled every individual to identify both true knowledge and moral conduct. “Kant’s solution was to find a universal subject that, to the extent it was universal, could be the subject of knowledge, but which demanded, nonetheless, an ethical attitude – precisely the relationship to the self which Kant proposes in *The Critique of Practical Reason*” (1983/1997, p. 279). We’ve seen that Foucault located Kant at the ‘threshold of modernity’ first for his questioning the limits of representation, and then in the context of the technologies (and double-binds) of pastoral care which began to spread through society with the advent of biopower. Now he argued that Kant offered new answers to old questions, in the form of a new way (within the Western cultural tradition that drew from the Greeks and then Christianity) for people to *constitute* themselves:

“Kant says, ‘I must recognize myself as universal subject, that is, I must constitute myself in each of my actions as a universal subject by conforming to universal rules.’ The old questions were reinterpreted: How can I constitute myself as a subject of ethics? Recognize myself as such? Are ascetic exercises needed? Or simply this kantian relationship to the universal which makes me ethical by conformity to practical reason? Thus Kant introduces one more way in our tradition whereby the self is not merely given but is constituted in relationship to itself as subject” (p. 279-280)

Foucault insisted that this constitution of the subject – both in power relations and through care of the self, both as an object for others and as an object for oneself – is observable. The self “is constituted in real practices – historically analyzable practices.” We can observe “a technology of the constitution of the self” (p. 277). Such a technology “can be found in all cultures in different forms.” It is however somewhat difficult to study, for two reasons. First, the techniques don’t require material apparatus and so “they are often invisible techniques.” Second, they are often tied up with “techniques for the direction of others. For example, if we take educational institutions, we realize that one is managing others and teaching them to manage

themselves” (p. 277). But it is nonetheless empirically observable, and this is the task of an ethics (or a “genealogy of ethics”).

Foucault proposed that there are four main aspects to this crafting of ones relation to self and to others. First is the part of the self which is concerned with moral conduct; the “ethical substance” — the material that is going to be worked over by ethics. Second is “the mode of subjectivation”; “the way people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations.” Third is “the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects” (p. 265), “the self-forming activity,” that is to say asceticism in a broad sense. Finally there is the kind of being we aspire to be.

Conclusions: Thinking, Problematization, and Critical Inquiry

“Even when a person seems to retire into himself to live among his own ideas, he is living really with the others who have thought what he is thinking” (Habermas, 1981/1989, p. 95-96)

We must return to the fact that Foucault made it clear he was not writing histories of ideas or histories of the progress of scientific knowledge. Looking back on his work he described it as “a critical history of *thought*” (emphasis added). What, then, is *thought*?

“By ‘thought,’ I mean what establishes, in a variety of possible forms, the play of true and false, and consequently *constitutes* the human being as a knowing subject [*sujet de connaissance*]; in other words, it is the basis for accepting or refusing rules, and constitutes human beings as social and juridical subjects; it is what establishes the relation with oneself and with others, and constitutes the human being as ethical subject” (Preface to HS2, Rabinow, p. 200, first emphasis added)

Foucault, just like Kant, worked backwards from our knowledge of the world to figure out what kind of subject we must be. “The problem is to determine what the subject must be, to what condition he is subject, what status he must have, what position he must occupy in reality or in the imaginary, in order to become a legitimate subject of this or that type of knowledge” (ref). What this required was rethinking the subject, and also rethinking thinking. We have seen that for Foucault every human being is the product of specific discursive practices, so there are many forms of subjectivity. Thinking itself is a social practice, and a way of relating to a situation.

Thought assumes “concrete forms” in institutions, in practices, and in systems of representations (maps, calculi, etc.). ‘Internal’ action on *mental* representations is only *one* form of thought, and it requires the formation of a particular *kind* of self, as a knowing subject. Foucault reminds us that for Kant, becoming a Cartesian subject required a certain kind of ethical stance, a stance in which one viewed oneself as a *universal* subject. Thinking for Kant was individual, detached, and formal.

But Foucault emphasized – and once again the influence of Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Hegel is evident – that thought is found in *all* action, whether it is intellectual, ethical, or self-conscious.

“‘Thought,’ understood in this way, then, is not to be sought only in theoretical formulations such as those of philosophy or science; it can and must be analyzed in every manner of speaking, doing, or behaving in which the individual appears and acts as knowing subject [*sujet de connaissance*], as ethical or juridical subject, as subject conscious of himself and others. In this sense, thought is understood as the very form of action – as action insofar as it implies the play of true and false, the acceptance or refusal of rules, the relation to oneself and to others” (p. 200-201)

Rethinking the subject and rethinking thinking go hand in hand with rethinking the nature of knowledge, and how something or someone becomes an object of knowledge.

“it is also and at the same time a question of determining under what conditions something can become an **object** for a possible knowledge [*connaissance*], how it may have been problematized as an object to be known, to what selective procedure it may have been subjected, the part of it that is regarded as pertinent. So it is a matter of determining its mode of objectivation, which is not the same either, depending on the type of knowledge [*savoir*] that is involved”

Foucault emphasized that thinking is a way of relating to a situation which objectifies it and allows us to raise the question of its character, consider it as a problem, and choose our actions accordingly. Rabinow and Rose note that “By definition, the thinker is neither entirely outside of the situation in question nor entirely enmeshed within it without recourse or options” (2003, p. 13). Indeed, thought “is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals. Thought is freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which

one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem” (1997b, p. 33)

In other words, thought is problematization.

Problematization

The task of a history of thought, in Foucault’s view, was to “define the conditions in which human beings ‘problematize’ what they are, what they do, and the world in which they live” (1984/1986, p. 10). This is a matter of analyzing “the *problematizations* through which being offers itself to be, necessarily, thought – and the *practices* on the basis of which these problematizations are formed” (p. 11). Problematizations are formed when the world and how we live in it become a matter of concern, an element for reflection, a matter of anxiety, discussion, and truth. Problematization is a definition both of a way of thinking and of a domain of objects: a way in which “being offers itself to be thought.” We can see now why for Foucault’s kind of history we must recognize that language is not merely representation but something ‘more.’ Language defines the mode of being of things, and the order that divides them up before presenting them to the understanding.

Problematization is the constitution of objects for thought – for scientific analysis, political assessment, or ethical reflection. To focus on problematization is to trace the history of thought and the dynamics of human thinking not as a history of ideas or representations, nor as a history of mentalities (of worldviews or attitudes), but as the constitution of subjects and objects. So “a critical history of thought would be an analysis of the conditions under which certain relations of subject to object are formed or modified, insofar as those relations constitute a possible knowledge [*savoir*]” (1984c). Thought is a questioning, a stepping back from what one is doing, a posing of problems. Diverse solutions may be the result, but what is at their root is the problematization (itself the result of social, economic, or political processes) which they attend to.

Critical Inquiry

The study of problematization is a critical inquiry. It looks at specific cases to learn their general significance:

“The study of modes of problematization (that is, of what is neither an anthropological constant nor a chronological variation) is ... the way to analyze questions of general import in their historically unique form” (1984b)

Thought about a problem will have taken a variety of forms. The point of analysis is not to evaluate these, but to explore the conditions in which they were possible, the general form of problematization that made them possible. This approach unsettles our tendency to accept a problem as ‘given,’ and allows us to see it instead as arising from a specific cultural and historical configuration. In doing this we recast the problem, examining the situation in which it arose. Critical analysis is itself a practice of problematization and re-problematization. It is:

“a movement of critical analysis in which one tries to see how the different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematization” (1997b)

And the study of problematization is itself a practice of problematization. Foucault considered problematization to be *his* “way of approaching political questions”: as “the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem to me to pose problem for politics” (1997b). He went on:

“For example, I don’t think that in regard to madness and mental illness there is any ‘politics’ that can contain the just and definitive solution. But I think that in madness, in derangement, in behavior problems, there are reasons for questioning politics; and politics must answer these questions, but it never answers them completely. The same is true for crime and punishment: naturally, it would be wrong to imagine that politics have nothing to do with the prevention and punishment of crime, and therefore nothing to do with a certain number of elements that modify its form, its meaning, its frequency; but it would be just as wrong to think that there is a political formula likely to resolve the question of crime and put an end to it. The same is true of sexuality: it doesn’t exist apart from a relationship to political structures, requirements, laws, and regulations that have a primary importance for it; and yet one can’t expect politics to provide the forms in which sexuality would cease to be a problem”

Thought, then, is a specific practical and concrete way of relating to a situation and considering it as a problem, a way of living a historical and cultural configuration. And the study of thought is itself a form of thought, the problematization of problematization, with epistemological, political, and ethical aspects. This is Foucault’s conception of the project for a critical scientific inquiry, and of the appropriate stance for an investigator.

Chapter 14 References

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