Foucault on Freedom and Truth

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OUCAULT DISCONCERTS. In a number of ways perhaps. But the way I want to examine is this: certain of Foucault's most interesting historical analyses, while they are original, seem to lie along familiar lines of critical thought. That is, they seem to offer an insight into what has happened and into what we have become, yet at the same time offer a critique, and hence some notion of a good unrealized or repressed in history, which we therefore understand better how to rescue.

But Foucault himself repudiates this suggestion. He dashes the hope, if we had one, that there is some good we can *affirm* as a result of the understanding these analyses give us. And by the same token he seems to raise a question of whether or not there is such a thing as a way out. This is rather paradoxical, because Foucault's analyses seem to bring evils to light; and yet he wants to distance himself from the suggestion that would seem inescapably to follow, that the negation or overcoming of these evils promotes a good.

More specifically, Foucault's analyses, as we shall see in greater detail, turn a great deal on power/domination and on disguise/illusion. He lays bare a modern system of power, which is both more all-penetrating and more insidious than previous forms. Its strength lies partly in the fact that it is not seen as power but as science or fulfilment, even liberation. Foucault's work is thus partly an unmasking.

You would think that implicit in all this was the notion of two goods that need rescuing and that the analyses help to rescue: freedom and truth—two goods that would be linked deeply granted the fact that the negation of one (domination) makes essential use of the negation of the other (disguise). We would be back on familiar terrain with an old Enlightenment-inspired combination. But Foucault seems to repudiate both. The idea of a liberating truth is a profound illusion. There is no truth that can be espoused, defended, or rescued against systems of power. On the contrary, each such system defines its own variant of

truth. And there is no escape from power into freedom, for such systems of power are coextensive with human society We can only step from one to another.

Or at least, this is what Foucault seems to be saying in passages such as the following:

> Contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits   nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: It is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its own régime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true.[1]

Is there confusion and contradiction here or a genuinely original position? The answer I want to offer cannot be put in a single phrase, but roughly I think that there is some of both. The nature of the combination, however, is not easy to understand.

I

I would like to examine this issue in connection with some of the analyses of Foucault's recent historical works, *Surveiller et Punir* and the *Histoire de la Sexualité*. For the sake of my discussion I want to isolate three lines of analysis, each of which suggests or is historically connected with a certain line of critique, but where in each case, Foucault repudiates the latter. I have ordered these analyses so that the argument arising from them moves toward more radical repudiations. That is at first sight, analysis 2 will seem to offer a reason for repudiating the good suggested by analysis 1, and 3 will seem to offer a reason for rejecting the good implicit in 2, only to be rejected in turn. Or so it would seem.

(1) The first that I want to take up is the contrast drawn in *Surveiller et Punir* (SP) between modes of punishment in the classical age and today The book opens with a riveting description of the execution of a parricide in seventeenth century France. The modern is appalled, horrified. We seem to be more in the world of our contemporary fanatical perpetrators of massacre, the Pol Pots, the Idi Amins, rather than in that of the orderly process of law in a civilized, well-established

regime. Obviously something very big has changed in our understanding of ourselves, of crime and punishment.

Bringing us up against this evidence of radical historical discontinuity—this is what Foucault does superlatively For our eyes, the details of the execution of Damiens bespeak gratuitous cruelty, sadism. Foucault shows that they had another reason then. The punishment can be seen as a kind of "liturgy" ("la liturgie des supplices").[2] Human beings are seen as set in a cosmic order, constituted by a hierarchy of beings that is also a hierarchy of goods. They stand also in a political order, which is related to and in a sense endorsed by the cosmic one. This kind of order is hard to explain in modern terms, because it is not simply an order of things but an order of meanings. Or to put it in other terms, the order of things that we see around us is thought to reflect or embody an order of Ideas. You can explain the coherence things have in terms of a certain kind of making sense.

Certain kinds of crime—parricide is a good example—are offenses against this order as well as against the political order. They do not just represent damage done to the interests of certain other individuals or even of the ensemble of individuals making up the society They represent a violation of the order, tearing things out of their place as it were. And so punishment is not just a matter of making reparation for damage inflicted, or of removing a dangerous criminal, or of deterring others. The order must be set right. In the language of the time, the criminal must make "amenda honorable."

So the punishments have a meaning. I find Foucault convincing on this. The violence done to the order is restored by being visited on the wrong-doer. Moreover this restoral is made more effective by his participation in (to us) the grisly scenario, in particular his avowal. As Foucault puts it, one of the goals was to "instaurer le supplice comme moment de vérité."[3] Moreover, since the order violated includes the political order—royal power in this case—and this order is public, not in the modern Benthamian sense of touching the general interest, but in the older sense of a power that essentially manifests itself in public space; the restoral has to be enacted in public space. What to us is the additional barbarity of making a spectacle of all these gruesome goings-on was an essential part of what was being *effected* in the punishments of that age.

L'atrocité qui hante le supplice joue donc un double rôle: principe de la communication du crime avec la peine, elle est d'autre part l'exaspération du

châtiment par rapport au crime. Elle assure d'un même coup l'éclat de la vérité et celui du pouvoir; elle est le rituel de l'enquête qui s'achève et la cérémonie où triomphe le souverain.[4]

It is clear that one of the things that makes us so different from the people of that epoch is that the whole background notion of order has disappeared for us. This has been connected to—is in a sense the obverse side of—the development of the modern identity, the sense we have of ourselves as free, self-defining subjects whose understanding of their own essence or of their paradigm purposes is drawn from within, and no longer from a supposed cosmic order in which they are set. But this is not the whole story; it is not just that we have lost their background rationale. It is also that a new notion of the good has arisen. This is defined by what often has been called modern humanitarianism. We have acquired since the eighteenth century a concern for the preservation of life, for the fulfilling of human need, and above all for the relief of suffering, which gives us an utterly different set of priorities from our forebears. It is this and not just our loss of their background that makes them seem so barbaric to us.

What lies behind this modern humanitarianism? This is a big and deep story No one can claim to understand it fully But I have to go into it a little, because his interpretation of it is central to Foucault's position. I think one of the important factors that underlies it is the modern sense of the significance of what I want to call "ordinary life." I use this as a term of art for that ensemble of activities that are concerned with the sustaining of life, its continuation, and its reproduction: the activities of producing and consuming, or marriage, love, and the family. While in the traditional ethics that came to us from the ancients, this had merely infrastructural significance (it was the first term in Aristotle's duo of ends: "life and the good life" [zên kai euzên]; a career [bios] concerned with it alone put us on a level with animals and slaves); in modern times it becomes the prime locus of significance.

In traditional ethics, ordinary life is overshadowed by what are identified as higher activities—contemplation for some, the citizen life for others. And in mediaeval Catholicism something like this overshadowing of ordinary lay life occurs relative to the dedicated life of priestly or monastic celibacy It was particularly the Protestant Reformation with its demand for personal commitment, its refusal of the notion of first- and second-class Christians (unless it be the distinction between saved

and damned), its refusal of any location of the sacred in human space, time, or rite, and its insistence on the biblical notion that life was hallowed, which brought about the reversal. This reversal continues through the various secularized philosophies. It underlies the Baconian insistence on utility, and partly in this way feeds into the mainstream humanism of the Enlightenment. It has obviously leveling, anti-aristocratic potential.

But more than this, it has come, I would claim, to inform the entirety of modern culture. Think for instance of the growth of the new understanding of the companionate marriage in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, the growing sense of the importance of emotional fulfillment in marriage—indeed the whole modern sense that one's feelings are a key to the good life. This is defined now as involving certain emotional experiences. If I can use the term "the good life" as an absolutely general, ethic-neutral term for whatever is considered good/holy/of ultimate value on any given view, then I would want to say that the Reformation theologies with their new stress on the calling made ordinary life the significant locus of the issues that distinguish the good life. Euzên now occurs within zên. And modern culture has continued this.

This I believe is an important part of the background to modern humanitarianism. Because with the ethics of ordinary life arises the notion that serving life (and with later, more subjectivist variants, avoiding suffering) is a paradigm goal in itself, while at the same time the supposed higher ends that previously trumped life—aristocratic honor, the sustaining of cosmic order, eventually even religious orthodoxy itself—are discredited progressively

This perspective would make one envisage the change in philosophies of punishment since the seventeenth century as a gain; perhaps in other respects also a loss, but at least in this one respect as a gain. In other words, it seems to contain a critique of the older view as based on a mystification, in the name of which human beings were sacrificed, and terrible suffering was inflicted. At least that has been the Enlightenment-inspired reaction.

But Foucault does not take that stance at all. Ultimately, as is well known, he wants to take a stance of neutrality Here are just two systems of power: classical and modern. But at first blush, there seems to be a value reason for refusing the Enlightenment valuation. This lies in a reading of modern humanitarianism as the reflection of a new system of domination, directed toward the maintenance and increase of "bio-mass." This is the second analysis, which I would like to look at briefly

(2) The picture is drawn in both *Surveiller et Punir* and *Histoire de la sexualité* (vol. 1) of a constellation combining modern humanitarianism, the new social sciences, and the new disciplines that develop in armies, schools, and hospitals in the eighteenth century, all seen as the formation of new modes of domination. In an immensely rich series of analyses, Foucault draws the portrait of a new form of power coming to be. Where the old power depended on the idea of public space and of a public authority that essentially manifested itself in this space, which overawed us with its majesty and relegated the subjects to a less visible status, the new power operates by universal surveillance. It does away with the notion of public space; Power no longer appears, it is hidden, but the lives of all the subjects are now under scrutiny This is the beginning of a world we are familiar with, in which computerized data banks are at the disposal of authorities, whose key agencies are not clearly identifiable, and whose modus operandi is often partly secret.[5]

The image or emblem of this new society for Foucault is Bentham's Panopticon, where a single central vantage point permits the surveillance of a host of prisoners, each of whom is isolated from all the rest and incapable of seeing his watcher. In a striking image, he contrasts ancient to modern society through the emblematic structure of temple and panopticon. The ancients strove to make a few things visible to the many; we try to make many things visible to the few "Nous sommes bien moins grecs que nous ne le croyons."[6]

The new philosophy of punishment thus is seen as inspired not by humanitarianism but by the need to control. Or rather humanitarianism itself seems to be understood as a kind of strategem of the new growing mode of control. The new forms of knowledge serve this end. People are measured, classed, examined in various ways, and thus made the better subject to a control that tends to normalization. In particular, Foucault speaks of the medical examination, and the various kinds of inspection that arose on its model, as a key instrument in this. The Examination, he says, is at once "le déploiement de la force et l'établissement de la vérité."

Far from explaining the rise of this new technology of control in terms of the modern identity of man as an individual, Foucault wants to explain the modern notion of individuality as one of its products. This new technology brings about the modern individual as an objective of control. The being who thus is examined, measured, categorized, and made the target of policies of normalization is the one whom we have come to define as the modern individual.[7]

There is another way of contrasting modern power with the classical. Foucault touches on it in SP but sets it out more explicitly in later work.[8]

The classical understanding of power turned on the notions of sovereignty and law Much of early modern thought was taken up with definitions of sovereignty and legitimacy In part these intellectual efforts were deployed in the service of the new centralized royal governments, which built up toward their apogee in the absolute monarchies of the seventeenth century. In part they were concerned with the opposite movement, a definition of the limits of rightful sovereignty, and hence the rights of resistance of the subject. At the limit this line of thought issues in the post-Rousseauian definitions of legitimate sovereignty as essentially founded on self-rule.

But in either case these theories present an image of power as turning on the fact that some give commands and others obey They address this question in terms of law or right. Foucault's thesis is that, while we have not ceased talking and thinking in terms of this model, we actually live in relations of power that are quite different and that cannot be described properly in its terms. What is wielded through the modern technologies of control is something quite different, in that (a) it is not concerned with law but with normalization. That is, it is above all concerned with bringing about a certain result, defined as health or good function, whereas relative to any such goal, law always is concerned with what Nozick calls "side-constraints." In fact what has happened is a kind of infiltration of the process of law itself by this quite alien species of control. Criminals are treated more and more as "cases" to be "rehabilitated" and brought back to normal.[9]

This change goes along with two others. First, (b) where the old law/power was concerned with prohibitions, with instructions requiring that we in some way restrict our behavior to conform to them, the new kind of power is productive. It brings about a new kind of subject and new kinds of desire and behavior that belong to him. It is concerned to form us as modern individuals.[10] Second, (c) this power is not wielded by a subject. It is essential to the old model that power presupposes a location of the source of command. Even if no longer in the hands of the King, it now will be located in a sovereign assembly or perhaps in the people who have the right to elect it. In any case the orders start from somewhere. But the new kind of power is not wielded by specific people against others, at least not in this way It is rather a complex form of organization in which we are all involved.[11]

We still live in the theory of the old power, understood in terms of sovereignty/obedience. But the reality we have is the new one, which must be understood in terms of domination/subjugation. In political theory, we still "need to cut off the king's head."[12]

Now this second analysis may remind us of another important theme of critical political theory, indeed a central theme of Critical Theory (in capitals), that of the link between the domination of nature and the domination of man. This is set out in perhaps its clearest form, and in one of its most influential formulations in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (especially letter 6). But it was taken up and continued in a variety of ways, and emerges as an explicit theme in the writings of the Frankfurt School.

The basic notion is a critique of mainstream enlightenment humanism with its exaltation of instrumental reason and an instrumental stance towards nature, both within and without us. To objectify our own nature and to try to bring it under the control of reason is to divide what should be a living unity It introduces a master within, in Schiller's language, a relation of domination internal to the person. The proper stance of reason to nature is that of articulator. In expression—in Schiller's formulation, in beauty—nature and reason come to reconciliation.

The relation of domination within man, which is part of a stance of domination toward nature in general, cannot help engendering a domination of man by man. What goes on within must end up also happening between men. Schiller's account of this connection is via the breakdown of a true consensual community among atomic individuals that necessitates a regime of enforced conformity to law But Foucault seems to offer to the Schillerian perspective another connection (supplementing, not replacing the first). The objectifying and domination of inner nature comes about in fact not just through a change of attitude but through training in an interiorization of certain disciplines. The disciplines of organized bodily movement, of the employment of time, of ordered dispositions of living/working space—these are the paths by which objectification really takes place, becomes more than a philosopher's dream, or the achievement of a small élite of spiritual explorers, and takes on the dimensions of a mass phenomenon.

But the disciplines that build this new way of being are social; they are the disciplines of the barracks, the hospital, the school, the factory By their very nature they lend themselves to the control of some by others. In these contexts, the inculcation of habits of self-discipline is often the imposition of discipline by some on others. These are the loci where forms of domination become entrenched through being interiorized.

Seen in this way, Foucault offers the Frankfurt school an account of the inner connection between the domination of nature and the domination of man that is rather more detailed and more convincing

than what they came up with themselves. It is the measure of the great richness of his work that this gift is not at all part of his intentions. On the contrary, Foucault will have nothing to do with this Romantic-derived view of the oppression of nature and our "liberation" from it.

Once again, this seems ultimately to be a matter of his Nietzschean refusal of the notion of truth as having any meaning outside a given order of power. But once again, there looks to be a more immediate, value-related reason. This comes out in the third analysis, which is the subject of the *Histoire de la Sexualité*.

(3) Central to the Romantic notion of liberation is the notion that the nature within us must come to expression. The wrong stance of reason is that of objectification and the application of instrumental reason: The right stance is that that brings to authentic expression what we have within us. In accordance with the whole modern rehabilitation of ordinary life, of which the romantic movement is heir, one of the crucial aspects of this inner nature that must be articulated is our nature as sexual beings. There is a truth of this; an authentic way for each of us to love. This is distorted by custom or by the demands of power external to us; in more modern variants, it is distorted by the demands of the capitalist work-ethic or by the disciplines of a bureaucratic society In any case, whatever the distorting agent, it needs to be liberated, and coming to true expression is both a means and a fruit of this liberation.

Foucault aims to dismantle this whole conception, and show it to be thorough-going illusion. The idea that we have a sexual nature and that we can get at it by speech, by avowal—perhaps with the help of experts—Foucault sees as an idea with deep roots in Christian civilization. It links together earlier practices of confession through counter-reformation practices of self-scrutiny (and also reformed ones, naturally; but Foucault tends to be more familiar with French Catholic sources) to Freudian psychoanalysis, the "talking cure." We live in "une *société singulièrement avouante.*"[13] But this idea is not the statement of a deep, culture-independent truth about us. It is rather one of these "truths" that are produced by a certain regime of power. And in fact it is a product of the same regime of power through the technology of control that we just have been examining.

Foucault's idea seems to be that the notion that we have a sexual nature is itself a product of those modes of knowledge designed to make us objects of control. Our acceptance that we have such a nature makes us an object of such control. For now we have to find it and set our lives to rights by it. And finding it requires the help of experts, requires that we put ourselves in their care, be they the priests of old or the

psychoanalysts or social workers of today And part of putting ourselves
in their hands is our avowal, the requirement that we go on trying to *say*
what we are like, what our experience is, how things are with us.

This whole idea turns out to be a strategem of power. It helps the
cause of control partly in that it presents us as enigmas who need
external help to resolve ourselves; and partly in that it has created the
very idea of sex—not of course, the desire, the instinct, but the
understanding of sexuality as the locus of a crucial fulfillment for
ourselves as human beings. This self-understanding in terms of an
enigmatic nature requiring expression has made us into modern sexual
beings, where a key element of the good life is some kind of sexual
fulfillment. The question of the meaning of our life is bound with the
authentic nature of our sexual longing. "La question de ce que nous
sommes, une certaine pente nous a conduits, en quelques siècles, à la
poser au sexe. Et, non pas tellement au sexe-nature (élément du
système du vivant, objet pour une biologie), mais au sexe-histoire, ou
sexe-significant, au sexe-discours."[14]

And this makes us objects of control in all sorts of ways that we barely
understand. The important thing to grasp is that we are not controlled
on the old model, through certain prohibitions being laid on us. We may
think we are gaining some freedom when we throw off sexual
prohibitions, but in fact we are dominated by certain images of what it is
to be a full, healthy, fulfilled sexual being. And these images are in fact
very powerful instruments of control. We may think of the contempo-
rary wave of sexual permissiveness as a kind of "revolt of the sexual
body " But

> What is the response on the side of power? An economic (and perhaps also
> ideological) exploitation of eroticisation, from sun-tan products to pornographic
> films. Responding precisely to the revolt of the body, we find a new mode of
> investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by represssion but
> that of control by stimulation. "Get undressed—but be slim, be good-looking,
> tanned!"[15]

The ruse is diabolic. The whole idea that we are generally too sexually
repressed and need above all liberation, that we need to be able to talk
more freely, that we need to throw off taboos and enjoy our sexual
nature: This is not just another of those illusions that makes us see power
always in terms of prohibitions. In fact the self experience whereby we
have a sexual nature that is held down or confined by rules and taboos is
itself a creation of the new kind of power/control. In going for
liberation, we see ourselves as escaping a power understood on the old

model. But in fact we live under a power of the new kind, and this we are not escaping; far from it, we are playing its game, we are assuming the shape it has molded for us. It keeps us tied to the whole "dispositif de sexualité."[16]

The very idea of modern sexuality thus develops as part of technologies of control. It is at the hinge where two axes of such development join. On one hand, it is related to the disciplines of the body; on the other, to the regulation of populations. It serves the preservation and extension of life as the "biomass," which is the overriding direction of much modern policy

II

Let me try to sum up the discussion of the three analyses of Foucault. I have been trying through them to get to the point where we can see the break in Foucault's thought, the point that disconcerts, where he adopts a Nietzschean-derived stance of neutrality between the different historical systems of power, and thus seems to neutralize the evaluations that arise out of his analyses. In analysis 1, he opposes the classical liturgical idea of punishment to the modern humanitarian one. And refuses to value the second over the first. But this refusal is overdetermined, in a sense. It does not seem to depend only on the bottom-line Nietzschean stance of neutrality, but also on his concrete reading of this humanitarianism, which is seen as a growing system of control.

And so we have analysis 2, which seems to give us an *evaluational* reason for refusing the evaluation that issues from analysis 1. But the evaluation on which this depends would be something akin to the Schillerian/Critical theory notion that modern discipline has repressed our own natures and constituted systems of domination of man by man, and this evaluation also is repudiated. Once again we seem to have an overdetermined judgement. It is not a pure case of Nietzschean neutrality For there is another reason to refuse this whole Romantic-inspired notion of liberation from the domination of nature within and without. And that is that the ideology of expressive liberation, particularly in connection with sexual life, is itself just a strategy of power. This is analysis 3.

And so we come to the bottom line. What about the evaluation that seems to flow from 3? This would offer us some idea of a liberation, but not via the correct or authentic expression of our natures. It would be a liberation from the whole ideology of such expression, and hence from

the mechanisms of control that use this ideology It would be a liberation that was helped by our unmasking falsehood; a liberation aided by the truth, then.

In short, it would be something that had certain parallels to the Romantic-originating notion. We would achieve a liberation from a system of control that operates in us largely through masks, disguises, and false pretenses. It operates by inducing in us a certain self-understanding, an identity. We can help to throw it off partly by unmasking this identity and the manner of its implantation, and thus cease to be accomplices in its control and shaping of ourselves.

This would be a notion of liberation through the truth, parallel to the Romantic-derived one, but different in that it would see the very notion of ourselves as having a true identity to express as part of the dispositif of control rather than as what defines our liberation.

Now the official Nietzschean stance of Foucault would refuse this value-position as well. And here at last we would be at the pure case, where the refusal was not overdetermined, but depended purely on the Nietzschean stance. But can he do it? Does he really do it? What does it mean to do it? These are the central questions that arise about Foucault's repudiation of the goods that seem implicit in his analyses. And this is the right place to pose these questions, where no extraneous considerations, no other possible value-positions muddy the waters.

Does he really do it? Even this is not so clear. There are moments where some notion of liberation seems to peek through. It is true (?) that he repudiates the notion of liberation through the truth in *Histoire de la Sexualité*: "La vérité n'est pas libre, ni l'erreur serve."[17] But later there is the hint of a possible point d'appui for at least a relative freeing: "Contre le dispositif de la sexualité, le point d'appui de la contre-attaque ne doit pas être le sexe-désir, mais les corps et les plaisirs."[18] What exactly this could mean I want to discuss later. But here I just want to point to the implication that once one has rejected the false idea of a liberation through the truth of one's natural sexual desires (le sexe-désir), there remains something else it can be founded on. In this connection, we also might mention the passages in *Power/Knowledge* where Foucault talks about the need for a kind of revolutionary practice that did not reproduce just the forms of control that exist in the structures against which they are rebelling.

But the question I would like to explore here is this: Can he do it? By that I mean this: What can be said coherently in this domain? Just how much sense does a Nietzschean position make?

Before I do this, I just want to mention another line of critique that one could take up against Foucault, but that I do not want to pursue

here. Foucault's analyses are terribly one-sided. Their strength is their insightfulness and originality in bringing usually neglected aspects to light. The weakness is that the other aspects seem denied altogether. We can see this with the three analyses above.

I already mentioned with 1, how Foucault reads the rise of humanitarianism exclusively in terms of the new technologies of control. The development of the new ethics of life is given no independent significance. This seems to me absurdly one-sided.

In the second analysis the rise of the new forms of discipline is seen exclusively in its relation to domination. Once again I think there is a mine of valuable historical insights here. Foucault has filled in, as I mentioned above, some of the background that critical theory always supposed, but did not work out adequately But Foucault has missed the ambivalence of these new disciplines. The point is that they have not served only to feed a system of control. They also have taken the form of genuine self-discipline that have made possible new kinds of collective action characterized by more egalitarian forms of participation. This is not a new discovery It is a truism of the civic humanist tradition of political theory that free participatory institutions require some commonly accepted self-disciplines. The free citizen has the "vertu" to give willingly the contribution that otherwise the despot would coerce from him, perhaps in some other form. Without this, free institutions cannot exist. There is a tremendous difference between societies that find their cohesion through such common disciplines grounded on a public identity and that thus permit of and call for the participatory action of equals on one hand, and the multiplicity of kinds of society that require chains of command based on unquestionable authority on the other.

Aside from the moral differences, there are also differences in efficacy, which Machiavelli examined, particularly military Modern history has been shaped by striking examples of the citizen military, from the New Model Army to the Israeli Defense Forces. This is really too big a phenomenon to ignore.

The point is that collective disciplines can function in both ways—as structures of domination and as bases for equal collective action. And they also can slide over time from one to the other. It can be argued that some of the disciplines that helped to found the societies based on contract and responsible government in earlier times, which represented a great leap forward in egalitarian politics, are now serving bureaucratic modes of irresponsible power that are sapping our democracy. I think that there is a lot in this. Undoubtedly the feeling that something like this

is happening adds plausibility to Foucault's analysis, at first blush. But on reflection we can see that Foucault's notion of modern power incapacitates us from understanding this process.

That is because we cannot understand modern bureaucratization unless we see how collective disciplines can function both for and against despotic control. The threatened degeneracy of modern mass democracies is a slide from one of these directions to the other. We will never see what is going on if we think of the disciplines as having their exclusive historical and social significance in forms of domination.

Foucault's attraction is partly that of a *terrible simplificateur*. His espousal of the reversal of Clausewitz's aphorism, which makes us see politics as war carried on by other means, [19] can open insights in certain situations. But to make this one's basic axiom for the examination of modern power as such leaves out too much. Foucault's opposition between the old model of power based on sovereignty/obedience and the new one based on domination/subjugation leaves out everything in Western history that has been animated by civic humanism or analogous movements. [20] And that means a massive amount of what is specific to our civilization. Without this in one's conceptual armoury, Western history and societies become incomprehensible, as they are for that reason to so many Russians (like Solzhenitsyn).

In the third analysis, Foucault is certainly on to something in the claim that sexual desire has been given exceptional importance in Western civilization, even in the very attempts to control it, neutralize it, go beyond it. He is certainly right to point to the Christian roots of this. Again we can appreciate the force of the point that we somehow have been led to place a tremendous weight of significance on our sexual lives and fulfillment in this culture, more than these can bear. But then to understand this simply in terms of technologies of control (I am not sure whether or not Foucault really does this. I await eagerly the second volume on sexuality to find out) leaves out its roots in the theologies/ ethics of ordinary life, in the Christian concern for the quality of the will, which Foucault himself rightly sees as basic to this. [21] And to reduce the whole Western, post-Romantic business of trying to say oneself to an artifact of such a technology of control approaches absurdity That the aspiration to express one's true nature can become a mechanism of control is indeed true, and Foucault can offer insights on this. But just as in the case of bureaucratization above, you incapacitate yourself to understand this *becoming* if you conceive it from the beginning as essentially *being* control.

III

But I am less interested in hammering this line of critique than in seeing what can be said coherently in this area. I think Foucault's position ultimately is incoherent, but that this escapes detection because the points at which it falls into contradiction are misidentified as new and deeper formulations of what many would recognize as valuable insights. I would like to explore this under three headings.

(1) First, the idea of power without a subject. There are a number of interesting ideas here, of which two are especially important for this discussion. (i) Foucault is setting aside the old model where power is a matter of one person (group) exercising sovereign control over another, where some give orders and others obey, where some impose their wills on the others. This is usually conceived as a relation alongside the others, social, economic, familial, sexual, and the like that people stand in with each other; conditioned by and conditioning the others, but distinct from them. On the contrary, the power Foucault is interested in is internal to, intrinsic to these other relations. One could say that it is constitutive of them, that built in to the very understanding of the common activity, or goods sought, or whatever forms the substance of the microrelation, are forms of domination.[22] Thus the doctor-patient relation is defined by a supposed common goal, constituted by a stance of helper on the part of the professional and a recognition of need on the part of the patient. But this coming together in a common goal is inseparable from a relation of power founded on the presumption that one *knows*, and that the other has an overwhelming interest in taking advise. The relation of force is integral to the common goal as defined.

This is a relation of power, but it cannot be conceived on the Hobbesian model. It is rare that a doctor can or wants to wreak his arbitrary and unrestrained will on his patient. Both parties are constrained in a sense by the common understanding, the common activity But within this there is a domination on the part of the doctor.

This helps us to understand another difference from the Hobbesian model: Frequently, in this kind of situation, the dominated cooperate in their subordination. They often come to interiorize the norms of the common activity; they go willingly They are utterly unaware of a relation of domination. Foucault's example is the ideology of sexual liberation, where we play along unwittingly with a technology of control, even as we are "letting it all hang out."

And we can see from this also how this kind of relationship can permit reversals. There is not necessarily a continuing identity of domi-

nators and dominated over time. There was for instance an ensemble of father, mother, educator, and doctor constituted in the 19th century around the control of the child's sexuality. The original relation puts the doctor on top, offering "advice" to parents, who are in turn controlling their children. But later the relation of psychiatrist to child is the basis on which the adult's sexuality is called into question.

(ii) But Foucault also is putting forward another thesis under this head, one about the relations of micro- to macrocontexts of power. It is not entirely clear what this thesis is, because it is stated somewhat differently in different places. But the baldest statement is perhaps this: "que le pouvoir vient d'en bas."[23] This seems to mean that we cannot hope to explain the local "rapports de force" in terms of some global relation of dominators and dominated. This is not to say that there may not be identifiable classes or groups of those who are "on top" or "on the bottom" at any given time. But we have to explain this division in terms of the combinations, alignments, mutual effects, oppositions, side-effects, and the like, which the microcontexts of domination produce on each other and with each other. Or perhaps better, we have to allow for a circular relation, in which the grand alignments, which become concretized in political or military institutions, both result from and reverberate back on the micro-rapports de forces.

The grand strategies of the macrocontexts—state, ruling class, or whatever—form the context in which the microrelations come to be, modify, or reproduce themselves; and reciprocally these provide the soil and point of anchorage for the grand strategies. Thus more than saying that power comes from the bottom, we should say that there is endless relation of reciprocal conditioning between global and microcontexts.

Foucault's target in this thesis is plainly Marxism, even as he rejects the Hobbesian model with the other. It is a mistake to take the relations of opposition at one level as explanatorily basic. That is what Marxism does. It is the global class struggle and its exigencies that are used to explain the way people square off in the microcontexts of family, factory, professional association, and so on. Foucault gives an example of the kind of account he disagrees with in chapter 5 of *Power/Knowledge*. There is a widely accepted view that we ought to explain, for example, the incarceration of the mad in the 16th century or the repressive interest in infantile sexuality in the 19th century, in terms of the requirements of the rising bourgeois economy Foucault rejects this. Rather the relation was that these contexts of domination developed in their own fashion, and then were taken up and used by the macrocontext of domination. They "came to be colonized and maintained by the

global mechanisms and the entire state system," in which the bourgeoi-sie was hegemonic.[24]

So far, so clear. Indeed we might be tempted to say so far, so true. But now there is a third thesis under this head that Foucault also seems to be propounding. Perhaps this is a good statement of it: "que les relations de pouvoir sont à la fois intentionnelles et non subjectives."[25] What Foucault seems to be affirming here is that, aside from the particular conscious purpose that agents pursue in their given context, there is discernible a strategic logic of the context itself, but this cannot be attributed to anyone as their plan, as their conscious purpose. As he puts it in *Power/Knowledge*, talking of the kind of history he writes, "the coherence of such a history does not derive from the revelation of a project, but from the logic of opposing strategies."[26]

Strategies without projects, this would be a good formula to describe Foucault's historiography Besides the strategies of individuals, which *are* their projects, there is a strategy of the context. The whole constitution and maintenance of the modern system of control and domination is an example. Foucault speaks of its growth and self-maintenance in strategic terms. He speaks of power using certain strate-gems or certain points of purchase. Thus in describing the reversals that occur as power and the resistance to it each take up each others' instruments, he gives this example:

> Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in that same body. Do you recall the panic of the institutions of the social body, the doctors and politicians, at the idea of non-legalized cohabitation (l'union libre) or free abortion? But the impression that power weakens and vacillates here is in fact mistaken; power can retreat here, re-organize its forces, invest itself elsewhere and so the battle continues.[27]

This notion of global strategies is essential to Foucault's reverse Clausewitzian thesis that we are engaged in perpetual war. This is not just the banality that there is much strife and rivalry among individuals. It is the thesis that there is a continuing struggle traversing the context in which we are all caught up. The use of the term "strategy" in Foucault recovers its full original etymological force.

It is this third thesis that makes no sense in Foucault's version. I stress this last phrase, because it would be quite wrong that no thesis of this kind makes sense. On the contrary, we can think of good examples where it makes sense to attribute a "purposefulness without purpose" to history, or at least a logic to events without design. Let us look at some examples in order to see what is required by this kind of explanation. (a) We can recognize a certain purposefulness in people's action where their

motivation and goals are unacknowledged or perhaps unacknowledgeable. An example would be the (I think profound) Dostoyevokian analysis of modern political terrorism in terms of projected self-hatred and the response to a sense of emptiness. These purposes are not only unacknowledged, they *could not* be acknowledged without undermining the whole enterprise, which depends crucially on the notion that one is acting out of purely political-strategic considerations. But they might explain certain systematic features of terrorism better than the overly avowed goals. (b) Then there are theories of unintended but systematic consequences. Such as "invisible hand" theories, that is, theories where the situation is so constituted that individual decisions are bound to concatenate in a certain systematic way The best known example is the (malign) invisible hand account of capitalism by Marx. The structure of a capitalist economy is that individual decisions have to concatenate toward an ever-greater polarization, immiseration of the masses, concentration of capital, falling rate of profit, and so forth. (c) There are unintended consequences theories that touch on the results of collective action and not just the combination of individual actions. As an example, we perhaps can see a certain pattern in Leninist politics whereby the possibilities of devolution and a move toward participation are more and more restricted. This is a consequence unintended by Leninist parties at the outset. But it perhaps could be shown that it follows ineluctably from their model of mass mobilization, which systematically ends up destroying the bases for devolved power. The tragedy would be that a movement aimed at liberation and radical democratization should end up destroying these more effectively than predecessor regimes.

The point of citing these types and examples is to illustrate my main point, which is that purposefulness without purpose requires a certain kind of explanation to be intelligible. The undesigned systematicity has to be related to the purposeful action of agents in a way that we can understand. This is a requirement that the above kinds of explanation try to fulfill. The reason for this requirement is that the text of history, which we are trying to explain, is made of purposeful human action. Where there are patterns in this action that are not on purpose, we have to explain why action done under one description on purpose also bears this other, undesigned description. We have to show how the two descriptions relate. A strategic pattern cannot just be left hanging, unrelated to our conscious ends and projects.

It is a mistake to think that the only intelligible relation between a pattern and our conscious purposes is the direct one where the pattern is consciously willed. This is a hangup that did come down to us from

classical Cartesian-empiricist views of the mind. Foucault is right to ridicule it. "Ne cherchons pas l'état-major qui préside à sa rationalité" (sc. du pouvoir).[28] But this must not be confused with the explanatory requirement outlined above. It is certainly not the case that all patterns *issue* from conscious action, but all patterns have to be made *intelligible* in relation to conscious action.

Now Foucault not only does not meet this requirement; it is difficult to see how he could without abandoning some or other part of his declared position. We could explain the constitution of the growing system of technologies of control, if we could understand it (on model a) as meeting the (largely unacknowledged) purposes of some group. But this Foucault could not do without going back on his thesis (ii), that there is no priority here of explanation in terms of the interest of some dominant class. The system has to arise out of the microcontexts in which people act and react. It would be even worse for his case, if the group whose interest of purposes was the motor of change was coterminous with society at large or at least widely distributed within it; for then the changes would be thought of as largely self-wrought, and a problem might arise about interpreting these as relations of *domination*. The same difficulty with thesis (ii) rules out explanations on model c, in terms of the unintended consequences of collective action (which might itself be motivated by partly unacknowledged purposes).

In order to stick by (ii) in this case, we would need some account on model b, where microreactions concatenate in this systematic way I do not say something like this cannot be found, but I am at a loss to say even where one should start looking for it. And Foucault does not even feel the need to start looking.

This is not to say that there is a difficulty with Foucault's thesis (ii) in principle. On the contrary, there are obviously lots of aspects of social life in which this reciprocal play of micropractice and global structures, each producing (largely unintended) consequences for the other, is the right explanatory model. The problem arises only when one combines this with Foucault's very strong claims to systematicity, in the idea that there are pervasive *strategies* afoot that condition the battle in each microcontext, that "power" can "retreat" or "reorganize its forces." These can only be combined via some account of how actions concatenate systematically some model of type b. But Foucault does not even try He leaves us with a strange kind of Schopenhauerian will, ungrounded in human action. [25]

One of the most important reasons why Foucault does not feel a need to offer an account here is the confusion that has afflicted the republic of letters these last decades about the supposed "death of subjectivity " This had its epicentre in Paris. Foucault took part in it.[30] Hacking[31]

praises Foucault for having stepped beyond the old conception of subjectivity, which required all purposefulness in history to have a purposer.

The confusion lies in not seeing that there not only can be but *must* be something between total subjectivism on one hand, holding that there are no undersigned patterns in history, and the strange Schopen-hauerianism-without-the-will in which Foucault leaves us. Much play is made of the discovery (which structuralists did a lot to put in vogue) that any act requires a background language of practices and institutions to make sense; and that while there will be a particular goal sought in the act, those features of it that pertain to the structural background will not be objects of individual purpose. That my declarations in this article are all made with uninflected words has nothing to do with what I have decided, and everything to do with the fact that the medium of my thought is English (and I did not really choose *that* either).

No one can deny that this is an invaluable point to have in mind in studies of power. The utter sterility of the view popular a while ago in American political science, that one could analyze power in terms of A's ability to make B do something he otherwise would not or some such thing, illustrates this. The approach is sterile, just because acts of power are so heterogeneous; they absolutely do not admit of being described in such a homogeneous medium of culturally neutral makings and doings. The power of the audience over the star craving approval is utterly incommensurable with the power of the general, which is incommensur-able with the power of the elected minister, and that in turn with the power of the guru, and so on. Power can be understood only within a context; and this is the obverse of the point that the contexts only in turn can be understood in relation to the kind of power that constitutes them (Foucault's thesis).

But all this does not mean that there is no such thing as explaining the rise and fall of these contexts in history On the contrary, this is one of the major tasks of historiography And that is the issue we were talking about in connection with Foucault's system of modern technologies of control. How does it arise? Of course you do not explain it by some big bad man/class *designing* it (who ever suggested anything so absurd?), but you do need to explain it nevertheless, that is, relate this systematicity to the purposeful human action in which it arose and in which it has come to shape. You cannot evade this question by talking of the priority of structure over element, of language over speech-act. What we want to know is why a language *arises*.

Indeed for purposes of such diachronic explanation, we can question whether or not we ought to speak of a priority of language over act. There is a circular relation. Structure of action or languages are

maintained only by being renewed constantly in action/speech. And it is in action/speech that they also fail to be maintained, that they are altered. This is a crashing truism, but the fog emanating from Paris in recent decades makes it necessary to clutch it as a beacon in the darkness. To give an absolute priority to the structure makes exactly as little sense as the equal and opposite error of subjectivism, which gave absolute priority to the action, as a kind of total beginning.

This helps explain why Foucault feels he can be evasive on this issue, but not why he feels the need to be. Here we touch the question of his motivations, which I would like to adjourn until later (if I dare take it up at all). In the meantime I turn to the second head under which there is incoherence.

IV

(2) "Power" without "freedom" or "truth." Can there really be an analysis that uses the notion of power and that leaves no place for freedom or truth? I already have raised the question of whether or not Foucault really does away with freedom. But this uncertainty of utterance is just the symptom, I believe, of a deeper problem. The Nietzschean programme on this level does not make sense.

This is because of the very nature of a notion like power or domination. True, they do not require that we have one agent who is imposing his will on another. There are all sorts of ways in which power can be inscribed in a situation in which both dominators and dominated are caught up. The first may see himself largely as the agent of the demands of the larger context; the second may see the demands on him as emanating from the nature of things. But nevertheless, the notion of power or domination requires some notion of constraint imposed on someone by a process in some way related to human agency Otherwise the term loses all meaning.

Power in the way Foucault sees it, closely linked to domination, does not require a clearly demarcated perpetrator, but it requires a victim. It cannot be a "victimless crime," so to speak. Perhaps the victims also exercise it, also victimize others. But power needs targets.[32] Something must be imposed on someone if there is to be domination. Perhaps that person also is helping to impose it on himself, but then there must be an element of fraud, illusion, false pretenses involved in this. Otherwise it is not clear that the imposition is in any sense an exercise of domination.[33]

But now something is only an *imposition* on me against a background of desires, interests, purposes, that I have. It is only an imposition if it

makes some dent in these, if it frustrates them, prevents them from fulfillment, or perhaps even from formulation. If some external situation or agency wreaks some change in me that in no way lies athwart some such desire/purpose/aspiration/interest, then there is no call to speak of an exercise of power/domination. Take the phenomenon of imprinting. In human life, it also exists after a fashion. We generally come to like the foods that have assuaged our hunger, those we are fed as children in our culture. Is this an index of the domination of our culture over us? The word would lose all useful profile, would have no more distinctiveness, if we let it roam this wide.

Moreover the desire/purposes and the like have to be of some significance. The trivial is not relevant here. If something makes it impossible for me to act on the slight preference that I have for striped over unstriped tootpaste, this is not a serious exercise of power. Shaping my life by imposition in this respect would not figure in an analysis of power.

This is recognized by Foucault in his thesis that there is no power without "resistances." Indeed Foucault sometimes dramatically is aware of the force and savagery of the imposition. Take this passage about knowledge but illustrating its close connection to power:

> Its development [sc. of knowledge] is not tied to the constitution and affirmation of a free subject: rather it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence. Where religion once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge.[34]

But this means that "power" belongs in a semantic field from which "truth" and "freedom" cannot be excluded. Because it is linked with the notion of the imposition on our significant desires/purposes, it cannot be separated from the notion of some relative lifting of this restraint, from an unimpeded fulfillment of these desires/purposes. But this is just what is involved in a notion of freedom. There indeed may be all sorts of reasons why in certain situations certain impositions just cannot be lifted. There are empirical obstacles, and some very deep lying ones in man's historical situation. But that is not Foucault's point. He wants to discredit as somehow based on a misunderstanding the very idea of liberation from power. But I am arguing that power, in his sense, *does not make sense* without at least the idea of liberation. It then may be shown that the specific liberation, defined in a given context as the negation of the power wielded therein, is not realizable for this or that reason. But that is another, quite different issue into which Foucault does not even enter.

The Foucaultian thesis involves combining the fact that any set of institutions and practices form the background to our action within them, and are in that sense irremovable while we engage in that kind of action, with the point that different forms of power indeed are constituted by different complexes of practice, to form the illegitimate conclusion that there can be no question of liberation from the power implicit in a given set of practices. Not only is there the possibility of frequently moving from one set of practices to another; but even within a given set, the level and kind of imposition can vary Foucault implicitly discounts both these possibilities. The first because of the fundamentally Nietzschean thesis that is basic to his work: The move from one context to another cannot be seen as a liberation because there is no common measure between the impositions of the one and those of the other. I want to address this in the next discussion (3 below). And he discounts the second, because of his over-simple and global notion of the modern system of control and domination, which I have already touched on above.

So "power" requires "liberty " But it also requires "truth"—if we want to allow, as Foucault does, that we can collaborate in our own subjugation. Indeed, that is a crucial feature of the modern system of control, that it gets us to agree and concur in the name of truth or liberation or our own nature. If we want to allow this, then truth is an essential notion. Because the imposition proceeds here by foisting illusion on us. It proceeds by disguises and masks. It proceeds thus by falsehood.

> C'est à la condition de masquer une part importante de lui-même que le pouvoir est tolérable. Sa réussite est en proportion de ce qu'il parvient à cacher de ses mécanismes. Le pouvoir serait-il accepté s'il était entièrement cynique? Le secret n'est pas pour lui de l'ordre de l'abus: il est indispensable à son fonctionnement.[35]

Mask, falsehood makes no sense without a corresponding notion of truth. The truth here is subversive of power: It is on the side of the lifting of impositions, of what we have just called liberation. The Foucaultian notion of power not only requires for its sense the correlative notions of truth and liberation, but even the standard link between them, which makes truth the condition of liberation. To speak of power and to want to deny a place to liberation and truth as well as the link between them is to speak coherently That is indeed the reason why Foucault seems to be contradicting himself in the passages I quoted earlier. He just does not slip into these formulations, which seem to allow for the possibility of a

liberation, and indeed one founded on a puncturing of illusions, a defense founded on "les corps, les plaisirs, les savoirs, dans leur multiplicité et leur possibilité de résistance."[36] He is *driven* into them by the contradictory position he has adopted.[37]

V

(3) Nietzschean relativism. In the end, the final basis of Foucault's refusal of truth and liberation sems to be a Nietzschean one. This is not all of Nietzsche; there is more, and not all of it compatible with this part. But at least in the *Fröhliche Wissenschaft* we have a doctrine that Foucault seems to have made his own; there is no order of human life or way we are or of human nature that one can appeal to in order to judge or evaluate between ways of life. There are only different orders imposed by men on primal chaos, following their will to power. Foucault espouses both the relativistic thesis from this view, that one cannot judge between forms of life/thought/valuation, and also the notion that these different forms involve the imposition of power. The idea of "regimes of truth," and of their close intrication with systems of dominance is profoundly Nietzschean. In this relationship Foucault sees truth as subordinated to power. Let me quote that passage again more fully:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.[38]

If this is so (true?) in general, it is even more emphatically so in our society:

> There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. This is the case for every society, but I believe that in ours the relationship between power, right and truth is organized in a highly specific fashion. . . . I would say that we are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we *must* speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess to or discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth;

it institutionalizes, professionalizes and rewards its pursuit. In the last analysis, we must produce truth as we must produce wealth.[39]

This regime-relativity of truth means that we cannot raise the banner of truth against our own regime. There can be no such thing as a truth independent of it, unless it be that of another regime. So that liberation in the name of "truth" could only be the substitution of another system of power for this one, as indeed the modern course of history has substituted the techniques of control for the royal sovereignty that dominated the 17th century.

This position is easy enough to state baldly, but difficult—or impossible—actually to integrate into the logic of one's analytical discourse, as I just have been trying to show in 2 above. The truth manufactured by power also turns out to be its "masks" or disguises and hence untruth. The idea of a manufactured or imposed truth inescapably slips the word into inverted commas, and opens the space of a truth-outside-quotes, the kind of truth, for instance, that the sentences unmasking power manifest, or that the sentences expounding the general theory of regime relativity themselves manifest (or paradox).

There has to be a place for revolt/resistance aided by unmasking in a position like Foucault's, and he allows for it. But the general relativity thesis will not allow for liberation through a transformation of power relations. Because of relativity, transformation from one regime to another cannot be a *gain* in truth or freedom, because each is redefined in the new context. They are incomparable. And because of the Nietzschean notion of truth imposed by a regime of power, Foucault cannot envisage liberating transformations *within* a regime. The regime is identified entirely with its imposed truth. Unmasking can only destabilize it; we cannot bring about a new stable, freer, less mendacious form of it by this route. Foucault's Nietzschean theory only can be the basis of utterly monolithic analyses; which is what we saw above in his failure to recognize the ambivalence of modern disciplines, which are the basis both of domination and self-rule.

And so for him unmasking can only be the basis for a kind of local resistance within the regime. In chapter 5 of *Power/Knowledge*, he speaks of rehabilitating subjugated and local knowledges against the established dominant truth. He uses the expression "insurrection of subjugated knowledges." The term bespeaks his basic idea: There is no question of a new form, just of a kind of resistance movement, a set of destabilizing actions, always local and specific, within the dominant

form. One of Foucault's historical paradigms seems to be the popular riots and uprisings that occurred in the former regimes at some of the execution scenes. Plebean resistance is a kind of model.

> No doubt it would be mistaken to conceive the plebs as the permanent ground of history, the final objective of all subjections, the ever smouldering centre of all revolts. The plebs is no doubt not a real sociological entity. But there is indeed always something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power, something which is by no means a more or less docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge. There is certainly no such thing as "the" plebs; rather there is, as it were, a certain plebian quality or aspect. There is plebs in bodies, in souls, in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie, but everywhere in a diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities. This measure of plebs is not so much what stands outside relations of power as their limit, their underside, their counter-stroke, that which responds to every advance of power by a movement of disengagement.[40]

We can see at least some of the motivation for this espousal of local insurrections. Foucault is deeply suspicious of "global, totalitarian theories" that claim to offer the overall solution to our ills. The target, as it must be in the world Foucault inhabits, is of course principally Marxism. And one can have a great deal of sympathy for this reaction in face of the destruction wrought by such global revolutionary schemes. There is a great deal to be said on the Left for a politics that stays close to the local, to lived experience, to the aspirations that groups spontaneously adopt. But this by itself does not determine one to adopt the Nietzschean model of truth with its relativism and its monolithic analyses. Just because some claims to truth are not receivable, we do not need to blow the whole conception to pieces.

Something else drives Foucault to Nietzscheanism. I think it will come out if I try to grapple with the central issue around this position. What does this combination of relativism between forms and monolithism of forms leave out? It leaves out—or better, it blocks out—the possibility of a change of life form that can be understood as a move toward a greater acceptance of truth—and hence also in certain conditions a move toward greater freedom. But in order to conceive a change in these terms we have to see the two forms as commensurable; the form before and the form after the change cannot be seen as incommensurable universes. How can this come about?

Biographically, we see examples all the time. After a long period of stress and confusion. I come to see that I really love A, or I really do not

want to take that job. I now see retrospectively that the image of myself as quite free and uncommitted had a merely superficial hold on me. It did not correspond to a profound aspiration. It just stood in the way of my recognizing the depts of my commitment to A, or the picture of a career that that job instantiated, which seemed before so powerful, so nongainsayable, turns out to be a model that my entourage was pressing on me, but that I cannot really endorse.

What makes these biographical changes of outlook/life possible, which seem to be steps toward the truth? Our sense of ourselves, of our *identity*, of what we are. I see this change as a discovery of what I am, of what really matters to me. And that is why I do not see this as a kind of character change, what a lobotomy might produce for instance. Rather I see it as a step toward truth (or perhaps better put, it is a step out of error), and even in certain conditions as a kind of liberation.

Is there nothing comparable in politics/history? There is. There are changes that turn on, that are justified by, what we have become as a society, a civilization. The American revolutionaries called on their compatriots to rise in the name of the liberties that defined their way of life (ironically as Englishmen). This kind of claim is always contested (there were Tories, there were Loyalists, as is well known where I come from). But is it by its nature not receivable? Is it always sham? Foucault would have us believe so.

But it seems clear to me that there is a reality here. We have become certain things in Western civilization. Our humanitarianism, our notions of freedom—both personal independence and collective self-rule—have helped to define a political identity we share; and one that is rooted deeply in our more basic, seemingly infrapolitical understandings: of what it is to be an individual, of the person as a being with inner depths—all the features that seem to us to be rock-bottom, almost biological properties of human beings, as long as we refrain from looking outside and experiencing the shock of encountering other cultures. Of course these elements of identity are contested; they are not articulated neatly and definitely once and for all, but the subject of perpetual revisionist strife. And worse, they are not all easily compatible—the freedom of independence is hard to combine with that of self-rule, as we constantly experience—and so we fight among ourselves in the name of incompatible weightings. But they all count for us. None of them can be repudiated simply in the political struggle. We struggle over interpretation and weightings, but we cannot shrug them off. They *define* humanity, politics for us.

This means that we can look at the kind of change Foucault described, from 17th century punishments to our own, in a way that renders them partly commensurable. It is not for nothing that we are the descendants and heirs of the people who so tortured Damiens. The makings of our present stress on the significance of life were already there in that Christian civilization. One of the important features of their world, which made them act so differently, was their sense of belonging to a cosmic order in which the polity was set. But *this* difference cannot be seen purely in a relativist light. One of the reasons why we no longer can believe in this kind of order is the advance of our civilization of a scientific understanding of the natural world, which we have every reason to believe represents a significant gain of truth. Some dimensions at least of the disenchantment that helps share modern culture represent an advance in the truth. To the extent that this change is operative, we can understand our difference from them as a change that denizens of Western Christendom have undergone under the impact of a stronger dose of truth.

Of *course*, this is not *all*. We also can discern losses. Indeed Foucault perhaps ought best to be interpreted as having documented some of these losses. The growth of modern control has involved in some respects a dehumanization, an inability to understand and to respond to some key features of the human context, those that are suppressed in a stance of thoroughgoing instrumental reason. That is why there is such a malaise in our civilization: so much groaning and travailing to recover what is lost, all the way from the Romantic period down to the most recent battles over ecology But the point is that the sense both of gain and of loss depends on comparability, on our understanding of our identity, of what we now realize more fully, or are betraying and mutilating.

Gains and losses do not tell the whole story There are also elements of incomparability The reality of history is mixed and messy The problem is that Foucault tidies it up too much, makes it into a series of hermetically sealed, monolithic truth-regimes, a picture that is as far from reality as the blandest Whig perspective of smoothly broadening freedom. Monolithism and relativism are two sides of the same coin. One is as necessary as the other to create this total incomparability across the changes of history

Foucault's monolithic relativism only seems plausible if one takes the outsider's perspective, the view from Sirius; or perhaps imagines oneself a soul in Plato's myth of Er. Do I want to be born a Sung dynasty

Chinese, or a subject of Hammurabi of Babylon, or a 20th century American? Without a prior identity, I could not begin to choose. They incarnate incommensurable goods (at least prior to some deep comparative study, and conceivably even after this). But this is not my/our situation. We have already *become* something. Questions of truth and freedom can arise for us in the transformations we undergo or project. In short we have a *history* We live in time not just self-enclosed in the present, but essentially related to a past that has helped define our identity, and a future that puts it again in question.

And indeed in his major works like *Les Mots et Les Choses* and *Surveiller et Punir,* Foucault *sounds* as though he believed that, as an historian, he could stand nowhere, identifying with none of the "epistemai" or structures of power whose coming and going he impartially surveys. But there are signs that this is not his last word. It would appear that Foucault is going to elaborate in forthcoming publications his own conception of a good life.

From certain indications[41] this would seem to be based, as one would expect, on a rejection of the whole idea that we have a deep self or nature that we have to decipher. Foucault thinks that Christianity introduced this false turn into Western culture. Where the ancient "care of the self" was concerned with self-making and self-mastery, Christian spirituality was preoccupied rather with purity and self-renunciation. "From that moment on the self was no longer something to be made but something to be renounced and deciphered."[42]

Foucault's project seems to be to return to these ancient sources, not in order to revive them—even if this were possible, he believes there is lots to criticize in ancient culture on other grounds—but as the point of departure for a different line of development. This would bring us to a conception of the good life as a kind of self-making, related in this way to the ancient "aesthetic of existence"[43] that one would make one's own life a work of art. "The principal work of art one has to take care of, the main area to which one has to apply aesthetic values is oneself, one's life, one's existence."[44]

It is understandable how Foucault, from the standpoint of an ethic of this kind, should want to distance himself from the banners of freedom and truth, since these have been the key terms in the view he is repudiating, that we ought to bring to light our true nature or deep self. And the affinity with Nietzsche in the stress on self-making is very understandable also. But this in no way lessens the paradox involved in the attempt to avoid these terms altogether. Indeed in offering us a new

way of reappropriating our history and in rescuing us from the supposed illusion that the issues of the deep self are somehow inescapable, what is Foucault laying open for us, if not a truth that frees us for self-making?

Perhaps Foucault will now be able to free his position of this paradox, seemingly linked with the impossible attempt to stand nowhere. Perhaps he will acknowledge his sources like the rest of us, and identify the moments when these sources were lost or obscured (the rise of Christian spirituality), what we have to undo to rescue what needs saving. At that point, the really interesting debate can begin on the issues that count, that Foucault's mode of expression up to now has obscured.

There are two such issues, which it is worth tabling for future discussions: (1) Can we really step outside the identity we have developed in Western civilization to such a degree that we can repudiate all that comes to us from the Christian understanding of the will? Can we toss aside the whole tradition of Augustinian inwardness? (2) Granted we really can set this aside, is the resulting "aesthetic of existence" all that admirable? These questions are hard to separate and even harder to answer. But they are among the most fundamental raised by the admirable work of Michel Foucault.

NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 131.

2. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 53.

3. Ibid, p. 47.

4. Ibid, p. 59-60.

5. Cf. the ancient idea of tyranny as power *hiding* itself, as in the myth of Gyges.

6. Foucault, 1975, p. 219. Thus in explaining the unplanned rise of this new form, Foucault says: "Take the example of philanthropy in the early nineteenth century: people appear who make it their business to involve themselves in other people's lives, health, nutrition, housing: then, out of this confused set of functions there emerge certain personages, institutions, forms of knowledge: public hygiene, inspectors, social workers, psychologists" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge,* 62). Foucault is precisely *not* claiming that there was a plot laid by anyone. The explanatory model of history here seems to be that certain things arise for a whole host of possible reasons, and then get taken up and used by the emerging constellation. But what is clear is that the dominating thrust of the constellation which uses them is not humanitarian beneficence but control. I will discuss this understanding of historical change below.

7 Foucault, 1980, p. 98.

8. For example in Foucault, 1980, ch. 5.

9. Foucault, 1975, p. 224.

10. See the references to Marcuse in Foucault, 1980, pp. 59 and 120.

11. Foucault, 1980, p. 140, points out the close link between b and c.

12. Foucault, 1980, p. 121.

13. Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la Sexualité,* Volume 1: *La volonté de savior* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 79.

14. Ibid, p. 102.

15. Foucault, 1980, p. 57

16. Cf. the reference to Wilhelm Reich in Foucault, 1976, p. 173. This analysis obviously has parallels to Marcuse's about "repressive de-sublimation," and this just underlines the point above about the possible utility of Foucault's analysis for Critical Theory. But the crucial difference remains, that Critical Theory remains within the notion of liberation through true expression, while Foucault denounces this. Hence the critique of Marcuse in Foucault, 1975, p. 59, for thinking of power still purely in terms of repression.

17 Foucault, 1976, p. 81.

18. Ibid, p. 208.

19. See Foucault, 1980, p. 90.

20. The sovereignty model is *meant* to cope with the rebellion against despotic power and the rise of representative institutions. But in fact, it can only illuminate its Lockean aspect. The civic humanist aspect precisely cannot be put in terms of who is giving orders to whom. The concept of sovereignty can not be integrated without strain in this form of thought.

21. Michel Foucault, *London Review of Books* (May-June, 1981), p. 5.

22. Foucault, 1976, pp. 123-124.

23. Ibid, p. 124.

24. Foucault, 1980, pp. 99-101.

25. Foucault, 1976, p. 124.

26. Foucault, 1980, p. 61.

27 Ibid, p. 56.

28. Foucault, 1976, p. 125.

29. Hacking, *New York Review of Books* (May 14, 1981) already has pointed out the Schopenhauerian overtones of the title vol. 1 of *HS, La Volonté de Savoir* But even Schopenhauer would not do as a theoretical background for Foucault, for that would give an account in our "nature." He has to be more evasive than this.

30. This set of doctrines is sometimes called "structuralist," or "poststructuralist," but the aspiration to overcome subjectivity goes well beyond people who hold some structuralist model or other. Foucault is a case in point.

31. Foucault, 1981, p. 35.

32. Foucault, 1980, p. 98."[Individuals] are not only its [sc. power's] inept or consenting target: they are also the elements of its articulation." But this means that they *are* targets.

33. I indicated above how heedless Foucault is of this boundary, in which the self-disciplines of freedom are distinguished from the disciplines of domination. This all turns in whether or not and how they are *imposed.*

34. Michel Foucault, in Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (eds.) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 163. I take this quotation from Mark Philip, "Foucault on Power: A Problem in Radical Translation?" *Political Theory* (February, 1983), pp. 29-52.

35. Foucault, 1976, p. 113.

36. Ibid, p. 208.

37 Of course, there is a question of whether or not Foucault is not trying to have it both ways with his notion of a resistance founded on "les corps et les plaisirs," on something quite inarticulate, not on an *understanding* of ourselves, or an *articulation* of our desires/ purposes. But does this make sense? Can we "faire valoir contre les prises du pouvoir les corps et les plaisirs" (ibid) without articulating them for ourselves, and affirming the truth of that articulation against the specious claims of the system of control? I do not see how. Foucault seems to be talking here out of both sides of his mouth.

38. Foucault, 1980, p. 38.

39. Ibid, p. 39.

40. Ibid, p. 40. This idea of political resistance without a positive new vision is parallel to the notion of resistance to the dominant sexuality based on the essentially unarticulated "bodies and pleasure." In both cases, the question very much arises of whether or not Foucault can have it both ways. Is there a plebian resistance that does not at least *point* to an alternative model, even if it may for some reasons be unrealizable in practice? Or if there is, if we can find mindless insurrections in history, do they really offer us models for our political action?

41. Cf. the new chapters in the second edition of Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow: *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

42. Ibid, p. 248.

43. Ibid, p. 251.

44. Ibid, p. 245.

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