

**MICHEL FOUCAULT AND THE DEATH OF MAN:
TOWARD A POSTHUMANIST 'CRITICAL ONTOLOGY OF
OURSELVES'**

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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by **Graham Longford**

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Abstract

The work of Michel Foucault has been recognized as among the most important, original, and provocative contributions to the critical analysis of Western thought, society, and culture produced in the second half of the twentieth century. All the same, for all its acknowledged brilliance and chastening insight, Foucault's work has also been the subject of repeated charges that his radical form of criticism ultimately collapses into irrationalism, self-contradiction, and ethico-political relativism. This dissertation aims to neutralize a number of these criticisms by demonstrating that Foucault's work is substantively and methodology more coherent, and ethically and politically more benign and less pessimistic, than his critics recognize. I offer a reading of his major works which, by placing the question of human nature and humanism in the forefront, throws into relief an overarching preoccupation on his part with what one might call the politics of human self-knowledge. I argue that more than simply revealing the conditions of possibility and costs of various historical forms of knowledge and practice - psychology, medicine, criminology, and sociology - related to the question of what we as human beings are deep down, his works question the conditions of possibility and costs associated with the assertion of the very question of human nature as the most compelling one for human thought and practice. Foucault questions both the fruitfulness and benevolence of this question as it relates to modern thought and practice, demonstrates ways in which a host of scientific discourses revolving around 'Man' during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries have been imbricated with strategies of social control, and condemns as humanistic all streams of thought, including progressive and critical ones, for which the primacy of 'Man' remains unexamined. By systematically reading each of Foucault's major works as an anti-humanist response to one form of humanism or another (classical, juridical, critical), I show that, together, they reveal an underlying unity of purpose: the decentring of 'Man'. Foucault pursues this objective not by providing a systematic post-humanist philosophy but, rather, by continually posing archaeological and genealogical questions about the various faces of humanism. In the course of doing so, his work also articulates a new post-humanist approach to criticism itself - which he calls the 'critical ontology of ourselves' - as well as ethics and politics, which I show harbour more fruitful and humane possibilities for critical theory and practice than his critics are able or willing to recognize. In short, the dissertation argues that Foucault's work can be seen as opening up new possibilities for providing a rational critique of reason and a humane critique of humanism.

Acknowledgements

This work has its roots in a number of formative intellectual encounters while I was an undergraduate student at Trent University. David Kettler introduced me to the pleasures and challenges of high theory, while Costas Boundas exposed me to numerous contemporary French thinkers, including Foucault, and encouraged me to pursue a number of questions which eventually animated this dissertation. Once at York University, I was granted the necessary time and latitude by my dissertation supervisor, Asher Horowitz, both to articulate what my project was and to formulate my own response to it. I owe him a debt of gratitude for all his patience, guidance, gentle prodding, good humour, and support over the years. I am similarly appreciative of the efforts and support of the other members of my supervisory committee, Robert Albritton and Shannon Bell, both of whom remained gracious in spite of having, in effect, to read not one but two dissertations. While at York University I benefited from the intellectual stimulation, friendship, and support of several other members of the Department of Political Science. Leo Panitch challenged and inspired me, and honoured me with his friendship. Christian Lenhardt buoyed my confidence with an enthusiasm for my work which I seldom felt it warranted. David Shugarman offered good-natured support, and encouraged me to join him to play hookey on the slopes once in a while. Departmental staff members Anne Stretch and Marlene Quesenberry were instrumental in helping me progress through all stages on the degree and it is a pleasure to acknowledge them here. I also owe a debt of gratitude to many graduate student peers for their companionship and encouragement through the years. Included in this long list of friends are: Graham Todd, Steve Patten, Martin Morris, Nadine Changfoot, Sharon Wong, Colleen O'Manique, Theresa Healey, Joanne Boucher, Samir Gandesha, Russ Janzen, Katherine Scott, Alan Ernst, Edward Comor, Christina Gabriel, and William Walters. Finally, none of this would have been possible without the love and support of the members of my family. Always encouraging, they extended their love and support whenever it was needed. They include: Sydney and Beverley Longford; Kimberley Longford and Timothy Daum; Michael Longford and Barbara Crow; Angie and Malcolm Rowan; and Caroline Rowan and Craig Flood. More than anyone else, however, I owe profound thanks to my partner, Kathryn Rowan, for her incredible patience, sensitivity, and support throughout this journey and my many dark nights of the soul, and to our wonderful son, Lachlan, who brings boundless joy into our lives. This work is dedicated to them both, with my eternal love and thanks.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Major Texts, Edited Collections, and Interviews cited.

AK	<i>The Archaeology of Knowledge</i>
AME	<i>Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology</i>
BC	<i>The Birth of the Clinic</i>
CS	<i>The Care of the Self</i>
DP	<i>Discipline and Punish</i>
EST	<i>Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth</i>
FL	<i>Foucault Live</i>
HB	<i>Herculine Barbin</i>
HS	<i>The History of Sexuality</i>
IPR	<i>I, Pierre Riviere...</i>
LCMP	<i>Language, Counter-Memory, Practice</i>
MC	<i>Madness and Civilization</i>
MF	<i>Michel Foucault</i>
OT	<i>The Order of Things</i>
PK	<i>Power/Knowledge</i>
RM	<i>Remarks on Marx</i>
UP	<i>The Use of Pleasure</i>

Introduction

In the fifteen years which have passed since his untimely death in 1984, a broad consensus has emerged that French philosopher and historian of thought, Michel Foucault, was one of the most important, original, and provocative thinkers of the second half of the twentieth century. The continuing influence of his work across a surprising range of intellectual disciplines, from philosophy and literary criticism, to sociology, ethical and political theory, and anthropology, bears witness to the fecundity of his contributions to intellectual life. Over the course of his career, Foucault's work touched upon questions at a number of levels including the theoretical, methodological, empirical, ethico-political, and strategic. At the theoretical level his work has helped spark renewed debate regarding the conditions of possibility for our knowledge, and his methodological contributions have compelled many to reconsider the very meaning and function of concepts like "truth," "subjectivity," "knowledge," and "critique" fundamental to modern thought. Foucault's archaeological and genealogical analyses of the history and development of knowledge, in works like Madness and Civilization, The Order of Things, and The History of Sexuality, have pointed to the ways in which the development of knowledge is determined by deep, unconscious grids of cultural perception and implicated in the defense of powerful strategic interests. His work has given many Western thinkers and social scientists pause to consider the ways in which our current systems of knowledge, as well as the practices inevitably tied to them, are based on unexamined concepts, categories, and mental habits which remain "unthought," and the maintenance of hegemonic identities and conventional practices which impose

gratuitous and unwarranted forms of suffering. At the practical level, his research and writing on the nature and functioning of modern power in works like Discipline and Punish has helped to reveal the capillary, corporeal, and quotidian functioning of modern power, drawing attention to the operation of power in previously unsuspected ways and areas of life, and forcing a re-examination of the adequacy of liberal and Marxist accounts of modern society alike. Foucault's political analysis has also had a considerable impact on the organizational and oppositional strategies and tactics of new social movements as well, helping to expand the very boundaries of "the political" itself. Finally, while regrettably truncated by his premature death, Foucault also began late in his life to take up questions of a more explicitly ethical nature, producing works on the relevance of ancient Greek ethics to contemporary ethical practice which, while embryonic, have inspired new ethical discourse and debate which has yet to run its course. Altogether, Foucault has left behind a body of work on the nature of knowledge, power, and the subject, as well as on a variety of discourses and practices revolving around madness, punishment, and sexuality, which challenges conventional and even some critical understandings of cultural and political modernity. His work challenges the very self-understanding of modernity and probes the limits and costs it imposes on us.

All the same, Foucault's work has also been a repeated target of claims that, for all its chastening insights, a radical critique of modern rationality, culture, subjectivity, and social practice such as his inevitably collapses into irrationalism, self-contradiction, and ethical-political relativism and nihilism. While, for example, Foucault's innovative archaeological and genealogical methods for the analysis and critique of modern knowledge and social practices produced original insights and sometimes dazzling new interpretations of the history of knowledge and the nature of modern culture and society,

critics argue that they must ultimately be set aside as fatally flawed and incoherent. Both methodologies, it is said, flounder on the basis of their own self-devouring logic¹. At the level of ethics and politics, meanwhile, Foucault's tendency to emphasize the constraints and costs of modern social practices and forms of life, his simultaneous aversion to endorsing any alternative political programme of emancipation to alleviate them, and his alleged valorization of subaltern experiences like madness, criminality, and unrestricted sexual gratification, as well as his late interest in ancient Greek ethics, suggest to many of his critics that Foucault's ethical and political stance is dangerously anti-modern, pessimistic, irrational, and relativistic². Overall, such interpretations of his work have contributed to another consensus, even among those who can hardly be described as dogmatic or uncritical champions of Enlightenment modernity, that, while Foucault's

¹ Among the more influential exponents of this view are Jurgen Habermas and Charles Taylor. See, for example: Habermas, Jurgen, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," *New German Critique*, Number 26, Spring-Summer, pp.13-30; Habermas, Jurgen, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," in Habermas, Jurgen, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1987, pp.266-293; and Taylor, Charles, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in Taylor, Charles, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp.152-184.

² For samples of various kinds of ethical and political reservations and criticisms of Foucault's work see: Alcoff, Linda, "Feminism and Foucault: The Limits to a Collaboration," in *Crises in Continental Philosophy*, Arlene Dallery and Charles Scott, eds., New York: SUNY Press, 1990, pp.69-86; Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, New York: The Guilford Press, 1991; Dews, Peter, *Logics of Disintegration: Poststructuralism and the Claims of Critical Theory*, London: Verso, 1987; Drury, Shadia, *Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994; Ferry, Luc and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, trans. Mary Cattani, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990; Fraser, Nancy, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, New York: Routledge, 1989, pp.17-66; Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," pp.266-293; Hartsock, Nancy, "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories," *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 6, (Fall 1987), pp.187-206; McGill, Allan, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; Merquior, J.G., *Foucault*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985; Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," pp.152-184; Wolin, Richard, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," *Telos*, No.67, 1985, pp.71-86; and Wolin, Richard, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," in Wolin, Richard, *The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, pp.170-193.

erudite and original work offers some significant insights, it is on the whole ethically and politically suspect. Whatever its insights, these do not justify overlooking the potential harm his corrosive views might inflict on the legitimacy, cognitive achievements, and ethico-political legacy of modernity. Jurgen Habermas and Charles Taylor have been among the more influential exponents of this view. These and other thinkers have responded to Foucault's work with numerous compelling criticisms deserving of serious consideration. However, by consigning Foucault's work to unintelligible self-contradiction and methodological "dead end," and emphasizing its ethico-political ambiguities and putative anti-modern archaism and irrationalism, such responses threaten to expel Foucault's work from the canon of serious, critical work in the analysis of modern rationality, culture, and practice in the name of what one particularly hostile scholar described as "intellectual hygiene"³.

This dissertation aims to neutralize the delegitimizing effects of these interpretations of Foucault's corpus by offering a reading of it which casts it in a more theoretically coherent and ethically and politically less nefarious light. In so doing, however, I wish neither to deny the seriousness or complexity of the methodological difficulties his work poses and addresses, sometimes inadequately, nor to downplay the ambiguities and risks which accompany his approach to the subject of ethics and politics. Having said that, however, I do wish to rescue a certain sense or consistency in his work, with all the interpretive presumptions and dangers *that* entails, and to preserve what I believe to be of theoretical and ethical-political significance in it.

³ Richard Rorty reports this comment in his book, Consequences of Pragmatism, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982, p.222. C.G. Prado alleges "on good authority" that the scholar in question is the analytic philosopher, D.M. Armstrong. Prado, C.G., Starting With Foucault: An Introduction to Genealogy, Boulder: Westview Press, 1995, p.1.

My reading of Foucault's work throws into relief the consistency with which it was preoccupied with the nature and effects of *humanism* and its accompanying figure of thought, "Man," which, in its various forms, has dominated Western thought and practice since the seventeenth century. Inspired by the work of anti-humanists like Nietzsche and Heidegger, *inter alia*, Foucault devoted most of his intellectual career to analyzing the conditions of possibility and emergence for, calculating and dramatizing the costs of, and experimenting with going beyond, our modern humanistic form of cultural experience and practice. While Foucault's work underwent several major substantive and methodological changes, it never departed from offering a radical critique of humanism, understood in a number of senses elaborated below. Thus, the sense, logic, or unity I discern in Foucault's work is supplied not so much by its conceptual clarity or methodological consistency, although his work can be defended on these grounds as well as we shall see⁴, as by the object of criticism - ie. humanism - around which it orbits and from which it takes its measure. This reading blunts criticisms that Foucault's work is ultimately unintelligible and incoherent. Such criticisms fail or refuse to recognize that the very unflinching nature of Foucault's anti-humanism lends to his work a self-consistent unity and coherence in its own right. Furthermore, I argue that while his ethical-political critique of the costs of various relations and practices of power in modern society eschews much of the conventional humanist discourse of repression and emancipation, and rejects the figure of Man as the privileged criterion on the basis of

⁴ See, for example, works by: Bernauer, James, Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought, Atlantic Highlands: The Humanities Press, 1990; Dreyfus, Hubert and James Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Second Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983; Gutting, Gary, Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; and Mahon, Michael, Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power and the Subject, Albany: SUNY Press, 1992.

which political critique is launched, his anti-humanist ethical-political critique of modernity by no means represents an invitation to nihilism, relativism, or inhumanity.

The humanism against and beyond which Foucault attempts constantly to work takes a number of forms, which we shall examine in the following chapter. I identify these as: the *classical*, epistemologically naive humanism associated with the more extravagant claims of the scientific Enlightenment on behalf of the autonomous subject of reason; the *juridical* form of humanism embodied in celebrations of the achievements of the political Enlightenment in terms of legal restraints on the exercise of state power in relation to individuals as bearers of inviolable legal rights and freedoms, and of the expanding possibilities for individual autonomy and expressive possibility conferred by them; and, finally, a more reflexive, at times romantic, and *critical* form of humanism embodied in the nineteenth-century tradition of philosophical anthropology and its twentieth-century descendents in Hegelian-Marxism, phenomenology, and existentialism, in which the two previous forms of humanism are subject to historically sensitive and dialectically nuanced forms of immanent criticism. What all these forms of humanistic thought share is an abiding confidence in human beings as subjects of their own thought and agents of their actions and practices. Whether this takes the form of classical humanism's faith in Man as the ultimate arbiter of truth and designator of meaning in the universe, juridical humanism's confidence that the current framework of liberal legality and morality provides the necessary and universal conditions of human freedom, or critical humanism's faith that by discovering and analysing all the forms of determination and alienation bearing down upon Man that humanity might yet achieve a genuine state of emancipation, all these forms of humanistic thought and practice have at their centre, as both critical criterion and object of interest, the figure of Man. What

provides Foucault's *anti-humanist* work with its unity and consistency is its unwavering preoccupation with and commitment to illuminating the constraints and costs of this anthropological obsession, and his effort to point the way beyond it. In place of the humanist effort both to discover and restore humanity to its essential identity, Foucault proposes a "critical ontology of ourselves" devoted to revealing how it is we have *become* what we are and what has been sacrificed in the process, as well as to exploring the desirability and possibility of going beyond what we are in the present.

According to my reading, Foucault's work represents a constant attempt to think both against and beyond these forms of humanism. Foucault was clearly preoccupied by the different forms in which humanism manifested itself in Western science, thought, and practice. His writings reflect a particular preoccupation with both the theoretical deficits as well as practical and ethico-political costs of humanism and our unexamined adherence to its cognitive and normative categories. At the level of thought and discourse, he argues in works like The Birth of the Clinic and The Order of Things that humanistic analyses of knowledge operate on the basis of flawed and unwarranted assumptions regarding the autonomy of the subject and the fidelity of knowledge and discourse to the reality putatively captured within them. In terms of his critique of the theoretical deficits of humanist epistemology Foucault's was a provocative voice whose addition to contemporary thought enlivened debate and spurred new work. His various attempts, both archaeological and genealogical, to reveal the epistemic and strategic grounds which precede and condition what it is possible for a given culture to think and to say only confirms, as Charles Taylor admits, a view of the simultaneously enabling and constraining nature of knowledge and discourse which has become the "generally

accepted thesis" among all but a few "hard-nosed reductivist" hold-outs⁵. One of Foucault's most important contributions was his keen sense of the costs, exclusions, and impositions on the basis of which the self-assurance of our current hegemonic forms of knowledge have been achieved. Whatever the methodological problems with the peculiarities of archaeology and genealogy, I maintain that Foucault's contribution to the critical understanding and analysis of modern knowledge has been a fruitful one in so far as it has provided a perspective from which to examine some of the deep-seated habits of thought and practice by which we are currently constrained, thereby initiating reflection on the possibility and desirability of altering them.

Meanwhile, works with a more practical focus such as Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality throw into relief how humanistic discourse and practice exact certain social costs by prescribing certain forms of conduct, experience, and life, while proscribing and suppressing others. Such practices not only impose unwarranted and gratuitous suffering upon those subject to them, but give the lie to the normative and emancipatory pretensions of humanistic discourses and practices on behalf of freedom and individuality. Empirically speaking, Foucault's work pushed into and inspired a growing area of research into previously overlooked and undetected fields of study on the relationship between power, knowledge production, and the governance of modern societies. As even Foucault's critics have conceded, his work offers intriguing and significant new insight into the productive, corporeal, and quotidian nature of power not addressed in more traditional juridical and repressive models of power. While we clearly do not live in a giant panoptic machine, Foucault's pioneering notions of "biopolitics,"

⁵ Taylor, Charles, "Connolly, Foucault, and Truth," Political Theory, Vol.13, No.3, August 1985, pp.378, 385.

"normalization," and "governmentality," which emphasize the extent to which modern forms of knowledge production designed to reveal the truth of Man are implicated in strategies of power and social control, remind us of the dangers of taking the emancipatory pretensions of humanistic knowledge and practice at face value.

My reading of Foucault needs to be situated in relation to a number of major interpretive tendencies in the secondary literature. Critical interpretations tend to fall into two distinct, at times overlapping, categories: the cognitive and the evaluative. The former focus on the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological shortcomings of Foucault's work, with a strong emphasis placed on the self-referential, paradoxical, and putatively self-defeating nature of his critical methodology. Figures such as Taylor, Fraser, and Habermas characterize Foucault's archaeological and genealogical critiques of modern knowledge and practice as, respectively, "nonsensical," "ambiguous" and "confused," or guilty of "performative contradiction" and, therefore, "unintelligible"⁶. According to this interpretation, archaeological and genealogical claims regarding the nature of knowledge are undermined by their own self-referential logic, according to which all knowledge is reduced to an epiphenomenon of unconscious epistemic grids of cultural perception and strategic bids for power. Without doubt, some aspects of Foucault's methodologies for the analysis and critique of culture posed some serious

⁶ The most representative and influential proponents of this particular interpretation have been Nancy Fraser, Charles Taylor, and Jürgen Habermas. See: Fraser, Nancy, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," in Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory, pp.17-33; Taylor, Charles, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2, pp.152-184; and Habermas, Jürgen, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," pp.13-30 and "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," in The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, pp.266-293.

difficulties. In my view, however, such interpretations misconstrue the nature of Foucault's anti-humanist form of critique as one launched on behalf of some deeper archaeological and genealogical truth or some normatively privileged but hidden *other* of modern Man whose authentic being is falsified by modern knowledge and repressed by modern forms of social and political practice. According to Foucault's detractors, criticism makes sense only when launched on behalf of some conception of a context-independent truth or criterion of normative justification. By eschewing both, they claim, Foucault's anti-humanism is nonsensical. However, if, as Foucault proposes, we see such foundations of criticism as the definitive features of *humanist* criticism, rather than as exhaustive of all possible forms of critique, then it becomes possible to see that Foucault was operating on the basis of a different conception of criticism, as well as why he *had* to avoid these conventions of humanist critique in order to remain *consistent* with his own *anti-humanist* form of critique. Moreover, a certain unity and coherence to Foucault's work is supplied by its more or less continuous, if at times elliptical, orbit around the problem of Man and humanism. The following chapters lay out in detail the extent to which humanism was an object of continuous, if not always direct, concern for Foucault. When not engaged directly in analyses designed to displace, dissolve, or debunk the Man of classical scientific, juridical, or critical humanism, his work explored various experiences and practices, such as avant garde literature and S/M sex, through which the dominant humanistic mode of criticism, categories of thought, and codes of practice might be refused, resisted, or left behind. None of this is to deny the heterogeneous nature of his oeuvre, or the existence of substantive ruptures and methodological blind alleys within it. A good deal of this heterogeneity can be accounted

for, however, if we see it as reflective of the multiple axes along which he worked on this problem of Man.

Reading a certain consistency and coherence into Foucault's work places my interpretation in the company of those offered more recently by William Connolly, James Bernauer, Michael Mahon, and Gary Gutting, among others. In the readings offered by these writers, Foucault is presented as having worked through a series of developmental or evolutionary stages in his thinking, each of which grew out his previous work and made sense as a *logical* progression within it. On this view, the heterogeneity of Foucault's work reflects an honest and candid attempt to follow new paths opened up by the questions and problems which presented themselves to him as a result of his previous work. Connolly, for example, argues that most of the seemingly heterogeneous substantive interests and methodological prescriptions in Foucault's work are informed by the basic ontological conviction that all discursive totalities and social practices constitute impositions and, in some cases, instances of violence in relation to material not suited to receive them⁷. Bernauer contends that Foucault's work reflects his evolutionary journey as a thinker who worked on himself and his own ideas, moving from what Bernauer calls his "cathartic thinking" of his early years to the "ecstatic thinking" of his final ones, with a view to fashioning a whole new "ethics for thought"⁸. Mahon presents Foucault's work as a thoroughly Nietzschean genealogical project, one oriented along three different but interrelated axes - truth, power, and the subject - each

⁷ See: Connolly, William, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault," Political Theory, Vol.21, No.3, August, 1993, pp.365-389; and Connolly, William, The Ethos of Pluralization, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp.1-40.

⁸ Bernauer, Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought, pp.1-23.

of which was dominant at a particular stage in his career⁹. Finally, Gary Gutting tends to privilege archaeology over genealogy, *pace* Mahon, but his reading of Foucault's work presents it as a unified corpus supported by an unswerving commitment to an archaeology of knowledge inspired by figures like Canguilhem and Bachelard¹⁰. On these readings, Foucault's work can be seen as self-consistent and coherent, as opposed to "confused," contradictory, or self-refutingly sceptical. Connolly refers much of Foucault's work back to a fundamental onto-political conviction from which all else follows, heeding a certain onto-political logic. For Bernauer, Foucault's thinking and writing heeds the imperative of certain ethical demands placed on himself and his own thinking while, for Mahon, it is a matter, for Foucault, of following the logic of genealogy as far as it will go along the axes of truth, power, and subjectivity. Gutting, finally, stresses the oft-ignored methodological bracketing of truth and validity claims in Foucault's archaeologies and genealogies, as well as the fact that Foucault did not deny certain scientific validity claims, in order to rescue them from the argument that they are self-defeating. Furthermore, according to Gutting, the alleged discontinuity between archaeology and genealogy has been vastly overstated, and Foucault's turn to genealogy is understood as a non-discursive supplement to his otherwise archaeological understanding of knowledge.

My interpretation of Foucault's work as locked in elliptical orbit around the problem of Man can be loosely grouped in among these latter interpretations. Reading Foucault through the lens of his animosity toward humanism, however, sheds a different light on the nature of the unity and coherence that Foucault's work constitutes. Without

⁹ Mahon, Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power and the Subject.

¹⁰ Gutting, Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason, pp.261-272.

denying that it exhibits a notable substantive and methodological heterogeneity, or that his work underwent a certain evolution as a result of revision and self-correction, my reading tends to emphasize its sameness in terms of its preoccupation with the problem of humanism. My reading inscribes or fixes as its focal point the problem of Man, at which multiple substantive and methodological axes intersect. I argue that most of the main elements of Foucault's anti-humanism were present in his work from the start, and that much of its apparent heterogeneity can be attributed to the different axes along which he worked - metatheoretical, methodological, ethical-political - each receiving varying degrees of emphasis at any given time. While my reading of Foucault does not deny some of the serious and vexing difficulties associated with archaeological and genealogical methodology, it does bring to the surface those elements of consistency and unity neglected in more narrowly cognitive and methodological critiques¹¹.

A second important and influential tendency within the critical interpretation of Foucault's anti-humanism concerns its ethico-political or normative implications. Judged by numerous critics in terms of its normative underpinnings and effects, Foucault's work has been described as confused, nihilistic, irresponsible, conservative, and politically dangerous. The list of commentators who associate some degree of danger with the putative ethical-political implications and effects of Foucault's work is long indeed. J.G Merquior set the tone for much of this criticism when he accused Foucault of espousing a politically poisonous irrationalism and nihilism¹². Many influential commentators have

¹¹ There are, of course, certain interpretive presumptions and dangers entailed in this effort to read a certain unity and consistency onto Foucault's work, not the least of which is his own hostility to critics who demanded of him a singular, self-consistent authorial voice. I discuss some of these difficulties with respect to my own interpretation in the conclusion of the dissertation.

¹² Merquior, J. G., Foucault, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, pp. 141-160.

reproduced this basic position in more sophisticated and less polemical fashion. One line of criticism holds that Foucault's normative critique of modernity is based on an inaccurate image of the nature of modern power and an underestimation of the gains made in terms of individual autonomy and expressive possibility as a direct result of societal modernization. Habermas, for example, worries about the dangers of "filtering out" or "suppressing" the progressive and redeeming aspects of political modernity, of which he finds Foucault guilty in works like Discipline and Punish, in which discipline and panopticism are generalized as "characteristic for the structure of societal modernization as a whole"¹³. Moreover, Habermas wonders about the intelligibility of an ethico-political critique of modernity like Foucault's which appears to eschew all reference to normative standards of justification of its own. Ultimately, Habermas attributes Foucault's critique of modernity to an "aesthetic modernist" gesture of total rejection. According to this view, Foucault's critique is not only empirically invalid and methodologically incoherent but politically dangerous as well¹⁴. Charles Taylor, too, worries about the implications of Foucault's Nietzsche-inspired radical scepticism, and reprises Habermas' argument that an ethico-political critique of humanist modernity without reference to standards of truth and freedom is nonsensical¹⁵.

Another line of critical interpretation focuses on Foucault's critique of the modern subject as a product of disciplinary power. Nancy Fraser, for example, finds that Foucault's work is not only normatively confused, but politically dangerous in so far as its putative utter rejection of political modernity, along with its reduction of the subject

¹³ Habermas, "Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," pp.273, 276, 288-293.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp.282-286.

¹⁵ Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," pp.167-177.

to an epiphenomenon of power, leaves a genuine political critique of our contemporary modernity both motiveless and subjectless, thus inducing a dangerous political paralysis and passivity¹⁶. Similarly, in the name of a "nonmetaphysical humanism" and a revived commitment to the concept of universal human rights, Ferry and Renaut denounce the "aporias and disastrous effects" of Foucault's anti-humanism, with its dangerous "liquidation" of the subject and nihilist scepticism with regard to the human sciences¹⁷.

Neo-Marxists and other critical theorists, including Terry Eagleton, Peter Dews, Steven Best, and Douglas Kellner, have also expressed deep reservations about the putatively enervating effects of Foucault's analysis of the subject and critique of political programmes of emancipation for future broad-based and progressive social change¹⁸. Many feminist theorists have embraced his work in part, but remain wary of its "risks" for feminist political practice, including its putative androcentrism and elitism¹⁹. Meanwhile, Habermas, Wolin, and Drury argue that a certain celebration of madness, violence, criminality, and unrestrained sexual gratification, as well as a certain "cryptonormative" privileging of "the other of reason," can be discerned in Foucault's work, and that this "plebian" trope supplies the unacknowledged normative underpinnings of Foucault's entire critique of reason and modernity, with disturbing

¹⁶ Fraser, Nancy, Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory, pp.17-66.

¹⁷ Ferry, Luc, and Alain Renaut, French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism, trans. Mary Cattani, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, pp.xvii-xxix, 69-121, 208-229.

¹⁸ See: Best and Kellner, Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations, pp.68-73; Dews, Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory, pp.161-199; and Eagleton, Terry, The Ideology of the Aesthetic, London: Basil Blackwell, 1990, pp.384-395.

¹⁹ These criticisms have been summarized in: Sawicki, Jana, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body, New York: Routledge, 1991, pp.95-109.

implications for human solidarity and mutuality²⁰. Allan Megill, Richard Wolin and Martin Jay have warned that Foucault's putative aestheticization of the world and the self, typified by his interest in an "aesthetics of existence," harbours the potential to philosophically underwrite acts of violence and cruelty in the name of aesthetic self-perfection²¹. Finally, on a practical level, many have criticized Foucault for his "irresponsibility" in regards to a range of political and social issues - ranging from his calls for the abolition of rape as a sex crime, and his initial enthusiasm for the Iranian revolution, to his alleged disregard for the safety of others during sexual encounters - on the suspicion, as well, that such irresponsibility followed directly from his theoretical anti-humanism²².

In my reading of Foucault, however, I show how his anti-humanism can be seen as ethically and politically more fruitful than these criticisms suggest, and as certainly far less nefarious and sinister. Following Heidegger, among others, I argue that neither a critique of humanism nor a defense of anti-humanism necessarily entail an endorsement of the inhumane. To the extent that Foucault encouraged us to face up to the costs imposed by the stubborn pursuit of knowledge of ourselves, as well as by the practices

²⁰ See: Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," p.282-283; Wolin, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," pp.170-193; and Drury, Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics, pp.132-133.

²¹ See: Jay, Martin, "The Morals of Genealogy: Or is There a Post-Structuralist Ethics?," in Jay, Martin, Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Criticism, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp.38-48; Megill, Allan, Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, pp.183-256; Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," pp.71-86; and Wolin, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," in The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism, p.192.

²² Such criticism was most recently, and notoriously, levelled at Foucault by James Miller, who alleges that Foucault knowingly and recklessly exposed his sexual partners to the HIV virus in the last few years of his life, a practice which derived a certain theoretical support from his putative fascination with "limit-experiences" and images of sex and death in the works of Bataille, Roussel, and others. See: Miller, James, The Passion of Michel Foucault, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993, pp.13-36.

and strategic interests attached to it, and to set aside the question of Man in favour of experimentation with ways in which to think, act, and become *other than* Man, I argue that he was attempting to clear a space in which we might become, to paraphrase Lyotard, "inhuman" in ways not at all inhumane²³. In this sense, Foucault's work might be seen as belonging among those "merciless doctrines" of figures like Nietzsche and Sade which, according to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, by proclaiming "the identity of domination and reason, [...] are more merciful than the moralistic lackeys of the bourgeoisie."²⁴

Contrary to many of his critics, I argue that Foucault's anti-humanism neither endorses a wholesale rejection of modernity nor extinguishes subjective agency, in spite of the excessive hyperbole of some of his formulations. Foucault's ethico-political anti-humanism does not constitute a wholesale rejection of modernity. Without careful reading, however, it is easy to be misled. Foucault himself conceded that his portrayals of disciplinary and biopolitical modernity were given to a certain overemphasis on the domination of the subject by various scientific, administrative, and strategic practices, and to a definite rhetorical excess²⁵. Furthermore, in remarks that have received considerably less attention than those he made about discipline and biopower, Foucault regularly conceded that modernity had succeeded in making certain "gains" in terms of

²³ Lyotard, Jean-Francois, The Inhuman: Reflections on Time, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991, pp.17-7.

²⁴ Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, New York: Continuum, 1987, p.119.

²⁵ See his comments in, for example: Foucault, Michel, "Technologies of the Self," in Martin, Luther, et al, eds., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p.19; and Foucault, Michel, "The End of the Monarchy of Sex," interview in Foucault, Michel, Foucault Live: Interviews 1966-1984, trans. John Johnston, Sylvere Lotringer, ed., New York: Semiotext(e), 1989, p.149.

freedom. Nonetheless, this should not lead us to trivialize or downplay the importance or effects of the mechanisms of power which he identifies, in the way that some critics do. Foucault's critique of modern power has drawn our attention to a certain kind of *governance* which other social theorists and critical social scientists, such as Jacques Donzelot and Francois Ewald, also began documenting a generation ago. The work of Donzelot, Ewald, and Foucault has given birth to a burgeoning body of empirical research in the field of "governmentality"²⁶. While no one seriously suggests that we live in a perfectly panoptic machine, mechanisms for the normalization of individuals and forms of life in modern society appear to be more prevalent than Foucault's critics are prepared to admit.

Criticism that Foucault's analysis of modern power and subjectivity liquidates subjective agency and renders resistance to power motiveless and impossible are based on a misconstrual of the nature of his anti-subjectivism. Foucault's anti-humanist anti-subjectivism, we shall see, is aimed primarily at the humanist *subject of philosophy*, and not agency per se. Surely this is the same subject that has been the object of Habermas' own critique of the "philosophy of consciousness" and Ferry and Renaut's refusal of "naive traditional humanism"²⁷. By admitting that his works on the genealogy of modern power tended to stress the forces of domination and constraint lined up against the subject, Foucault in effect concedes to charges that his characterizations of modernity

²⁶ See, for example: Burchell, Graham, et al, eds., The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

²⁷ See, in particular, Habermas's essays, "Modernity's Consciousness of Time and Its Need for Self-Reassurance," "Hegel's Concept of Modernity," "Three Perspectives: Left Hegelians, Right Hegelians, and Nietzsche," and "An Alternative Way Out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centred Reason," in Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, pp.1-74, 294-326. See Ferry and Renaut, French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism, pp.xi-xxix.

tended to "filter out" certain promising tendencies and paths where the subject was concerned. We shall also see, however, that careful reading of this same work, as well as his late turn to the question of modes of subjectivization and the ancient Greek "care of the self" represented candid efforts at self-correction and redress where the subject is concerned. In insisting that Foucault liquidates the subject and subjective agency altogether, his critics engage in a certain rhetorical excess and substantive "filtering out" of their own, in relation to Foucault's writings and interviews²⁸. Secondly, once it has been granted that Foucault did take the subject seriously, especially in his late writings on Greco-Roman practices of the self and the "aesthetics of existence," it is necessary to defend these ethical ruminations against charges by Wolin, for example, that they authorize self-aggrandizing, instrumental, and potentially violent behaviour in relation to others. It can be shown that these practices, both intellectual as well as ethical-political, need not necessarily lead to the sinister consequences that have been suggested by Foucault's critics.

Finally, as to the cognitive status of Foucault's anti-humanist ethical-political critique of modernity, Habermas and Taylor claim, as we know, that it is unintelligible and meaningless in the absence of explicit standards of normative justification. As we shall see, however, Foucault's work is susceptible to a number of interpretations which blunt the force of this critique. Firstly, as I have already argued above, Foucault's work can be read as offering a form of critique which challenges Habermas' and Taylor's assumption that critique must be carried out on behalf of some "promise" and that

²⁸ I am indebted to Alan Schrift for this critical turning of the table on Habermas, Ferry, and Renaut. See: Schrift, Alan, Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism, New York, Routledge, 1995, pp.39-58, 111-120.

standards are built into the very grammar of critique. The alleged incoherence of Foucaultian critique is produced by translating it into the very kind of *humanist* critique it seeks to replace. Foucault endorses the permanent work of detachment and self-escape undertaken through a "critical ontology of ourselves" over the humanist effort to identify, transcendentalize, and universalize what we *are*. If conventional humanist criticism functions on the basis of strong truth claims and standards of normative justification then, in so far as Foucault seeks to articulate an anti-humanist approach to critique, his own approach is *logically driven* to forego reference to them.

One possible form of meta-ethical but non-normative justification for Foucaultian critique has been offered by William Connolly, whose interpretation of Foucault's work will be examined in Chapter Six. Drawing on Connolly's interpretation of Foucault, I argue that the latter's ethico-political critique of humanism rests not so much on any explicit normative framework as it does on a certain ontological conviction with political implications²⁹. According to Connolly, Foucault treats every form of knowledge and practice as a kind of imposition or violence on an ineffably complex protean reality, that is, as emanating from an urge to "impose form over that which was not designed to receive it."³⁰ Such an anti-foundationalist ontology, as Connolly dubs it, brings with it ethical and political implications which cannot be enclosed within a humanist framework. Given such a conviction, Foucault was loath to provide any explicit, positive normative standards *for us*. Rather, his stance is best understood as a *metaethical* one in which radical genealogical critique provides a kind of insurance policy against the

²⁹ Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault," pp.374-384; and Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, pp.19-40.

³⁰ Connolly, William, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," Political Theory, Vol. 13, No. 3, August 1985, p.366.

ossification of discursive totalities and relations of power which inevitably come with every system of thought and practice. According to Foucault, the best insurance against the danger that a given system of thought and practice will freeze into one-way domination is supplied by maintaining an anti-foundationalist, anti-essentialist, and anti-universalist scepticism in relation to all systems of thought and practice, which is not to say that we can or must utterly reject, abandon, or condemn everything that we currently think, say, and do. Thus, I defend the ethical and political significance of Foucault's "critical ontology of ourselves," as opposed to seeing it as a retreat from or absence of ethics and politics.

Having said that, Foucault's prematurely arrested corpus furnishes us with few instructions as to how to respond to the question, "What do we owe to others," once the normative framework of humanism has been jettisoned. Yet, it is far from clear that his critics have pegged it right when they accuse him of underwriting nihilism, relativism, or callous aestheticism. I argue that Foucault's post-humanist critical ontology entails a certain ethical orientation toward identities, practices, and ourselves - which he dubbed "an aesthetics of existence" or the "care of the self" - which not only does not constitute an endorsement of the inhumane but may well engender relations of care and curiosity in relation to others. As such, my defense of Foucaultian ethics and politics joins that of a number of others. Within the domains of ethics and political theory, Foucault's work remains important, indeed vital in some cases, to ongoing work and discussion on the notion of agonistic and radical pluralist democracy, of which the works of Connolly, Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Iris Marion Young are exemplary³¹. Furthermore,

³¹ See: Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization; Laclau, Ernesto, and Mouffe, Chantal, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack,

one can certainly point to the many strategic applications of Foucault's work, informed by obvious emancipatory and progressive intentions. For example, Foucault's influence upon and utility to feminist theorizing remains unquestioned, if not undisputed³². Meanwhile, one would be hard pressed to identify very many thinkers who have been more influential upon the burgeoning fields of gender studies and Queer theory. To the work of Judith Butler, Leo Bersani, Gayle Rubin, and David Halperin, among others, Foucault's work remains foundational³³. Similarly, the contribution of his work toward the emergence of post-colonial theory and literary analysis should not be underestimated³⁴. Finally, in more empirical work on topics ranging from criminal justice, unemployment, and high technology, to international relations, gerontology, genetics, and biotechnology, the presence of Foucault continues to be felt³⁵. None of this

London: Verso, 1985; and Young, Iris Marion, "Impartiality and the Civic Republic," in Benhabib, Seyla, and Cornell, Drucilla, Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp.57-76.

³² See, for example: Diamond, Irene, and Lee Quinby, Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988; and Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault.

³³ Examples of such work include: Butler, Judith, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, New York: Routledge, 1990; Bersani, Leo, "Is the Rectum a Grave," October, No. 43, Winter 1987, pp.197-222; Sedgwick, Eve, Tendencies, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995; Rubin, Gayle, "The Valley of the Kings: Leathermen in San Francisco, 1960-1990," Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1994; and Halperin, David, Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

³⁴ See: Said, Edward, Orientalism, New York: Random House, 1979; and Stoler, Ann Laura, Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and the Colonial Order of Things, Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.

³⁵ For a recent example of Foucauldian scholarship on criminal justice and penal practice see: Snider, Lauren, "Understanding the Second Great Confinement," Queen's Quarterly, Vol. 105, No. 1, Spring 1998, pp.29-46; and Connolly, William, "The Desire to Punish," in The Ethos of Pluralization, pp.41-74. William Walters has used Foucault's concept of "governmentality" to analyse state unemployment policies in Great Britain: Walters, William, "The discovery of 'unemployment': new forms for the government of poverty," Economy and Society, Vol. 23, Number 3, August 1994, pp.265-289. David Lyon incorporates insights from Foucault in his book on modern practices and techniques of surveillance, The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994. Stephen Gill incorporates Foucauldian insights into the analysis of the contemporary international financial system in his "The Global Panopticon? The Neoliberal State, Economic Life, and Democratic Surveillance,"

is to deny, of course, the intensity of the controversies which continue to rage as to the fruitfulness or destructiveness of his lingering influence.

Chapter 1 provides a discussion of the meaning and place of the term humanism in modern thought in general, and in Foucault's work in particular, as well as an overview of the various ways in which his anti-humanism manifested itself consistently throughout the course of his career. Humanism is defined in relation to the history of Western thought as well as situated within a specific Continental and post-war French context. Each of the major substantive and methodological changes in Foucault's work, it will be shown, can be explained in terms of formulating an appropriate response to a specific form or manifestation of humanism.

Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to a discussion of Foucault's metatheoretical critique of humanism. His critique of the essentialist myth of Man as a stable *object* of scientific knowledge captured in the human sciences such as psychiatry, medicine, and sociology is presented in Chapter 2, with specific reference to the ways in which his work succeeds in historicizing such scientific unities as "mental illness," "life," "criminality," "sexuality," or the "normal" and the "abnormal" in general. Foucault's work dramatizes the degree of discontinuity and change which has characterized substantive developments in the knowledge of humanity, and relates the substance of

Alternatives, vol.20, no.1, 1995, pp.1-49. Stephen Katz uses Foucault to analyze and critique the formation and practices of the contemporary discipline of gerontology in his book, Disciplining Old Age: The Formation of Gerontological Knowledge, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996. Evelyn Fox Keller, Ian Hacking, Donna Haraway, and James Rabinow have all used his work in their own writings on science, genetics, and biotechnology. See, for example: Fox-Keller, Evelyn, Reflections on Gender and Science, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995; Hacking, Ian, The Taming of Chance, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; Haraway, Donna, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," Socialist Review, 15, no. 2, March-April, 1985; and Rabinow, James, Essays on the Anthropology of Reason, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

humanistic knowledge to a host of material, moral, cultural, and epistemic determinations which, when excavated and proliferated, have the effect of dispersing the very unity of the objects of humanist knowledge. Chapter 3 is devoted to Foucault's critique of Man as the rational, autonomous, and self-transparent *subject* of knowledge. Here, the main targets of his work are the humanistic subject of philosophy and science, and the traditional history of ideas in which developments in knowledge are portrayed as progressive advances in the demystification of the world at the hands of the patient, disinterested, and rational gaze of the scientific subject which makes discoveries and unveils the truth of things hidden by superstition, power, and error. Here, Foucault attributes such discoveries in the human sciences as "mental illness," "delinquency," and "sexuality" to the conditioning effects of epochal epistemic limits and the influence of powerful strategic interests and forces, thereby displacing the putatively autonomous, disinterested, and rational scientific subject from the analysis of knowledge and its history. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Foucault's anti-humanist methodology for the analysis and critique of knowledge, and reflects on its relative strengths and weaknesses.

Chapters 4 and 5 take up the ethical-political dimensions of Foucault's anti-humanism. Chapter 4 is devoted to Foucault's debunking of the humanistic "myth of humanization," according to which the sciences of Man have been portrayed as responsible for humanizing perceptions and treatments of the insane, the diseased, the criminal, and the sexually non-conforming. The target of criticism here is the humanistic myth of the disinterestedness of the subject of scientific knowledge and its heroic portrayal as having pursued knowledge in spite of the protestations of power. In terms of

humanism, Foucault reveals the inhumanity to which the scientific and practical humanism embodied in the human sciences are prone.

Chapter 5 takes up the question of the nature and operation of modern power in relation to both the liberal juridical and Marxist humanist portrayals of modernity. In relation to the former, the clear object of criticism is the juridical myth of the political Enlightenment as having led to the discovery and emancipation of the individual endowed with unimpeachable rights and freedoms. This "myth of emancipation" is belied by the pervasive presence of myriad techniques, mechanisms, and institutions of surveillance, discipline, police, and biopower which constrain and shape individuals at the microscopic level of their bodies and daily conduct. Foucault's critique of juridical humanism also attempts to reveal the ignoble origins of cherished normative categories, such as the individual, personhood, interiority, and autonomy, in the techniques, practices, and interests of the modern biopolitical state. According to Foucault, juridical humanism's failure to acknowledge the workings of power through such mechanisms "on the underside of the law" renders its account of political modernity empirically invalid and analytically deficient. Meanwhile, Marxist humanism suffers from similar empirical blindspots and analytical deficits insofar as its analysis and critique of the structures of power in modern capitalist societies focuses almost exclusively on economic relations and the structures of power in the State. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Foucault's critique of the Freudian-Marxist "repressive hypothesis" and an assessment of numerous standard criticisms of Foucault's ethical and political critique of modern society.

Chapter 6 deals with both the general question of the meaning and function of critique in Foucault's work, and with what form theoretical, political, and ethical critique

might take once the tropes and touchstones of humanist criticism have been discarded. According to Foucault, whereas humanist criticism always entailed the search for truth, the analysis of repression, and the restoration of Man to some more authentic state or condition, a post-humanist form of critique would eschew such truth claims and standards of normative justification in favour of what Foucault calls a "critical ontology of ourselves". This approach to critique is not devoted to revealing some hidden truth of humankind or accumulating knowledge but, rather, to carrying out a ceaseless and restless "permanent critique of ourselves" in order to reveal to us the limits imposed upon us by our current ways of thinking, saying, and doing things, as well as the possibilities for going beyond them. Viewed from this standpoint, I will argue, his approach to critique is not inconsistent or self-contradictory. Secondly, as we shall see, the critical ontology of ourselves implies a certain form of ethical practice in relation to the self, as well as theoretical work on the limits imposed by our knowledge of ourselves. Such an ethics of the self, I argue, not only makes sense within an overall anti-humanist critique of humanist ethics and morality, but has the potential to neutralize some of the resentment, hostility, and cruelty often attached to hegemonic identities and to help foster and cultivate relations of care, concern, and mutuality.

Chapter One

The Deaths of Man¹: **Foucault's Anti-Humanism**

"One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area - European culture since the sixteenth century - one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it."

Michel Foucault, The Order of Things

At first glance, Foucault's above claim that, as a problem for human knowledge, "man is a recent invention" appears provocative and debatable in the extreme. The suggestion that the nature or essence of humanity was taken up as an object of thought only relatively recently is belied by millennial philosophic and scientific concern since Antiquity². The idea that the question "What is man?" has been posed only since the

¹ The use of the term "Man", which appears throughout the remainder of the essay, warrants some explanation. I have capitalized it in order to distinguish my use of the term from its deployment as a putative generic. I have chosen to retain this otherwise sexist term on technical grounds, as it is central to a number of philosophical traditions at issue in this essay. Since the late-eighteenth century, Man has been a central object of philosophical reflection, at least in the Continental context. Beginning with Kant, and proceeding through such figures as Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Lukacs, and Sartre, "man", the subject, and human history, have been at the centre of philosophy. Furthermore, in the structuralist and post-structuralist critiques and polemics of this tradition, the term Man has been retained as a central object of criticism and displacement; witness Levi-Strauss's influential call for the dissolution of Man, or Derrida's interrogation of the "Ends of Man". The plural reference to the deaths of Man indicates that this figure is actually an amalgam of different forms of humanism and different formulations of the problem of Man, which are discussed below in this chapter.

² Herbert Schnadelbach, for example, provides numerous examples of anthropocentric concern, dating from the time of Protagoras, which predate the epistemic "Age of Man" in which, according to Foucault, the question of "Man" first emerged. See: Schnadelbach, Herbert, "The Face in the Sand: Foucault and the Anthropological Slumber," in Honneth, Axel, et al, eds., Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment, trans. William Rehg, Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1992, pp.318-319.

sixteenth century is clearly preposterous. But its very preposterousness compels us to consider what more specific or limited use Foucault might have been making of the term at the time of writing. Clearly, his claim is *not* that to philosophy, science, and the arts prior to the sixteenth century the question of humanity did not exist. Rather, in wishing to erase Man from Western thought and culture, what Foucault seeks is the abandonment of *humanist* Man as a certain kind of subject and object of knowledge, and the setting aside of the very question "What is man?" which it takes as the central and most compelling one for human reflection. The Man whose recent invention he wished to demonstrate, and whose disappearance he wished to effect, I shall argue, is the Man of *humanism*, understood according to several of the senses in which the term had come to be used, affirmatively and negatively, in France in the 1950s and 60s.

To begin with, Foucault did not employ the term humanism with great regularity, but he did so in quite precise terms and with different connotations over the course of his career. It should also be noted that Foucault's use of the term "humanism" is inseparable from his understanding of and use of "anthropology", and related terms such as "the Enlightenment" and "modernity". These terms ought not be conflated, however, since, along with the meaning of humanism, the sense in which Foucault uses the other terms varies as well³. Broadly speaking, the humanism which is Foucault's focus and main

³ While the modern philosophical Enlightenment is often rather loosely characterized as "humanist" within a great deal of postmodernist and poststructuralist literature, Foucault does not always use these terms interchangeably. For example, the distinctively anthropological "Age of Man" identified in The Order of Things has its chronological origins in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, beginning with Kant, whereas the philosophical and scientific Enlightenment proper dates from the works of Bacon and Descartes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Later, in the essay "What is Enlightenment?," Foucault comes to view particular conceptions of enlightenment and modernity, inspired by Kant and Baudelaire, respectively, as promisingly counter-humanist. See: Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?" in Foucault, Michel, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954 - 1984, Volume 1, James Rabinow, ed., New York: The New Press, 1997, pp.309-315. Hereinafter cited as EST.

object of criticism is that chronologically modern, anthropocentric, and subject-centred approach in philosophy and the social sciences which has its origins in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and which has since been transformed into increasingly reflexive and historically sensitive permutations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries⁴.

Within Continental philosophy, the term humanism has been deployed in a number of relatively technical senses, both affirmatively and pejoratively, to designate a wide range of thinkers who share a profound confidence in the rational powers of humanity, that is, in its ability to know and exert control over both the natural world and its own internal and social nature. Now, this confidence has manifested itself in a number of basic forms since the Enlightenment. Following the conventions of Continental usage in general, and the deployment of the term in post-war France in particular, one can identify three major forms of humanism in modern Western thought with which Foucault's work takes issue: the epistemologically naive and extravagant form of *classical* humanism embodied in the outlook of the scientific Enlightenment; a *juridical* form which celebrates the putatively emancipatory achievements of the liberal political Enlightenment in terms of individual civil and political rights and autonomy on behalf of abstract, universal Man; and, finally, a *critical* form of humanism embodied in the Continental tradition of "philosophical anthropology," extending from Kant through Marx to various twentieth-century syntheses of Marxism, psychoanalysis, existentialism, and phenomenology, which responds to both the classical and liberal juridical forms of humanism with an epistemologically more reflexive understanding of knowledge and

⁴ The following discussion of the philosophical and technical use of the term "humanism" is partially indebted to Kate Soper's Humanism and Anti-Humanism, London: Hutchinson, 1986, pp. 9-95.

consciousness and an immanent critique of the political ideals of the bourgeois Enlightenment. Foucault responds to each of these forms of humanism, as well as to what they have in common⁵.

i) Classical Humanism

In its epistemologically crudest and most extravagant form, humanism manifests itself in the classical scientific outlook, endorsed by figures like Bacon and Descartes, which juxtaposes an external world of objects to an autonomous, subjective human consciousness. On this view, human consciousness is endowed with the capacity to generate representations of the external world, in the form of concepts and language, which are perfectly isomorphic to it. Classical humanism posits the human mind as, in effect, what Richard Rorty has described as "the mirror of nature"⁶. Thus, the essence of humanity comes to be equated with its putative role as the discoverer of the essence of all things, of the very nature of nature and all the laws of its operation⁷. From this perspective, the history of Western thought and science has been portrayed in terms of progress, disenchantment, and enlightenment, in which reason and knowledge have been

⁵ There is, admittedly, a certain heuristic quality to the three forms of humanism I have constructed here as the central objects of analysis and criticism in Foucault's work. Foucault himself identified numerous other candidates for inclusion under the rubric of humanism, but concluded, given the diversity of trajectories represented, that humanism itself was "too supple, too diverse, [and] too inconsistent to serve as an axis of reflection." Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p.314. In my view, however, the three forms of humanism I have identified conform to a fairly standard typology of humanism, and Foucault's work can easily be shown to be preoccupied with them, if only as forms of thought and practice from which he sought to escape.

⁶ Rorty details a whole host of ocular metaphors at the heart of Western thought since Plato, but reserves the concept of the mind as "mirror" to refer to modern ocularcentrism since Descartes, for whom philosophy constituted the practice of inspecting, repairing, and polishing the mirror of the mind in which the world is represented. See: Rorty, Richard, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, pp.3-13, 131-164.

⁷ Ibid., p.357.

gradually liberated from the constraints of superstition, customary tradition, arbitrary authority, and vested interest⁸. This epistemologically naive form of humanism articulated by figures of the Enlightenment like Condorcet, Gibbon, and Montesquieu, and propagated in the history of ideas ever since, is the chief antagonist of Foucault's early archaeological works on the human sciences, which analyse and critique the notion of the autonomy of scientific consciousness embodied in the sciences of medicine and psychiatry, and traditional history of science, which portrays the development of scientific knowledge in terms of discursive continuity, logical development, and progressive disenchantment. Foucault analyses the main characteristics of classical epistemology in The Order of Things, reducing it to the epistemic theme of "representation," in which the subject of thought is portrayed as that mirrored surface in which the world is unproblematically reflected. By assuming its own complete self-presence, the subject of classical thought offers itself as "representation in its pure form"⁹. However, in so far as the subject of classical thought fails to turn that same mirror upon itself, just as the artist Velazquez fails to represent his own perspective in the painting, "Las Meninas," memorably analyzed in the opening pages of Foucault's book, it remains blind to its own role in the constitution of knowledge. This is the source of the naivete of classical thought. The kinds of factors impinging upon the subject's autonomy and self-transparency, such as reification or the unconscious, analyzed by later figures like Marx and Freud, remain "unthought".

⁸ W.T. Jones summarizes this optimistic "mood of the Enlightenment" in his, Kant and the 19th Century: A History of Western Philosophy Vol IV, 2nd Edition, revised, San Diego: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1975, pp.1-9.

⁹ Foucault, Michel, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, New York: Vintage, 1973, p.16. Hereinafter cited as OT.

Negatively speaking, from the perspective of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as Foucault, this naive epistemological humanism conceals the extravagance and hubris of the "hard atheists," "the metaphysics of subjectivity," the "dialectic of Enlightenment," or the imperious scientific "gaze," in which zealous pursuit of scientific reason and technical domination of nature reflect a substitution of religious faith in God by worship of the new God - subjective reason - endowed with the ability to unlock the secrets of the universe as well as the power to control it. Nietzsche laments the rise of humanism as the triumph of the Socratic, Apollonian, or "theoretic," worldview; with its "faith in the explicability of nature and in knowledge as a panacea," over the Dionysian, world-disclosing, "tragic" experience embodied in art and poetry¹⁰. Heidegger diagnosed the essentialist and metaphysical anthropomorphism at the root of the scientific Enlightenment as symptomatic of humanity's desire to master the unbearable indeterminacy of Being. This project of mastery results only in a tragic "forgetting" of Being and its technological and instrumental "enframing" as no more than a "standing reserve" for the narrowest instrumental purposes¹¹. For Horkheimer and Adorno, Bacon's view represents one in which Enlightenment disenchantment of the world has already begun to slide into a mythologization of the subject of instrumental rationality and humanity's technological mastery of nature¹². On this view, humanism

¹⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich, The Birth of Tragedy, trans. Walter Kaufman, New York: Random House, 1967, p.93-98, 105-121. See also: Nietzsche, Friedrich, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. Walter Kaufman, New York: Random House, 1966, pp.9-32.

¹¹ See the essays: "Letter on Humanism," and "The Question Concerning Technology," in Heidegger, Martin, Basic Writings, ed. David Farrell Krell, New York: Harper and Row, 1977, pp.193-242, and 284-317, respectively.

¹² Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment opens with a discussion of Bacon as the paradigmatic philosophical spokesperson for this brand of scientific humanism. Horkheimer, Max, and Adorno, Theodor, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming, New York: Continuum, 1972, pp.3-80.

constitutes the new religion of Man, the autonomous subject, and instrumental reason, which is no less obfuscatory or mythological than those pre-Enlightenment systems of thought which were replaced.

Foucault was heavily influenced by the kind of radical critique of scientific reason elaborated in the preceding works, and reproduced the theme of the entwinement of reason, knowledge, and power in a number of forms throughout his work in opposition to the classical humanist position. "It has been a tradition for humanism," Foucault argues:

"to assume that once someone gains power he ceases to know. Power makes men mad, and those who govern are blind; only those who keep their distance from power, who are in no way implicated in tyranny, shut up in their Cartesian *poêle*, their room, their meditations, only they can discover the truth. The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power. [...] Modern humanism is therefore mistaken in drawing this line between knowledge and power. Knowledge and power are integrated with one another, and there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power; this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise."¹³

Foucault's early works evince unmistakable suspicions as to the violence and imperiousness of the "gaze" of scientific reason in relation to such objects as madness and disease. Madness and Civilization, for example, describes the relation between reason and madness in terms of an historic and arbitrary "seizure," as a result of which the experience and voice of madness was forcibly silenced by the "monologue of reason," which eventually assumed the form of psychiatric dominance of the experience of madness in the nineteenth century. The forcible confinement of the insane in psychiatric institutions, along with the non-reciprocal and, at times, cruel techniques for the

¹³ Foucault, Michel, "Prison Talk," interview in Foucault, Michel, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, Colin Gordon, ed., New York: Pantheon, 1980, pp. 51-52. Hereinafter cited as PK.

accumulation of knowledge adopted by the psychiatric profession belied the validity of humanist claims that reason and knowledge flourished only where power had ceased to function. Aside from the question of power, Foucault's strictly archaeological works raise the possibility that knowledge is determined by and develops according to anonymous rules for the formation of discourse - deep *epistemic* structures - constituting the discursive conditions of possibility for knowledge which "dominate and even overwhelm" the subjects responsible for scientific discourse. In works such as The Birth of the Clinic and The Order of Things, the putatively autonomous subject of knowledge is displaced by unconscious but simultaneously enabling cultural grids of perception which make up a "positive unconscious" of knowledge which is prior to the subject. Such archaeological analyses deprive the subject of its foundational role in the history of the development of knowledge. In his later genealogical works, including Discipline and Punish, Foucault examines the ways in which the production of knowledge and discourse within the human sciences was bound up with dominant political rationalities of social control. Once again, his work returns to the humanist view which sees knowledge and power in a relation of externality to one another. "From the sixteenth century on," Foucault remarks,

"it has always been considered that the development of the forms and contents of knowledge was one of the greatest guarantees of the liberation of humanity. It is a postulate of our Western civilization that has acquired a universal character, accepted more or less by everyone. It is a fact, however - I was not the first to ascertain this - that the formation of the great systems of knowledge has also had effects and functions of subjection and rule."¹⁴

¹⁴ Foucault, Michel, "The Discourse on Power," interview in Foucault, Michel, Remarks on Marx: Conversations With Duccio Trombadori, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito, New York: Semiotext(e), 1991, p.165. Hereinafter cited as RM.

Indeed, Foucault's whole approach to the question of the relationship between knowledge and power focuses not only on the ways in which the traditional intellectual is situated in relations of power but, more importantly, on the role played by experts of all kinds - psychiatrists, criminologists, social workers, parole officers, physicians, and teachers - pervasive within society and responsible for both registering and correcting a host of abnormalities and disorders in the social body.

ii) Juridical Humanism

The second form of humanism with which Foucault's work is concerned is what I have called the *juridical* form, which informs and celebrates the political and civil rights and freedoms of the individual achieved as a result of the bourgeois revolution and liberal political Enlightenment¹⁵. According to the humanistic interpretation of political and cultural modernity, the Enlightenment inaugurated a period of expanding civil and political freedom, autonomy, and self-determination on the basis of the gradual disintegration and at times violent rejection of traditional and arbitrary forms of authority, custom, and belief in favour of the rights and freedoms of an atomized, decontextualized, and putatively universal "Abstract Man". Culturally, the modern period has witnessed the decline of religious dogma and prejudice, and the increasing influence of the values of tolerance, pluralism, and rationality in human cultural, spiritual, and intellectual affairs. Politically, the modern period has witnessed the emergence and flourishing of the autonomous individual on the basis of constitutional constraints on the

¹⁵ This exceedingly brief description of the juridical form of humanism is informed, in part, by Ernst Cassirer's discussion of the period. See: Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955, pp.197-274.

sovereign powers of the state and inviolable civil, political, and democratic rights and freedoms of Man. This interpretation of the nature and achievements of cultural and political modernity, memorably articulated in the writings of Voltaire, Diderot, and J.S. Mill, among others, was supported by a set of universalist ideals and assumptions which together make up the juridical form of humanism. The philosophical and juridical grounds supporting this interpretation of cultural and political modernity deploy an evaluative and conceptual framework privileging such notions as autonomy, subjective agency, natural right, contract, and sovereignty originally articulated in the liberal natural law tradition of Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, and Montesquieu; a framework in which these values and concepts were believed to have universal validity. On the juridical humanist view, the meaning and significance of modernity is derived from the respect, civil and political protections, and opportunities for expression and self-actualization afforded to the individual, conceived as the autonomous subject of a unique set of interests, inner desires, and personal aspirations. The most important achievement of Enlightenment modernity, according to this liberal humanist ethico-political framework, has been the removal of obstacles, such as religious belief, traditional authority, and arbitrary, absolutist state power, to individual autonomy and fulfillment and the rational ordering and benign administration of society.

Within the tradition of Western thought, however, the achievements of cultural and political modernity have not been greeted with unanimous approval. No sooner was the bourgeois Enlightenment and political revolution under way when it became the object of suspicion and concern, and not only on the part of conservative reactionaries. Beginning with laments regarding the "barbarism of reason" issued by figures like Vico and Rousseau, the juridical humanists have been opposed and criticized on various

grounds by a non-reactionary counter-Enlightenment. Hegel, for example, lamented the experience of diremption at the heart of cultural modernity and recoiled at the vacuity of bourgeois negative liberty in the famous chapter of The Phenomenology of Spirit, "Absolute Freedom and Terror," while Marx revealed the alienation and exploitation on which the bourgeois revolution depended, thus dismissing the ideological nature of the terms of juridical humanism. At the end of the nineteenth century, the achievements of the bourgeois revolution were diagnosed by Nietzsche as a stultifying and suffocating form of modern "nihilism," while Weber's account of modern rationalization and the "iron cage" of bureaucracy belied the empirical portrayal of political modernity offered in juridical humanism. Meanwhile, Freud's discovery of the structure of the human psyche and the role played by the unconscious in determining human personality and behaviour struck a blow to juridical humanism's celebration of the autonomous subject. In the twentieth-century, the critique of bourgeois modernity has been carried on by the members of the Frankfurt School, among others, who lament the obstacles to genuine autonomy thrown up not only by the capitalist mode of production but by "total administration," the "culture industry," and the "one-dimensionality" and "repressiveness" of modern society and culture. In France, the critique of juridical humanism in the twentieth century was inspired by figures like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kojève, and Bataille, the influence of which is evident, in part, in the Marxist-humanism of the postwar period, as well as in the work of Foucault and his contemporaries. For his part, Foucault increasingly develops an analysis and critique of modern society which challenges not only its portrayal by humanists as an epoch of expanding liberty and the curtailment of power, but also the very adequacy of its terms, such as "sovereignty,"

"contract," "subject," and the "self," for dealing with the nature and functioning of modern power.

The account of cultural and political modernity offered up by the juridical humanists was one of the primary objects of the genealogical critique of modern power and subjectivity which preoccupied Foucault in the 1970's. His writings on "discipline," "biopower," "governmentality" and the political rationality underlying the liberal state's concern with order, security, population, and the general welfare challenge both the empirical account of the achievements of modernity as well as the universalist ideals and concepts offered by the juridical perspective. Foucault's work on punishment, penal practice, and the rationality of "policing" in a host of social institutions in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries introduces the concept of *discipline* to denote the increasingly pervasive and insidious form of modern power which takes hold of individuals at the level of the corporeal and the quotidian, subjecting them to routinized practices of *dressage* as productive workers, obedient children, model soldiers, and responsible parents. Foucault's work in this period was instrumental in drawing renewed attention to the use of such disciplinary techniques in the nineteenth century, in particular Jeremy Bentham's schemes for institutions of welfare, moral improvement, and punishment, including his famous Panopticon. This work offers a counterhistory of the political Enlightenment in which the modern individual is portrayed as the subject of a host of disciplinary and biopolitical practices and techniques operating "on the underside of the law" and constituting a "dark side" to the Enlightenment. The modern juridical subject of rights and the law has, as a kind of administrative and strategic analogue, a *subjectified* and *normalized* flipside as the guarantee of order and obedience. Accompanying seventeenth and eighteenth-century discourses of emancipation, Foucault

argues, one finds the discourse and practice of the *Polizeiwissenschaften*, the sciences of statecraft oriented toward the maintenance of order and the optimization of the state and all its forces, including the productivity, health, and welfare of its population. "The 'Enlightenment'," he notes, "which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines."¹⁶ The "policing" of society in this expansive way called for multiple, widely diffused points for the surveillance and control of the population - police, magistrates, inspectors, schoolmasters, physicians - which belied boosterish portrayals of political modernity as an era in which power was finally curtailed. What was occurring, according to Foucault, was a change in the very nature and economy of power. "Historically," he writes in Discipline and Punish:

"the process by which the bourgeoisie became the dominant class was masked by the establishment of an explicit, coded and formally egalitarian juridical framework, [...] But the development and generalization of disciplinary mechanisms constituted the other, dark side of these processes. The general juridical form that guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle was supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines."¹⁷

The modern state, he argues, could afford to extend juridical and formal equality and liberty because the new disciplinary form of power provided "a guarantee of the submission of forces and bodies"¹⁸. Thus, while according to the humanist champions of the political Enlightenment, the concepts of sovereignty, natural right, and contract provided the ideal foundation for law and political authority, the disciplinary power of "policing," the effective mechanism of power which seized hold of individuals and bodies, ensured social order and docility by functioning in opposition to its formal

¹⁶ Foucault, Michel, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, Trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Pantheon, 1977, p.222. Hereinafter cited as DP.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.222.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.222.

framework. "[A]lthough the universal juridicism of modern society seems to fix limits on the exercise of power," Foucault claims,

"its universally widespread panopticism enables it to operate, on the underside of the law, a machinery that is both immense and minute, which supports, reinforces, multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law."¹⁹

Foucault's critique and unmasking of the disciplinary nature of modern power and individuality poses a direct challenge to both the empirical validity of the humanist account of modernity as well as the practical relevance and efficacy of its juridical ideals and concepts such as liberty, right, sovereignty, and contract in the face of such "capillary," corporeal, and mundane forms of power. In opposition to the rhetoric of emancipation accompanying juridical humanism, and the subjectifying effects of disciplinary and biopolitical power in modern society, Foucault advocated not only genealogical unmasking of the ways in which modern subjects have been produced, but also the adoption of various "technologies of the self," in fields such as writing and sexual pleasure, oriented to dislodging and detaching the self from the current disciplinary form of subjectivity. In the final two published volumes of his history of sexuality, The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, along with numerous interviews and other writings on the subject of sexuality, Foucault began to make tentative steps in the latter direction. By showing how things, like the self, have been made, as well as experimenting with how they might be unmade, Foucault hopes to create a space for freedom, for things, including the experience of the self, to be otherwise.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.222.

iii) Critical Humanism

Finally, against both the classical and juridical forms of humanism, there developed in Western thought a more critical, reflexive, and, at times, romantic one which we shall call *critical* humanism. The critical humanists offered a dialectical critique of the naive epistemology of the former, and advanced an immanent critique of the bourgeois ideals of the latter. Since the late-eighteenth century, the Continental tradition of "philosophical anthropology" has problematized the Enlightenment's celebration of subjective reason, bourgeois freedom, and technological progress without abandoning a commitment to reason and human freedom²⁰. Critical humanism offered a more thoroughgoing interrogation of Man as the subject and condition of the constitution of knowledge and, against the diremption and alienation at the heart of the modern experience, radicalized the bourgeois project of the emancipation of Man. Ever since Kant and Hegel, scores of thinkers have emphasized the historicity and situatedness of human reason, subjectivity, and knowledge, thus challenging the naive, metaphysical pretensions of the early classical Enlightenment. At the same time, these and other thinkers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including Rousseau, Herder, and Marx, appealed to some core humanity or potential, such as "perfectibility" or "species-being," which had been blocked, perverted, or suppressed under the dominant form of instrumental reason and alienating bourgeois social relations, thus belying the overly-sanguine ethico-political evaluation of political modernity found in the liberal juridical

²⁰ Soper, Humanism and Anti-Humanism, pp.24-78. Schnadelbach identifies Left Hegelian Marxist humanism as the "anthropology" targeted by Foucault's archaeological work in The Order of Things. See: Schnadelbach, "The Face in the Sand," pp.318-327. While certain of Foucault's works certainly seem particularly preoccupied with this manifestation of humanism, however, it does not exhaust the range of humanisms with which his work tries to come to terms. I make this argument further below.

model of humanism. Critical humanism avoided the crude essentialism of appeals to human nature as a fixed, pre-given datum, but continued to rely on such concepts as alienation and reification to denote the extent to which, in its historical development, humanity's efforts to achieve a more rational, authentic, and emancipated existence equal to its true potential have been truncated or stifled. While the tendency, here, is for the autonomy and efficacy of the subject to be diminished in the face of the objective, historical determination with which it enters into relations of interpenetration, philosophical anthropology attempts to preserve reason, subjectivity, and human agency in some recognizable form. In the critical tradition of humanism, beginning with Kant, Hegel, and Marx and continuing in the work of such thinkers as Lukacs, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty, emphasis is placed on analyzing the nature of the relationships between mind and body, consciousness and world, and self and other, and on examining the repressiveness of modern instrumental rationality and/or bourgeois society in relation to capacities, interests, and potentialities deeply embedded in humankind. Critical humanism does not give up on but, rather, seeks to modify and render in more complex and dialectically or historically nuanced form the humanist touchstones of reason, subjectivity, autonomy, history, and truth. As such, critical humanism attempts a reflexive and dialectical reconstruction of the grounds for humanistic knowledge and advances an immanent critique of the claims of juridical humanism on the basis of the claim that the "bourgeois ideals" of autonomy and individuality constitute a worthy but as yet unrealized project.

Now, among those thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries whom Foucault identified as belonging to this critical tradition of humanism are, for example, Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx and various Western Marxists, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and

members of the Frankfurt School such as Horkheimer and Marcuse²¹. His misgivings about critical humanism are simultaneously metatheoretical, methodological, and ethico-political. Foucault finds in Kant's work on the subjective origins of the *a priori* conditions of knowledge constitution the emergence of the epistemic "analytic of finitude," setting in motion the aporetic form of inquiry into Man as both, "an object of knowledge and a subject that knows: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator,"²² which he claims is still with us today. Kant's decentring of the metaphysical subject of classical representation stimulates more reflexive and historically sensitive forms of the analysis of knowledge and culture, in which consciousness is treated as to some extent "cut off" from itself and the world by its own biological, historical, and cultural being. Thus, the Man contemplated by classical humanism is transformed from that unproblematic, self-transparent subject of representation to a "difficult object and sovereign subject" with a density and opacity of its own²³.

The insight into human finitude produced a multitude of new investigations into the forms of Man's finitude - biology, political economy, philology - in the hope, Foucault argues, that the subject would, "by a sort of internal torsion and overlapping,"²⁴

²¹ There are inherent difficulties in attributing such labels to Foucault's understanding of these thinkers, due in part to the fact that Foucault himself seldom engaged in sustained philosophical commentary on their work. My construction of a critical tradition in humanistic thought to which his work responds is somewhat heuristic. However, the grounds for such a construction are not entirely absent or arbitrary. The Order of Things contains a lengthy discussion and critique of philosophical anthropology and those thinkers caught up in what Foucault calls the "analytic of finitude," which include most of those mentioned (pp.340-343). Furthermore, Foucault's relationship to the thinkers I have identified was the subject of numerous interviews. These comments have informed the above discussion a great deal. Now, the degree to which each of these thinkers is susceptible to the humanist interpretation Foucault pins on them has, of course, been the subject of debate. I do not wish to enter these debates at this point, however, but accept these humanist characterizations for heuristic purposes.

²² Foucault, OT, p.312.

²³ Ibid., p.310.

²⁴ Ibid., p310.

be reinstalled in its central place. The analysis of finitude promised to arrive at a kind of grounding finitude where the foundations of knowledge and consciousness are secured by a thoroughgoing analysis and clarification of all that limits and impinges upon Man's being and knowledge, including history, culture, and the unconscious²⁵. With the invention of the human sciences, Foucault argues:

"one hoped, one dreamed the great eschatological myth of the 19th century, which was somehow to make this knowledge (*connaissance*) of man exist so that man could be liberated by it from his alienations, liberated from the determinations of which he was not master, so that he could, thanks to this knowledge of himself, become again, or for the first time master of himself, self-possessed. In other words, one made of man an object of knowledge so that man could become subject of his own liberty and of his own existence."²⁶

Foucault's criticisms of this humanistic "analytic of finitude" were aimed at phenomenology in particular. In the case of Husserlian phenomenology, the analysis of finitude appears aimed at restoring the privileges of the classical subject of philosophy in the form of a "transcendental Ego" or "absolute subject," in which case critical humanism constitutes only a superficially more complex and nuanced approach which seeks, ultimately, to prepare the ground for the return of the *cogito* of classical humanism. On the other hand, taking Merleau-Ponty's acknowledgement of human historicity and finitude seriously, Foucault argues that the former's phenomenological quest for a "grounding finitude" runs aground on the shoals of its own antinomies. The analytic of finitude rests upon an extremely unstable figure of Man as simultaneously the empirical object whose finite nature as a being determined by its own history and culture must be unveiled, and the subject of that analysis, which is itself impinged upon by the

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.310.

²⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," interview in Foucault, Michel, Foucault Live: Interviews 1966 - 1984, trans. Sylvere Lotringer, New York: Semiotext(e), 1989, p.36. Hereinafter cited as FL.

forces of finitude. Thus, the analytic of finitude ensnares thought in an interminable and aporetic exercise of simultaneously *unveiling* and *grounding*; unveiling the unthought behind the products of consciousness, and grounding these same products which are the result of an openly acknowledged *finite* consciousness. Thus, for all its historical sensitivity and dialectical nuance, philosophical anthropology's quest for a "grounding finitude" winds up the victim of its own interminable unmasking of consciousness and its unthought, and of the philosophical antinomies of the analytic of finitude. The aporetic and fruitless efforts within the analytic of finitude to establish the sovereignty of an "enslaved subject" and the validity of its knowledge against all displacements end up inducing what Foucault calls an "anthropological sleep" from which thought has yet to be roused²⁷. Rather than risk being entrapped in what he saw as a philosophical dead end, but still taking it as his "point of departure,"²⁸ Foucault attempts by way of an archaeology and genealogy of the human sciences, self-immersion in avant garde literature, and, above all, adherence to Nietzsche, to divorce himself from the phenomenological problem of the subject. Rather than participating in the analytic of finitude, Foucault proposes to explore a different question: "[H]ow is it that the human subject took itself as the object of possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And finally at what price?"²⁹

With regard to the critical humanist challenge to the bourgeois ideals of the liberal political Enlightenment, Foucault often singled out Marx for special attention.

²⁷ Foucault, OT, pp.340-342.

²⁸ Foucault, Michel, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," interview in Foucault, Michel, Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Lawrence Kritzman, ed., New York: Routledge, 1988, p.28. Hereinafter cited as MF.

²⁹ Ibid., p.30.

While fully aware of Althusser's radically anti-humanist and anti-subjectivist interpretation of Marx, Foucault refers critically to Marx's and various Marxists' preoccupation with the themes of alienation/repression and the historical task of producing Man³⁰. And while some of his remarks suggest an appreciation for a certain decentring of the subject achieved in Marx's works³¹, Foucault argues in The Order of Things that political economy participates in the depth hermeneutics of the analytic of finitude which keeps thought tethered to the figure of Man, even as it rejects all reference to human nature as a stable object or identity³². Marx and, in particular, postwar Marxist humanism in France, preserved some conception of a more genuine or authentic existence within the critical framework of repression, alienation, and reification in spite of the disavowal of human nature as fixed or given. Furthermore, according to Foucault, insofar as Marxist historiography claims to find in class struggle and the inevitable triumph of the proletariat a narrative of emancipation that is universal for all humanity, a "total history," it displays a flagrant and politically retrograde Cartesianism. Insofar as the Marxist historiographer claims insight and perspective on the meaning of history that is "total" and universal, he or she arrogates to him or herself all the rights and privileges of the metaphysical subject of classical humanism. Thus, as things appeared to Foucault, for all its advances over the naivete of classical humanism, Marxist thought remained tethered to the terrain of humanism. While the metaphysical subject of reason is

³⁰ See, for example: Foucault, Michel, "Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse: Who is a 'Negator' of History?," interview in RM, pp.121-123.

³¹ See: Foucault, Michel, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, London: Tavistock, 1972, p.13; and Foucault, Michel, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," in Foucault, Michel, Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954 - 1984, Volume 2, James D. Faubion, ed., New York: The New Press, 1998, pp.269-278. Hereinafter cited as AME.

³² Foucault, Michel, "But Structuralism was not a French Invention," interview in RM, p.104-105.

problematized in Continental thought, man as subject of his own consciousness and of his own liberty remains entrenched.

Finally, while Foucault never disputed the importance of analyzing the economic and class character of power relations in a given society, he wondered whether Marxist conceptions of the nature of power were enough to fully grasp the specificity of its "disciplinary" and "biopolitical" forms in modern societies. In particular, Foucault wished to explore the growing connection he observed between the production of knowledge at multiple sites of social surveillance - police records, school reports, public health reports, social welfare "cases," *etc.* - and the regulation and control of the social order as a whole, a form of modern power which the dominant Marxist critique of modern society had largely overlooked. "If the accumulation of capital has been an essential feature of our society," he remarks, "the accumulation of knowledge has not been less so."³³ Foucault dedicated much of his genealogical work in the 1970s to exploring the relationship between the accumulation of knowledge and the exercise and maintenance of power, culminating in the claim that his whole problem was that of "how men govern (themselves and others) by the production of truth"³⁴. Juridical and critical humanists alike committed what Foucault regarded as an important empirical and theoretical oversight in this respect. Having said that, Foucault always acknowledged a certain debt to Marx's work, as a result of the work it did to begin decentring the subject of classical humanism. And commenting on his own critical historiography Foucault confessed, for example, that "[i]t is impossible at the present time to write history

³³ Foucault, Michel, "The Discourse on Power," interview in RM, p.165.

³⁴ Foucault, Michel, "Questions of Method," in Baynes, Kenneth, et al, eds., After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1987, p.108.

without using a whole range of concepts directly or indirectly linked to Marx's thought and situating oneself within a horizon of thought which has been defined and described by Marx."³⁵

Existentialism and phenomenology were the principal heirs to the tradition of philosophical anthropology in twentieth-century France. The void left behind in the wake of Bergsonianism and Brunschvicg's neo-Kantianism was soon filled in the 1930s by Kojève's distinctively anthropological Left-Hegelianism. The latter proved a significant influence upon the development of a uniquely French cross-fertilization between Hegelian-Marxism, on the one hand, and existentialism and phenomenology on the other, represented in the works of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty³⁶. In addition to articulating a conception of the subject as thoroughly historicized and situated "in-the-world," in opposition to the idea of human nature as a fixed, pre-given datum, the Marxist existentialism and phenomenology of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty advanced a critique of modern industrial society which placed them in opposition to both the technological and liberal humanism of the modern Enlightenment. If the French Marxist humanists rejected crude essentialist faith in some transcendent human essence, however, they remained committed to certain quintessentially humanist minimum propositions. French humanism is defined as such by its unswerving adherence to the centrality of human consciousness and agency in the creation and interpretation of the historical, social, and institutional conditions to which individuals find themselves subject, and to the primacy of the question of human freedom³⁷. While consciousness is certainly confronted and

³⁵ Foucault, "Prison Talk," p.53.

³⁶ This period of intense development by philosophical anthropology in France is discussed in: Descombes, Vincent, Modern French Philosophy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, pp.9-74.

³⁷ Soper, Humanism and Anti-Humanism, p.18.

shaped by objective structures, economic and social relations and the like, it is ultimately human beings themselves who create and constitute their own social life. While rejecting the notion that this historical process is a working out of some immanent human purpose, Sartre, for example, "still refuses to allow that exhaustive analysis of what is historically specific [...] can be given in terms of the determination of 'subjectless' structures and relations."³⁸ The content of human activity is meaning-giving, moral, and reason-based, even if the effects achieved are unforeseeable or not those intended. In other words, for the French humanists, "the distinctive role of human activity in the creation of historical conditions of existence remains [...] irreducible."³⁹ Thus, behind the very structures and relations which determine and shape social life and subjective experience lies the constitutive subject of human agency⁴⁰.

In addition, the historical process by which humanity constitutes the very social life to which it is subjected is susceptible to being rationally interpreted, understood, and ameliorated. Following Vico's famous *verum factum* rule, according to which humanity understands best that which it has itself created, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty insisted upon the presence of meaning and intelligibility in the world. "[I]n the use of our body and our senses," Merleau-Ponty writes, "in so far as they involve us in the world, we have the means of understanding our cultural gesticulations, in so far as it involves us in history."⁴¹ Sartre, even more so than Merleau-Ponty, was extremely reluctant to relinquish the privileges of the meaning-giving and historically efficacious subject. Sartre's Marxist-existentialism is well-known for its refusal to give up the notion of the

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.18-19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.54-78.

⁴¹ Quoted in Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, p.74.

subject as an autonomous designator of meaning and efficacious agent of action and history⁴², as well as its insistence that the Hegelian-Marxist narrative of class contradiction and the emancipation of the proletariat constituted the "*one* human history, with *one* truth and *one* intelligibility."⁴³ The implicit Cartesianism of Sartre's position on the subject is breathtakingly clear in his postwar writings on the role of the "universal intellectual," the committed intellectual whom he endows with the autonomy and insight which enable them to gain a universal perspective on the course of human history and the genuine interests of the proletariat⁴⁴. "Our job," as intellectuals, Sartre claims, "is to reveal to the public its own needs."⁴⁵ Elsewhere he writes: "Our historical task, [...], is to bring closer the moment when history will have *only one meaning*."⁴⁶

Foucault reserved his most stinging rebukes of critical humanism for Sartre, precisely for the latter's tendency to revive the mythology of the classical subject of philosophy in his extravagant claims on behalf of writers and intellectuals endowed with privileged insight into the meaning of "History"⁴⁷. The Archaeology of Knowledge constituted, aside from a retrospective methodological reconstruction of his own previous archaeological studies of the human sciences, a direct challenge to the

⁴² Sartre's dualist ontology and resulting unwillingness to part with the autonomous subject, often attributed to a lingering Cartesianism on his part, is discussed in the following works: Descombes, Modern French Philosophy, pp.48-54; Jay, Martin, Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept From Lukacs to Habermas, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p.338; Poster, Mark, Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: In Search of a Context, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989, pp.34-52; and Soper, Humanism and Anti-Humanism, pp.60-85.

⁴³ Quoted in Jay, Marxism and Totality, p.352.

⁴⁴ Sartre's concept of the "universal intellectual" is discussed in Poster, Critical Theory and Poststructuralism, pp.34-52.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Ibid., p.46.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Jay, Marxism and Totality, p.353.

⁴⁷ Foucault's criticisms of Sartre are summarized in Poster, Critical Theory and Poststructuralism, pp.34-48.

grandiose claims of Sartre's Marxist historiography. Against claims made by Sartre, de Beauvoir, and various members of the PCF that The Order of Things entailed the outright denial and "rejection of history"⁴⁸ Foucault responded in The Archaeology of Knowledge:

"The cry goes up that one is murdering history [...] But one must not be deceived: what is being bewailed with such vehemence is not the disappearance of history, but the eclipse of that form of history that was secretly, but entirely related to the synthetic activity of the subject: what is being bewailed is the 'development' (*devenir*) that was to provide the sovereignty of the consciousness with a safer, less exposed shelter [...] that ideological use of history by which one tries to restore to man everything that has unceasingly eluded him for over a hundred years. All the treasure of bygone days was crammed into the old citadel of this history [...] it was made the last resting-place of anthropological thought..."⁴⁹

Thus, Sartre's views on the role of the intellectual in history, and his attacks on Foucault's efforts to displace it, constitute a pathetic attempt "to preserve privilege; [...] to affirm once and for all [...] that history, at least, is living and continuous, that it is, for the subject in question, a place of rest, certainty, reconciliation, a place of tranquilized sleep."⁵⁰ When it was suggested to Foucault that he failed to appreciate the contribution made by Sartre to the critique of traditional philosophy he argued nonetheless that, "in a philosophy like Sartre's [...] it was essentially the subject which restored meaning in the world. This point was not questioned. It was the subject which attributed meanings."⁵¹ Against this view Foucault proposed an archaeological understanding of the development of knowledge in which the subject is determined and overwhelmed by unconscious but enabling epistemic grids of perception and expression and, later, a genealogical

⁴⁸ The reception of Foucault's The Order of Things among Sartreans and the PCF is discussed in: Macey, David, The Lives of Michel Foucault, London: Verso, 1993, pp.175-179; and Eribon, Didier, Michel Foucault, trans. Betsy Wing, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, pp.160-165.

⁴⁹ Foucault, AK, p.14.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.14.

⁵¹ Foucault, Michel, "The Subject, Knowledge, and 'The History of Truth'," interview in RM, p.49.

understanding of history devoid of all reference to anthropocentric meaning or progress.

In place of Marxist historiography Foucault encouraged:

"a recourse to analyses in terms of the genealogy of relations of force, strategic developments, and tactics. [...] The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no 'meaning', though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail - but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies and tactics. Neither the dialectic, as logic of contradictions, nor semiotics, as the structure of communication, can account for the intrinsic intelligibility of conflicts."⁵²

On the heels of The Archaeology of Knowledge Foucault produced the methodologically significant essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in which he opposed to traditional history, in which events "are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value,"⁵³ what he called "effective history," in which emphasis is placed on discontinuity, lines of force, and strategic overcoming. Against Sartre, among others, Foucault proposes a genealogical or "effective" version of historiography which destroys the grounds for the "consoling play of recognitions," of history as "the successive forms of a primordial intention" and "pretended continuity," and of the historian as guarantor that "the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities," in favour of a "true historical sense," one which "confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or point of reference."⁵⁴

Sartre's humanism also manifested itself in the traditional assumption he made about the relationship between knowledge and power, where power is seen as that which "makes blind". The committed intellectual, Sartre claims, is at the height of his or her

⁵² Foucault, Michel, "Truth and Power," interview in PK, p.114.

⁵³ Foucault, Michel, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Foucault, Michel, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, Donald Bouchard, ed., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, p.155. Hereinafter cited as LCMP.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp.153-155.

powers of autonomous insight when withdrawn in contemplation: "The man who reads [...] puts himself at the peak of his freedom."⁵⁵ Thus, Sartre's view of the intellectual seems to retreat to the terrain of classical humanism in Descartes' Meditations. In a conversation with Gilles Deleuze entitled, "Intellectuals and Power," Foucault's veiled reference to Sartre is obvious when, in the context of discussing the role of the intellectuals in postwar France, he describes the traditional committed intellectual as the one who "spoke the truth to those who had yet to see it, in the name of those who were forbidden to speak the truth: he was conscience, consciousness, and eloquence."⁵⁶ He then proceeds to connect the paternalistic functioning of the universal intellectual to the system of power against which it is deployed. Against a host of subjugated, local knowledges and experience harboured within the masses themselves, he argues:

"there exists a system of power which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates this discourse and this knowledge, a power not only found in the manifest authority of censorship, but one that profoundly and subtly penetrates an entire societal network. Intellectuals are themselves agents of this system of power - the idea of their responsibility for 'consciousness' and discourse forms part of the system."⁵⁷

Elsewhere he writes: "we know from experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions."⁵⁸ Against the extravagant claims of Sartre's "universal intellectual" Foucault proposes his own model of the specific intellectual who offers theory as a weapon "for those who fight,"⁵⁹ and to whom theorizing is always

⁵⁵ Quoted in Poster, Critical Theory and Poststructuralism, p.44.

⁵⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Intellectuals and Power," interview in LCMP, p.207.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.207.

⁵⁸ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p.316.

⁵⁹ Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.114.

"local and regional [...] and not totalizing," since the act of totalization itself instantiates relations of power in one of their more insidious forms⁶⁰. On the basis of his claims on behalf of the "universal intellectual," Foucault's harsh critique of Sartre is not misplaced. Throughout his writings, Sartre maintains the subjective bias of his early existentialism, and in his postwar work transforms the committed intellectual into the surrogate of transcendental consciousness, as Merleau-Ponty himself pointed out⁶¹. In the context of postwar French philosophy and the near hegemony exercised by figures like Sartre over it, the vehemence with which Foucault and others attacked the humanist touchstones of Man, history, subjectivity, meaning, and truth is understandable. If, however, Foucault's quarrel is primarily with Sartre's tendency to revive the metaphysical subject of classical humanism, then his attacks on critical humanism *tout court* were perhaps less so, since one can point to the work of others within the critical humanist tradition as identified by Foucault, such as Theodor Adorno and, some would argue, Merleau-Ponty, who resist the hypostatization of the subject.

Although seldom explicitly mentioned, another French figure with whom Foucault associated the errors of humanism was the aforementioned Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Foucault targeted his archaeological works at phenomenology as well as Sartre's existential Marxism, and also aimed his critiques of Marxist-humanism at Merleau-Ponty's postwar avowals of faith in the proletariat as the privileged agent of universal human progress and emancipation⁶². While allied with Merleau-Ponty against Sartre's

⁶⁰ Foucault, "Intellectuals and Power," p.208.

⁶¹ Jay, Marxism and Totality, p.374. Jay also notes, however, that readings of Sartre such as these tend to ignore those very elements within his own thought which undermine the likelihood of such a single intelligibility ever being achieved: pp.355-356.

⁶² Merleau-Ponty's enthusiasm for this view was short-lived, as Jay notes, and went against his own better judgement. See: Ibid., pp.371.

Cartesian "universal intellectual"⁶³, Foucault attacks the former's Husserlian phenomenology for what he takes to be its own attempts at preserving the privileges of the subject. "The phenomenologist's experience," Foucault claims,

"is basically a way of organizing the conscious perception (*regard reflexif*) of any aspect of daily, lived experience in its transitory form, in order to grasp its meaning. [...] Moreover, phenomenology tries to grasp the significance of daily experience in order to reaffirm the fundamental character of the subject, the self, of its transcendental function."⁶⁴

Indeed, while more tolerant of competing explanations for the development of knowledge than is often allowed by its critics, archaeology singles out, among those approaches which it does reject, phenomenology, "which," Foucault argues, "gives absolute priority to the observing subject"⁶⁵. Foucault's hostility toward phenomenology can be seen, in part, as a reflection of the philosophical tenor of the times. According to Foucault, with the appearance of the problem of language in the work of Saussure and Levi-Strauss, "it was clear that phenomenology was no match," since the former promised a "structural analysis in accounting for the effects of meaning that could be produced by a structure of the linguistic type, in which the subject (in the phenomenological sense) did not

⁶³ In his Adventures of the Dialectic, which appeared in 1955, Merleau-Ponty was as critical of Sartre's Cartesianism as Foucault. See: Ibid., pp.373-374; and Poster, Critical Theory and Poststructuralism, pp.45-46.

⁶⁴ Foucault, Michel, "How an 'Experience-Book' is Born," interview in RM, pp.30-31.

⁶⁵ Foucault, OT, p.xiv. Foucault's interpretation of the subjective, epistemological bias of Husserlian phenomenology is confirmed in a number of sources: Lebrun, Gerard, "Notes on phenomenology in *Les Mots et les Choses*," in Armstrong, Timothy, ed., Michel Foucault: Philosopher, London: Routledge, 1992, pp.20-37; Macann, Christopher, Four Phenomenological Philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, London: Routledge, 1993, pp.1-55; and Descombes, who writes, for example, that "By raising the relative to the absolute, it would seem that Merleau-Ponty is engaged in an ambiguous undertaking. Does the subject become relative, or does perception become absolute? Perception becomes absolute; for ourselves, it becomes absolute knowledge. Merleau-Ponty is thus led to encumber the unlucky *percipiens* with the last thing it wanted: the crushing attributes of the 'absolute subject'." Modern French Philosophy, p.68.

intervene to confer meaning."⁶⁶ Moreover, Foucault argues, in the wake of Lacan, "the phenomenological subject was disqualified," since "the unconscious could not feature in any discussion of a phenomenological kind."⁶⁷ However, Foucault also formulated his own distinctive philosophical critique of phenomenology. Phenomenology is singled out among the aporetic, anthropological philosophies played out within the epistemic "analytic of finitude" identified in The Order of Things⁶⁸. Merleau-Ponty does not escape Foucault's charge of anthropology by rejecting Sartre's strict dichotomy of *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself* by insisting upon a dialectical conception of subjectivity as always already shot through with "being-in-the-world," since it installs Man as a figure of such instability as to ensure that every enunciation of meaning by the subject would be instantly called into question by the very finitude of the subject that speaks and gives meaning. Thus, Foucault condemns or, rather, laments phenomenology as one more vain attempt within the aporetic analytic of finitude to establish a "grounding finitude" for consciousness and knowledge. In this instance, humanism simply constitutes a failed philosophy, rather than the dangerous, imperious form of anthropocentrism embodied in classical humanism.

Merleau-Ponty's postwar Marxist-humanism was also targeted by Foucault. Merleau-Ponty maintained, for a time, that the interests of the proletariat were identical to the interests of Man *per se*, and that history contained one universal meaning which was intelligible to the intellectual armed with the insights of Hegelian-Marxism. "To be a

⁶⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Structuralism and Post-structuralism," interview AME, p.436.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.437.

⁶⁸ Foucault, OT, pp.318-328. One recent commentator suggested that much of The Order of Things be seen as an aggressive attack upon Husserlian phenomenology. See: Lebrun, Gerard, "Notes on phenomenology in *Les Mots et les Choses*," in Armstrong, ed., Michel Foucault: Philosopher, pp.20-37.

Marxist," he wrote, "is to believe that economic problems and cultural problems are a single problem and that the proletariat, as history has shaped it, holds the solution to that problem"⁶⁹. Whether such claims reflected Merleau-Ponty's view for long, and it appears they did not, they go some way in explaining the vehemence with which Foucault's work attacks and denounces the postwar Marxist humanist goal of a "total history". Now, alternative readings of Merleau-Ponty suggest that his late work, in particular, was far less subjectivist than Foucault's remarks appear to recognize, drawing attention to the sympathy the former expressed for the structuralist approach just prior to his death in 1961, and to his shift toward a radical Heideggerian critique of "human chauvinism" which challenged not only the "shameless humanism" of the intellectual and political Enlightenment but the socialist humanism prevalent in France and to which he adhered as well for a time⁷⁰. Martin Jay has gone so far as to characterize Merleau-Ponty's work as proto-deconstructionist⁷¹. However, if Foucault glosses over some of these aspects of Merleau-Ponty's work, the very speed and means, including the insights of structuralism, by which the latter distanced himself from Sartre and his own previous positions only lend support to the validity, if not the ferocity, of Foucault's anti-subjectivist attack on postwar Marxist-humanism in France.

Rather than attempting like Sartre to salvage the foundational subject, or fall into the dialectical trap of the analytic of finitude as phenomenology and other forms of philosophical anthropology had done, Foucault was drawn to the work of thinkers and

⁶⁹ Quoted in Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p.370.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.375-380. Foucault was aware of Merleau-Ponty's interest in structuralism, having attended many of his lectures, but he does not acknowledge or recognize any impact it have had on the Merleau-Ponty's work. See: Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," p.21.

⁷¹ Jay, *Marism and Totality*, p.383.

writers like Nietzsche, Blanchot, and Bataille, for whom the problem was not so much to give a better account of the subject as it was to displace it, to engender an experience of thinking and writing in which the subject is decentred. In addition, under the influence of philosophers of science like Bachelard and Canguilhem, who represented the only other philosophical tradition that could remotely compete with the towering figure of Sartre among professional philosophers at the time, Foucault took up the task of conceiving of a method for analyzing the history of scientific discourse in which the role of the subject, or scientific consciousness, is displaced. We find the fruits of this effort in his three archaeological studies of the human sciences, Madness and Civilization, The Birth of the Clinic, and The Order of Things, as well as in his later genealogies of punishment and sexuality. Foucault's archaeological work was aimed not only at the Cartesian subject of classical humanism and traditional history of ideas, but at what he perceived to be the extravagance of Marxist-humanist claims on behalf of the "universal intellectual" and the universalization of Marxist "total history". Against these he juxtaposed the more modest goals of "general" or "effective history," which are the work of the archaeologist and the genealogist.

In tandem with the development of his archaeological perspective, Foucault pursued an interest in avant garde literature as a practice of writing in which the authorial subject is effaced⁷². In this respect, the writings of Raymond Roussel, Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and others held a particular fascination⁷³. At the same time

⁷² Examples of these writings include the essays, "A Preface to Transgression," "Language to Infinity," and "What is an Author?," in Foucault, *LCMP*, pp.29-67 and 113-138, respectively, and Foucault, Michel, "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought From Outside," in Foucault/Blanchot, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Brian Massumi, New York: Urzone, 1987, pp.9-58.

⁷³ Foucault discusses these and other literary figures in the interview, "On Literature," in *FL*, pp.113-119.

as he was beginning to sound the archaeological depths of medicine and the other human sciences, he took up the question of the transgressive role of literature, in particular, in the overcoming of the metaphysics of subjectivity and the "monologue of reason". The avant-garde styles and writings of Roussel and Blanchot held out the possibility for a transgressive, literary self-overcoming in the practice of writing itself, a radical alternative to the relation to and experience of the self as the subject of reason, as epitomized by Sartre's imperial "universal intellectual". Meanwhile, in the sheer transgressive ferocity of Bataille's celebration of eroticism, violence, sacrifice, and excess, Foucault discovered the world-disclosing, and world-shattering, power of the "limit-experience" and the poetic languages of non-reason. His writings in this period explored the critical potential of transgressive writing as a challenge to both the metaphysics of subjectivity and the totalized "enframing" of the world by reason. "The reason it is now so necessary," Foucault writes in a 1966 essay on Blanchot:

"to think through fiction - while in the past it was a matter of thinking the truth - is that 'I speak' runs counter to 'I think'. 'I think' led to the indubitable certainty of the 'I' and its existence; 'I speak,' on the other hand, distances, disperses, effaces that existence and lets only its empty emplacement appear. Thought about thought, an entire tradition wider than philosophy, has taught us that thought leads us to the deepest interiority. Speech about speech leads us, by way of literature as well as perhaps other paths, to the outside in which the speaking subject disappears. No doubt that is why Western thought took so long to think the being of language: as if it had a premonition of the danger that the naked experience of language poses for the self-evidence of 'I think'."⁷⁴

Foucault saw in the transgressive style of Roussel and the "thought from outside" in Blanchot a language which questions the self-evidence of the "I think" of the metaphysics of subjectivity, alluding to "an experience now being heralded at diverse

⁷⁴ Foucault, "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside," pp.12-13.

points in culture,"⁷⁵ including the rise of structuralism. Thus, Foucault's interest at the time extended beyond his methodological quarrel with the history of ideas and Marxist historiography to embrace desubjectivizing experiences or modes of writing. It is in this sense that we can see the opposition between Sartre's claims on behalf of the "universal intellectual" in his, What is Literature?, and Foucault's analysis of the subject in his essay, "What is an Author?," as "a complex and variable function of discourse" which has been "stripped of its creative role"⁷⁶.

One other contemporary manifestation of critical humanism identified by Foucault was the work of the Frankfurt School, which he discussed in a number of his later writings and interviews. While he often claimed a strong affinity for the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse⁷⁷, Foucault distinguishes his work from theirs on the grounds that it was "noticeably impregnated with humanism of a Marxist type."⁷⁸ "I'm convinced," he once remarked, that given the importance to its work of concepts like alienation, repression, and exploitation, "the Frankfurt School cannot by any means admit that the problem is not to recover our 'lost' identity, to free our imprisoned nature, our deepest truth..."⁷⁹. Whatever one might say about the validity of his interpretations of their work, it is with figures like Marcuse, as well as Reich, clearly in mind that Foucault believed he had unmasked as armatures of the system of biopower the "repressive hypothesis" and the "hermeneutics of the self" examined in The History of Sexuality. "We are really going to have to rid ourselves," he insists,

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.15.

⁷⁶ Foucault, "What is an Author," in LCMP, p.138.

⁷⁷ Foucault, "Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse," pp.117-118.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.120-121.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.121.

"of the 'Marcuseries' and 'Reichianisms' which encumber us and which would have us believe that of all things sexuality is the most obstinately 'repressed' [...] Since the Renaissance there is nothing that has been more studied, questioned, extorted, brought to light and into discourse, forced into confession, required to express itself and praised, finally, when it found the words. No civilization has chattered so much about sexuality as ours. And many people still believe that they are subverting it when they are only obeying this injunction to confess [...]"⁸⁰.

By the late seventies, Foucault had begun drawing connections between the critical humanist emphasis on the repressiveness of modern sexuality, its attention to the self as a place of deep interiority in which resided fundamental drives, needs, and interests thwarted by a "one-dimensional society," and various "technologies of the self," confession in particular, on the basis of which individuals appeared to participate in their own subjection. In this light, the "repressive hypothesis" and the confessional "hermeneutics of the self," by which one excavated one's sexual desires as one's deepest truth, no longer carry the emancipatory implications once thought. Here we see the outlines of Foucault's critique of Critical Theory. For all its insight into the ways in which the promise of the Enlightenment had been "overturned within the domain of Reason itself,"⁸¹ much of its critical power ends up being negated by its own alleged adherence to a traditional, philosophical conception of the subject and the strategic use that is made of its "repressive hypothesis" in the service of social control. Thus, the members of the Frankfurt School unwittingly aid and abet the very forces of domination they oppose. Against what he took to be its emphasis on the putatively emancipatory effects of returning to the deepest roots of the sexual self, Foucault proposed strategies of resistance to the disciplinary and normalizing effects of sexuality, including experimentation with the "desexualization of pleasure" by multiplying the sites of

⁸⁰ Foucault, Michel, "Sorcery and Madness," interview in FL, p.108.

⁸¹ Foucault, "Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse," p.118.

pleasure on and within the body and with the "desubjectivizing" effects of ecstatic experience and role-playing via the practice of S/M.

Now, the nature of Foucault's relationship to the Frankfurt School has not been examined very thoroughly, but a number of preliminary comments are in order. Firstly, for all his apparent appreciation for its work, Foucault appears to have assimilated a relatively caricatured version of it which is not reflected in the writings of leading figures like Adorno or Marcuse, particularly in their later writings⁸². When, for example, Foucault argues that "what must be produced is not man identical to himself, exactly as nature would have designed him [but] something that doesn't yet exist and about which we cannot know how and what it will be,"⁸³ similar comments could easily be attributed to Adorno, Marcuse, Marx, and incidentally, Merleau-Ponty as well⁸⁴. Comments by Adorno in the well-known essay, "Subject and Object," including the claim that "Man is a result, not an *eidos*"⁸⁵ are suggestive of potential affinities between Foucault's approach and his own, although these require more thorough study⁸⁶. Since, however, Foucault

⁸² For a critique of Foucault's interpretation of Marcuse which suggests, moreover, the possibility for an accommodation between the two, see: Horowitz, Gad, "The Foucaultian Impasse: No Sex, No Self, No Revolution," Political Theory, Vol.15, No.1, February 1987, pp.61-80.

⁸³ Foucault, "Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse," p.121.

⁸⁴ In the case of Merleau-Ponty, for example, Martin Jay cites passages such as the following, in which the former appears to contradict some of his own more extravagant claims regarding history and Man: "It [philosophy] cannot assign history a particular end in advance; it cannot even affirm the dogma of 'total man' before he actually comes into being," and, "Human history is not from this moment on so constructed as to one day point, on all its dials at once, to the high noon of identity." Jay, Marxism and Totality, p.370 and 375, respectively.

⁸⁵ Adorno, Theodor, "Subject and Object," in Arato, Andrew, and Eike, Gebhardt eds., The Essential Frankfurt School Reader, New York: Continuum, 1982, p.511.

⁸⁶ For one of the few works comparing Foucault and Adorno in any detail see: Honneth, The Critique of Power, pp.149-202. Other works comparing Foucault and the Frankfurt School include: Best, Steven, The Politics of Historical Vision: Marx, Foucault, Habermas, New York: The Guilford Press, 1995; McCarthy, Thomas, "The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School," in McCarthy, Thomas, Ideals and Illusions: On Reconstruction and Deconstruction in Contemporary Critical Theory, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1991, pp.43-75; and Poster, Critical Theory and Poststructuralism.

appears not to have made a close study of the Frankfurt School thinkers and never discussed their works at any length, it is difficult to explain the source for his views on them.

The only exchange between Foucault and a member of the Frankfurt School took place between himself and Jurgen Habermas. While it is not clear to what extent Foucault was familiar with Habermas' written work, he had begun by the early 1980s to respond to specific criticisms advanced by the latter in regards to his own work. Remarks made with reference to Habermas in a number of interviews suggest a passing familiarity with a few major ideas⁸⁷. In any event, given Habermas' avowed commitment to "do justice to the elements of reason in cultural modernity" and to recognize the value of the "bourgeois ideals" of individuality and autonomy⁸⁸, he is clearly one of the principal contemporary heirs, along with figures like Charles Taylor and Luc Ferry, to the critical humanist tradition as Foucault saw it⁸⁹. A planned meeting in 1983 of Foucault and Jurgen Habermas, among others, never took place. Foucault's untimely death deprived us of the fruits of a more substantive and thorough exchange between these contemporary defenders of the humanist and anti-humanist positions. As a result, this essay contains no sustained discussion of Habermas' work as a version of critical humanism as Foucault understands it. Having said that, disputes between Foucault and contemporary critical humanists like Habermas, Taylor, and Ferry are extremely important. It is precisely these figures who, on the basis of numerous compelling criticisms of Foucault's work, have

⁸⁷ See for example: Foucault, Michel, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," interview in EST, p.299; and Foucault, Michel, "An Ethics of Pleasure," interview in FL, pp.268-270.

⁸⁸ Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment," pp.18.

⁸⁹ Schnadelbach argues that Habermas remains within the anthropological analytic of finitude, as Foucault understands it. Schnadelbach, "The Face in the Sand," pp.331-332.

helped to forge a growing consensus that it is ultimately unintelligible, self-contradictory, and even dangerous in relation to the project of reflecting critically on modern culture and society. Therefore, in the interest of neutralizing some of the effects of delegitimation and disqualification produced by such criticisms in relation to his work, a defense of Foucault's anti-humanism against the claims of these critics will be central to my argument.

Humanism and the figure of Man, in the senses enumerated above, have, in Foucault's view, constituted the linchpins of Western thought, knowledge, and practice since the seventeenth century⁹⁰. In the context of modern Continental thought in particular, the term humanism embraces scientific and philosophical traditions dating back to Descartes. Whether consisting in the scientific Enlightenment's faith in the powers of the autonomous subject of reason to reflect, know, and control external nature to serve human purposes, the bourgeois celebration of the achievements of liberalism, or calls to radically transform an alienating modern technological and social world hostile to human freedom, creativity, and happiness, each of these forms of humanism share, in more or less reflexive form, "a profound confidence in our powers to know and thereby

⁹⁰ Evaluating the adequacy of such a characterization of the whole of modern thought as humanistic, in the sense understood by Foucault, is beyond the scope of this text and its questions, which is not to deny the seriousness and necessity of an assessment of Foucault's argument on these terms. The question of the adequacy of Foucault's characterization of modern philosophy as fundamentally humanistic and anthropological is taken up and challenged by Schnadelbach, who argues that Foucault's critique of anthropology and the analytic of finitude is narrowly applicable to the Hegelian-Marxist tradition alone, and cannot account for the appearance of numerous important non-anthropocentric philosophies from figures such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Frege, and, in his view, Husserl. See: *Ibid.*, pp.322-323. Gary Gutting makes a similar argument in relation to Foucault's reduction of the whole of Western philosophy since the nineteenth century to the humanistic "analytic of finitude" in *The Order of Things*. According to Gutting, Foucault's reduction of all of modern Western thought to philosophical anthropology omits mention of and cannot account for the appearance of other traditions of thought which cannot easily be so assimilated to it, including the Anglo-American analytic school, See: Gutting, Gary, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p.222.

control our environment and destiny."⁹¹ Therefore, while they diverge from one another in key respects, from the vantage-point of anti-humanism, the scientific, juridical, and critical traditions are cut from the same cloth.

Now, without becoming bogged down by questions of the interpretive justice Foucault does, or does not do, to these traditions, this essay will show that it was at these three forms of humanism - the classical, the juridical, and the critical - that Foucault's work was consistently targeted. Foucault's work as a whole was to one degree or another preoccupied with them and can be understood as continuous and consistent in that sense at least. The remainder of this essay is devoted to showing the ways in which Foucault's work as a whole responds to each of these forms of humanism. At different times in his career Foucault tended to dwell on one or another of these forms, which lends a certain heterogeneity to his work. On the face of it, the metatheoretical concerns of his archaeological works appear only distantly related to the genealogy of the modern power to punish or of the hermeneutics of the self. Foucault pursued his critique of humanism along a number of different axes, including the metatheoretical, the methodological, the empirical, and the evaluative. Each of these intersects, however, at the problem of the figure of Man which constitutes the principle of unity and coherence in his work. Having said that, I do not mean to suggest that Foucault's work was exclusively or principally prompted by a wish to engage with humanist philosophy. Foucault eschewed the role of traditional philosopher such an account for his work might imply, and always attributed it to practical experiences and problematics confronted in his own life, such his experiences with and in the psychiatric profession, and to a desire to work on certain

⁹¹ Soper, Humanism and Anti-Humanism, p.14.

ideas of his own as well. In the chapters which follow, each of the forms of humanism to which his work offers some kind of a response is examined in detail and assessed in terms of its shortcomings as well as its strengths.

Moreover, I argue that, taken separately, Foucault's criticisms of each individual form of humanism contain valuable insights and worthwhile questions which can contribute to the promotion of a certain rigorous, healthy, and mature reflexivity in relation to contemporary thought and practice. Foucault's detailed historical analysis and critique of both the conditions of possibility and costs associated with the emergence of various forms of scientific knowledge give the lie to the pretensions of the autonomous scientific subject of classical humanism. His archaeological and genealogical histories of knowledge excavate the epistemic and strategic grounds of human sciences like psychiatry and criminology which the history of science had previously ignored. This material proved in Foucault's hands to offer a rich source of insight into the nature of the relationship between knowledge and power. Meanwhile, in paying close attention to the ways in which modern power operates at the level of the capillary and the quotidian, as well as at the extremities and limits of the law in institutions like the asylum and the prison, Foucault's genealogies of modern practices of punishment, discipline, and confession have provided an original and provocative antidote to the empirical as well as theoretical shortcomings of both liberal and Marxist humanism. By throwing into relief the extent to which modern power has functioned on the basis of extending mechanisms for objectifying ourselves in myriad ways, he gives pause to the automatic and seldom interrogated identification of the question of Man with benevolence and emancipation. Finally, in proposing the highly provocative thesis regarding the imbrication of humanism and domination, after humanism has so profoundly shaped our current

conceptions of what truth, critique, and emancipation are, Foucault gives impetus for the elaboration of and experimentation with new approaches to knowledge, to ethics and politics, and to critique in general.

Having said that, it warrants mentioning that Foucault was not unmindful of the fact that humanism had once produced certain results in the spheres of knowledge, politics, and culture that were advantageous. Contrary to popular caricatures of his work, as well as the trajectory of some of his own flights of rhetorical excess, Foucault expressed admiration for numerous figures central to humanism, including Kant, Marx, Merleau-Ponty, and, as we know, the Frankfurt School and, late in his life, even certain libertarian thinkers like Hayek. The contemporary problem, as Foucault saw it, however, is that in spite of what critical and practical value it may have had in the past, humanism today constitutes more of an obstacle than a catalyst to further critical thought and practice in relation to the present. Humanism's ceaseless questioning of Man is driven by the dubious equation of knowledge, truth, and emancipation. Since the nineteenth century, in particular, humanists have made Man an object of knowledge in the belief that by doing so "man could become the subject of his own liberty and his own existence."⁹² In the analyses he offers of the conditions of possibility, methods, and uses to which such knowledge has been put since the birth of the human sciences, however, Foucault throws into relief the extent to which such knowledge has been implicated in relations which have taken the form of governing and domination as well. Thus, Foucault's work constitutes both a means by which to extract ourselves from the limits imposed upon us by our humanist past, and a call to formulate new forms of critique and

⁹² Foucault, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," p.36.

practice which move us beyond humanism. Many critics have denounced Foucault's attempts to transcend humanism as cognitively self-defeating and contradictory, and as ethically and politically suspicious and potentially inhumane. No sooner had his final book been published than exhortations to forget Foucault were amplified. In the interest of extending meditation on the potential promise, as well as pitfalls, of his work, I offer this qualified endorsement of his work.

Chapter Two

The Death of Man I: Dispersing the Object

"It is not around [man] and his secrets that knowledge prowled for so long in the darkness. [...] As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date."

Michel Foucault
The Order of Things

"What, in short, we wish to do is to dispense with 'things'. [...] To substitute for the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse."

Michel Foucault
The Archaeology of Knowledge

"A meticulous observation of detail, and at the same time a political awareness of these small things, for the control and the use of men, emerge through the classical age bearing with them a whole set of techniques, a whole corpus of methods and knowledge, descriptions, plans and data. And from such trifles, no doubt, the man of modern humanism was born."

Michel Foucault
Discipline and Punish

According to Foucault, the idea of Man as a stable object, essence, identity, or point of origin, and as the most compelling object of human reflection, constitutes the linchpin of humanistic thought. Such beliefs in human nature have been the basis of efforts within the empirical and human sciences, including medicine, biology, psychiatry, political economy, and sociology, to uncover and enumerate the essential qualities, capacities, and dispositions of humankind, along with its corresponding pathologies and abnormalities. A belief in Man as a stable unity and identity has also provided the grounds, Foucault argues, for most modern philosophy, whether in the form

of classical humanism's ocular metaphor for the human mind as the "mirror of nature," natural law theories of the natural rights and sovereignty of the atomistic individual, or nineteenth-century critiques of bourgeois society in terms of alienation, repression, and reification. At the level of substance, humanistic knowledge consists of the various philosophical and scientific "unities," "objectivities," "positivities," or "self-evidentnesses" in which the nature of Man is putatively captured and represented in modern science and thought. All of Foucault's major historical works concern themselves with these various unities, including "reason," "health," "sovereignty," "responsibility," "sexuality," and "selfhood," as well as their *disorders*, like mental illness, disease, idleness, delinquency, and perversion. Foucault attempts to unmask the "self-evidentness" of the unities by which our knowledge of Man is constituted in order to demonstrate that they are in no way in touch with or isomorphic to some deep human essence or identity. Contrary to the Enlightenment's portrayal of these unities as objective things in themselves susceptible to discovery by autonomous reason, Foucault's work unmask them as thoroughly contingent *products* of polymorphous origin bearing no necessary relation to the putative reality of this object called Man. In particular, Foucault's historical studies of the human sciences, including psychiatry, medicine, biology, political economy, criminology, and sociology, work to demonstrate how the unities on the basis of which they operate have, in fact, been produced or fabricated on the basis of unacknowledged exclusions and suppressions of marginalized forms of existence and experience, such as madness, and by simultaneously limiting and enabling cultural, epistemic, and strategic grids of perception (*savoir*) constituting the very conditions of possibility for what has been seen and said in the humanistic sciences. The unities of "mental illness", biological "life", "delinquency", and "sexuality", for example,

which have been deployed to denote and delimit the essence of Man, are all revealed as having emerged out of, and as harbouring within them still, a host of cultural sensibilities, biases, class interests, and other inflections of power and discourse. At the level of *connaissance*, Foucault's historical studies of various scientific discourses of human nature constitute an anti-essentialist critique of the naive, traditional scientific humanism implicit in the empirical and human sciences, which rest on the assumption that such stable, essential characteristics of human nature exist out there, awaiting discovery by and representation to scientific consciousness. At their most superficial, then, many of Foucault's major works can be read as anti-essentialist critique of the unities of the human sciences, which reveal the contingent and relational nature of the unities by which we have come to know ourselves as objects of reflection over the last two centuries. Now, a number of these works are targeted explicitly at the crudest and epistemologically most naive sorts of positions adopted within conventional history of science. However, even the more historically sensitive human sciences, such as political economy and linguistics, are treated as misguided forms of depth hermeneutics which, in their persistent efforts to peel away the layers of historical sedimentation, succeed only in confirming that Man has no nature whatsoever¹.

i) Eventalization

The major assumptions and motives lying behind Foucault's critique of Man as a privileged object of scientific and philosophic concern were laid out in his 1971 essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History". This important methodological statement begins with

¹ Foucault, Michel, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, New York: Vintage, 1973, p.371. Hereinafter cited as OT.

an endorsement of Nietzsche's critique of one of the dominant tendencies of Western thought: the metaphysical and essentialist "pursuit of the origin" of things². This "attempt to capture the exact essence of things [...] assumes the existence of immobile forms [...] a primordial truth fully adequate to its nature, [which] necessitates the removal of every mask to ultimately disclose an original identity."³ Foucault joins Nietzsche in calling for the abandonment of such "adolescent quests," choosing instead to "listen to history" and find "'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they *have no essence* or that their essence was *fabricated* in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms."⁴ Even attempts to locate within Man some deep point of origin, truth, nature, or essence are susceptible to this critique. From this anti-essentialist perspective, no such original Man exists. Contrary to the presumptions of the human sciences, there is no such unity at all. "Nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition," Foucault claims and, "[n]ecessarily," he continues, "we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions. Knowledge [...] does not depend on 'rediscovery', and it emphatically excludes the 'rediscovery of ourselves'."⁵

In order to "dispel the chimera of the origin,"⁶ Foucault adopts a different approach to the analysis of knowledge; what he calls its "eventalization"⁷. This approach

² Foucault, Michel, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Foucault, Michel, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, Donald Bouchard, ed., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, pp.139-164. Hereinafter cited as LCMP.

³ Ibid., p.142.

⁴ Ibid., pp.142-143. Emphasis added.

⁵ Ibid., pp.153-54.

⁶ Ibid., p.144.

⁷ Foucault, Michel, "Questions of Method: An Interview with Michel Foucault," in Kenneth Baynes, James Bohman, and Thomas McCarthy, eds., After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, p.104.

involves bracketing the humanist touchstones of identity, adequacy, and continuity in favour of treating each unity of knowledge as an "event" or appearance, the emergence of which is to be explained in terms of its conditions of possibility. He adopts two main techniques for eventalizing knowledge in this way. One of these is the strategy of destabilizing self-evident unities by introducing discontinuity where identity and continuity have been assumed, by establishing what he called a "breach of self-evidence"⁸ at points where the human sciences have been thought to have touched upon something fundamental. By "making visible a *singularity* at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant," Foucault attempts to show that things "'weren't as necessary as all that'"⁹. This accounts for Foucault's preoccupation with the conceptual histories of the human sciences, as well as the emergence of whole new scientific fields. For example, Foucault's history of the perception and treatment of the insane in his first major work, Madness and Civilization, was intended to undermine the sense of necessity attached to psychiatric discourse and practice today by showing how psychiatry, no less than other historical forms of the experience of madness, has been produced on the basis of enabling grids of epistemic and cultural perception. His histories of the various unities and concepts in the human sciences constitute a purposeful retrieval of historical knowledge in order to show that things *have* been seen, said, and done differently in the past, and that how things are seen and said today are not "as necessary as all that."¹⁰ Establishing and dramatizing such points of breach or singularity in the way things have been perceived in the past is a key first step in

⁸ Ibid., p.104.

⁹ Ibid., p.104.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.104.

demonstrating that they still *can* be seen otherwise by us, today. "[R]ecourse to history," Foucault claims,

"[...] is meaningful to the extent that history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; ie. that the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history. [...] What different forms of rationality offer as their necessary being, can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of contingencies from which it emerges can be traced. Which is not to say, however, that these forms of rationality were irrational. It means that they reside on a base of human practice and human history; and that since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was they were made."¹¹

In various historical studies Foucault succeeds in dramatizing how, over the course of centuries, our definitions and perceptions of phenomena such as "crime," "madness," or "perversion" have referred to highly unstable and discontinuous forms of experience and behaviour, where a certain identity and continuity has been assumed. "[I]t wasn't as a matter of course," he claims,

"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 to be sought through the individual examination of bodies..."¹²

By demonstrating how the economically unusable were swept up by new definitions of, first, "unreason", and subsequently, "criminality" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries where, previously, there had existed only the "idle" and "nomadic," Foucault shows how unstable have been the contents of unities of knowledge assumed to refer to relatively stable and unchanging identities. His work also dramatizes the magnitude of the substantive discontinuity which has characterized humanistic knowledge, such that qualities which were ignored or perceived in a certain way in one era have been swept up

¹¹ Foucault, Michel, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," interview in Foucault, Michel, Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Lawrence Kritzman, ed., New York: Routledge, 1988, p.37. Hereinafter cited as MF.

¹² Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.104.

into new identities and unities in another, with sometimes dramatic and catastrophic results.

A further critical strategy Foucault brings to bear on Man as a unity or self-evident object of knowledge is that of dispersing the unity or object through a pluralization of the causes lying behind its emergence as an event in the field of knowledge. Here, he writes, "eventalization means rediscovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies, and so on that at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary."¹³ In this case, Foucault brackets the question of the objectivity or adequacy of knowledge in relation to reality in favour of treating the emergence of each unity of knowledge as an *event* to be explained. Our knowledge of things, the identities in which we purport to capture them, are entirely contingent, having their origins not in essences but in a "profusion of lost events"¹⁴. That is, the things we know and the unities by which we represent them to ourselves have their beginning not in some essential, original, and self-identical condition in which we find them but, rather, in a host of complex events through which they are *produced* and made to emerge as "events" before us. Things, concepts, unities, or objects of knowledge are not resolvable into simple identities but, rather, susceptible to genealogical dissolution into myriad determining events and conditions. "What is found at the historical beginning of things," Foucault writes, "is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity."¹⁵ As a result, genuinely critical analysis of knowledge consists not in an evaluation of its

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.104.

¹⁴ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," p.155.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.142.

adequacy in relation to reality or an interpretation of its meaning but, rather, in an examination of its *Entstehung*, that is, its decomposition into the constituent events, struggles, and confrontations of force which *produced* it as what Foucault calls an "emergence"¹⁶.

"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; [...] The genealogist needs history to dispel the chimeras of the origin, [...] He must be able to recognize the events of history, its jolts, its surprises, its unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats - the basis of all beginnings ..."¹⁷

Originally, Foucault's archaeological work on the human sciences directed the analysis of knowledge to an exploration of the underlying epistemic events which took place at the level of whole grids of cultural perception and experience. In his later genealogical works, Foucault directs his analysis to recover the *strategic* events underlying discursive "emergences" in the field of knowledge. Instead of seeking continuity and identity, genealogy "seeks to reestablish the various systems of subjection: not the anticipatory power of meaning, but the hazardous play of dominations"¹⁸. The analysis of knowledge and its development, or in the terminology Foucault uses here, "the isolation of different points of emergence", does not establish continuous, successive manifestations of an identity. Rather, it identifies their *Herkunft* or descent from the "substitutions, displacements, disguised conquests, and systematic reversals"¹⁹ from which they result. Foucault's analysis of the unities and objectivities of the human sciences explodes them into a kaleidoscopic profusion of determining and conditioning factors, including

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.148.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.144.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.148.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.151.

exclusions, cultural sensibilities and grids of perception and experience, moral prejudices, economic forces, and state and other strategic interests. This procedure produces not an object reduced to its singular identity and cause but, rather, a certain "polyhedron" or "plethora" of intelligibilities whereby the object is understood as the infinitely complex product of polymorphous elements and relations. This amounts, according to Foucault, to a "multiplication of analytical 'salients'"²⁰ in the analysis of knowledge which shows that behind every emergence in the field of knowledge lies not some original, self-identical essence but a "profusion of lost events".

ii) Archaeological and Genealogical Analysis

Before examining some examples of the anti-essentialist work that Foucault's histories of the human sciences do, it is worth looking somewhat more closely at the methodological and metatheoretical bases for these works. During the course of his career, as we know, Foucault developed two different historical methods for the analysis of knowledge: archaeology and genealogy. Each of these methods helps to dramatize both the discontinuous nature of the development of knowledge and the irreducibility of the unities or objectivities of knowledge to simple, original identities. While differing as to the basis or conditions of possibility for the discontinuity which characterizes the history of knowledge - epistemic versus strategic - both archaeology and genealogy illuminate the degree to which the history of knowledge has unfolded on the basis of ruptures as opposed to a gradual accumulation of knowledge of things previously hidden. Furthermore, while also differing as to the nature of that "profusion of lost events" into

²⁰ Foucault, "Questions of Method," pp.104-106.

which the putative identity of things can be cast, both archaeology and genealogy offer an analysis of knowledge which succeeds in dispersing the unities of knowledge into "entangled events" and polymorphous origins rather than consolidating them into irreducible identities.

Foucault made important statements regarding the archaeological methodology of his early works in the opening pages of both The Birth of the Clinic and The Order of Things, while the most important statement of his later genealogical presuppositions and methodology is contained in the 1971 essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History". In the former archaeological works, Foucault set out a number of metatheoretical and methodological presuppositions with radical implications for the analysis of knowledge. First of all, Foucault brackets or sets aside entirely the question of the validity or adequacy of the unities of knowledge, such as "disease," in relation to the human realities they purportedly capture. He wishes his readers to suspend the question of the validity or objectivity of the historical forms of knowledge in order to focus on a different question; that is, how is it that these different forms of knowledge became possible, and under what conditions did they arise and succeed one another? Archaeological analysis seeks to excavate the conditions of possibility for the unities of scientific discourse, "instead of disputing its validity and seeking to diminish its scientific nature,"²¹ which is the kind of analysis performed by most modern historians of science on pre-modern scientific discourse. "I am not concerned," Foucault continues,

"to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the

²¹ Foucault, OT, p.xi.

episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or its objective forms, grounds its positivity..."²²

Knowledge itself is understood here as epiphenomenal, so that the centrality and significance of its questions and objects are displaced and subverted. It is not a matter, for Foucault, of exposing the "errors" produced by scientific perceptions of humanity, as if these could be replaced by genuinely objective ones, but of exposing what he calls the "positive unconscious" of science, that is, the simultaneously limiting and enabling rules for determining the domain of objects about which statements of truth and falsity can be made. The object of archaeological analysis is to reveal the system of thought and cultural experience (*savoir*) constituting the epistemic conditions of possibility for each form of knowledge (*connaissances*). Foucault sets out in these works to establish the contingency of the various unities of knowledge in relation to epistemic conditions of possibility. Foucault's archaeology effectively rules out analyses of knowledge which insist on evaluating it in terms of its relative adequacy to the essence or identity of things. As a result, at this point, Foucault does not so much attack the concept of "human nature" explicitly, as set it aside in order to inquire into the discursive conditions of possibility which produce it in various historical forms. The sceptical and anti-essentialist direction in which such analysis leads is clear, however.

The chief target of Foucault's early archaeological studies of the human sciences was the conventional history and philosophy of science which, as he saw it, suffered from the kind of epistemological subjectivism and naive progressivism typical of the classical humanists. In this regard, major influences on Foucault's work were not only Nietzsche but the French philosophers of science Gaston Bachelard and Georges

²² *Ibid.*, p.xxii.

Canguilhem²³. Knowledge does not "advance" from forms which poorly to those which more adequately reflect the reality of things in-themselves. Archaeology perceives all knowledge as necessarily contingent. *All* systems of thought are constituted by underlying epistemic structures which determine and produce the way a culture sees and thinks "the being of things", not simply the unscientific, mythological or ideological ones. The unities and positivities by which humanity is known to modern science, such as "mental illness", "health", "life", "labour", "language", "criminality", and "sexuality", must be recognized as contingent, discursive products of these underlying epistemic systems. No knowledge exists outside of the simultaneously enabling and limiting grids of perception and "regimes of truth" which make it possible. In light of this, the only kind of analysis of knowledge in which it makes sense to engage is one, like archaeology, which illuminates the conditions of possibility and epistemological ruptures which determine it. Such a view of knowledge foregoes the kind of self-congratulatory, retrospective history of ideas which sees contemporary knowledge as the culmination of thought's overcoming of obstacles, blockages, and repressions which blinded it to a reality which was always there awaiting discovery once the veils of ignorance, error, vested interest, and superstition were torn away.

²³ Foucault acknowledged the legacy of Canguilhem for French philosophy of science, and its influence on his own work in Foucault, Michel, "Introduction by Michel Foucault," in Canguilhem, Georges, The Normal and The Pathological, trans. Carolyn Fawcett, New York: Zone Books, 1991, pp.13-20. Helpful guides to the relationship between Foucault and the work of Bachelard and Canguilhem include: Gutting, Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp.9-55; and Lecourt, Dominic, Marxism and Epistemology: Bachelard, Canguilhem, and Foucault, trans. Ben Brewster, London: New Left Books, 1975, pp.168-175. Foucault's biographer, Didier Eribon, relates many of the details of Foucault's professional as well as intellectual debts to Canguilhem. See: Eribon, Didier, Michel Foucault, trans. Betsy Wing, Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991, pp.101-115.

By the 1970s the role of epistemic and discursive rules and factors which influenced the development and character of knowledge diminished in Foucault's work as he became increasingly concerned with the importance of strategic relations of power. The essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," marks a significant shift in the focus of Foucault's approach to humanistic knowledge. In terms of Foucault's critique of essentialist categories with respect to Man or human nature, the turn to genealogy entails a number of important shifts. While remaining faithful to the archaeological belief in the radical contingency of the unities of scientific knowledge and discourse, genealogical analysis shifts the basis for that contingency away from discursive or epistemic rules and structures and toward non-discursive practices and configurations of power. Instead of being an epiphenomenon of strictly discursive and epistemic determinants, knowledge is now understood strategically, that is, as profoundly rooted in and determined by agonistic relations of power, confrontations of force, and events of violence and struggle. According to this genealogical perspective, all knowledge, not simply that which is ideological or non-scientific, is inherently connected with urges to dominate, subordinate, or struggle. As Foucault memorably wrote, with a degree of rhetorical excess: "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for *cutting*."²⁴ In so far as knowledge is inherently connected to power, albeit not entirely reducible to it, each new field, object, or unity of knowledge which emerges instantiates the outcome of a struggle or confrontation between forces. Beneath every emergence lies not something unfragmented and immobile but, rather, a certain constellation of forces which constitutes its "lineage" or condition of possibility. What this means for the human

²⁴ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," p.154.

sciences, and their unities such as Man, is that they are now understood as "current episodes in a series of subjugations"²⁵, that is, as "emergences" which indicate a certain outcome of agonistic struggles.

Thus, genealogy carries on the anti-essentialist metatheoretical message of Foucault's earlier archaeological works. The unity of Man and the various positivities offered by the human sciences are properly understood and analyzed apart from any considerations as to their "truth", objectivity, or adequacy to "reality". "The world we know," Foucault writes, "is not this ultimately simple configuration where events are reduced to accentuate their essential traits, their final meaning, or their initial and final value. On the contrary, it is a profusion of entangled events."²⁶ Man is no longer understood by Foucault as an event whose significance is exhausted in an analysis of its discursive "conditions of possibility", epistemic structures and their autonomous rules of formation and change. The figure of Man in modern knowledge is now understood in a strategic sense, as inherently bound up with historic struggles, confrontations of force, bids for power, and the imposition of domination. The shift in Foucault's work towards an analysis of the strategic conditions of possibility for knowledge constituted a challenge not only to humanist convictions surrounding the stability and identity of human nature as an object of knowledge, but to the humanist understanding of knowledge itself. Foucault juxtaposes his own genealogical methodology with what he takes to be the typically humanist approach:

"It has been a tradition for humanism to assume that once someone gains power he ceases to know. Power makes men mad, and those who govern are blind; [...] Now I have been trying to make visible the constant articulation I think there is of power on knowledge and

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.148.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.155.

of knowledge on power. We should not be content to say that power has need for such-and-such a discovery, such-and-such a form of knowledge, but we should add that the exercise of power itself creates and causes to emerge new objects of knowledge and accumulates new bodies of information. [...] The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power. "²⁷

On the basis, then, of his radically Nietzschean critique of the concepts of essence or origin, Foucault's archaeological and genealogical studies of unities like madness, delinquency, and sexuality attempt to explode them into the "profusion of lost events" and "origin in dispersion" out of which they emerged for us in the first place. The search for such origins, including the essence or self-identical object, Man, must be abandoned. In metatheoretical terms, Foucault rejects the notion that human knowledge can be made somehow perfectly adequate or isomorphic to a reality inhabited by such stable objects or identities. Finally, Foucault contends that the current set of "objectivities", the sum of which constitutes and sustains the unity of Man, have entailed exclusions and costs, born by various marginalized populations as well as the social body at large in modern society. Motivated by the desire to liberate some of these experiences and subjugated knowledges, Foucault launches numerous anti-essentialist attempts at destabilizing, complicating, and exploding the objectivities of the human sciences in order to "loosen" things up a bit, or to thaw out some of the gratuitously rigid concepts and categories through which the being of humanity has been thought. By demonstrating that things have been seen and said *otherwise* in the past, and by demonstrating the fundamental contingency of *all* that has been seen and said by laying bare the discursive and non-discursive conditions of possibility for knowledge, Foucault hopes to clear a space for things, including Man, to be seen in different ways, or not at all. Having said that, in

²⁷ Foucault, Michel, "Prison Talk," interview in Foucault, Michel, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, Colin Gordon, ed., New York: Pantheon, 1980 pp. 51-52. Hereinafter cited as PK.

spite of some of the more hyperbolic formulations and rhetorical excesses in which his work indulges, Foucault is no hyperconstructionist or pan-textualist, as we shall see below, who denies certain brute facts of existence in favour of viewing all of reality as pure discourse or artifice. Rather, if his work at times suggests such a radically hyperconstructionist position in relation to reality, it is a result of a certain deliberate strategy of rhetorical overstatement. As we shall find, Foucault's attempts to fragment and disperse certain unities of knowledge are not intended to deny the brute facticity of existence but, rather, to see to it that "certain phrases can no longer be spoken so lightly, certain acts no longer, [...] so unhesitatingly performed, to contribute to changing certain things in people's way of perceiving and doing things,"²⁸ or such that "the acts, gestures, discourses that up until then had seemed to go without saying become problematic, difficult, dangerous."²⁹ Let us now examine Foucault's major archaeological and genealogical works on the unities and objectivities of the human sciences.

iii) "Objectivities" in the Human Sciences

Foucault's first major work, Madness and Civilization, anticipated many of the key elements of the metatheoretical critique of humanistic knowledge elaborated over the course of his career. While previous minor works on psychology and mental illness were firmly rooted in the phenomenological tradition of the human sciences, this new work represented an attempt to rethink madness and psychiatry from a fledgling anti-humanist perspective³⁰. Madness and Civilization historicizes the perception and treatment of

²⁸ Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.112.

²⁹ Ibid., p.113.

³⁰ Foucault's early works in psychology, Maladie Mentale et Personnalité, Mental Illness and Psychology, and an Introduction to the French translation of Binswanger's, Dream and Existence, all bear

madness from the Renaissance to the early nineteenth century, reveals the fundamentally discontinuous nature of the history of the western experience of madness, and shows how contingent unities and practices surrounding madness were produced by complex social and discursive determinants.

According to Foucault, what madness has been taken to be, the behaviours, qualities and symptoms which constitute its unity as a "thing", and what significance it has been accorded in the West, have undergone radical transformation over the centuries. Dominant perceptions of madness in western history since the Renaissance have ranged from the tragic and theological, economic and moral, to the scientific and medical. Since the Renaissance, madness has been variously identified as a tragic form of insight into the nature of Fallen Man and the fallibility of reason³¹, a wild animality³², a form of uneconomic disorderliness and social uselessness³³, a self-inflicted outcome of moral lassitude or overstimulation of the senses³⁴, and, finally, as a psychiatric illness³⁵. These varying experiences of madness have also determined the ways in which the insane were treated. Foucault contrasts a certain forbearance and tolerance of the insane in Renaissance society with subsequent Classical and Modern approaches in which the

the marks of the kind of "anthropological" thinking which he would later disavow. For discussions of Foucault's early humanistic psychological writings see: Dreyfus, Hubert, "Foreword to the California Edition," in Foucault, Michel, Mental Illness and Psychology, trans. Alan Sheridan, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, pp.vii-xliii; and Bernauer, James, Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought, New Jersey, Humanities Press, 1990, pp.24-36.

³¹ Foucault, Michel, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Vintage, 1973, pp.16-37. Hereinafter cited as MC.

³² Ibid., pp.70-75.

³³ Ibid., pp.40-65.

³⁴ Ibid., pp.147-158, 208-220.

³⁵ Ibid., pp.203-276.

insane were isolated from society and confined, initially in penal institutions and, eventually, in therapeutic ones.

The history of madness also reveals the extent to which different kinds of individuals and behaviours were caught up in societal perceptions and responses of the time. Foucault describes a Great Confinement in the Classical period, for example, in which thousands of paupers, nomads, prostitutes, petty thieves, and vagrants were swept up and confined, along with the insane, on the grounds of their disorderliness, "unreasonableness" and "social uselessness" in an age increasingly preoccupied with work, thrift, and order³⁶. Eighteenth-century concerns over apparent increases in cases of hysteria and hypochondria, believed to be largely self-inflicted and due to an excess of stimulation associated with urbanization and leisure, added to the ranks of the insane from the middle and upper classes as well³⁷. In the late-eighteenth century, however, mixture of the insane with other populations on the margins of society came to be viewed as scandalous, so that by the nineteenth century the medical profession was summoned to identify and separate the properly insane from the merely delinquent or idle, giving birth to the asylum³⁸.

Corresponding to each of the historical definitions of madness and responses to the insane have been dominant but equally contingent and transitory cultural sensibilities and experiences. Renaissance forbearance of the insane was supported by a certain mystical and theological view in which madness was seen as one of the tragedies afflicting the experience of humanity in its fallen state, rather than as an illness or

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.40-65

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.213-220.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.221-240.

abnormality to be cured or corrected³⁹. Tolerance of the insane was also supported by a view of madness as "present everywhere and mingled with experience,"⁴⁰ whereas after the Great Confinement of the Classical period, "madness was shown, but on the other side of bars; if present, it was at a distance, under the eyes of a reason which no longer felt any relation to it"⁴¹. Informing the Classical view and confinement of the insane individual as an untamable "beast" was an acute sensitivity to the problems of order and disorder, poverty, production, and work in the new socio-economic and cultural framework of emerging mercantilist and capitalist society, and a tendency to view the world and the cosmos in strict binary terms⁴². By the eighteenth century, the generalization of bourgeois morality increasingly located madness on a horizon of guilt and moral lassitude, contemporaneous with growing concerns about the effects of rapid liberalization, industrialization, urbanization, and the prevalence of leisure⁴³. Finally, the experience of madness was medicalized on the basis of a certain reactivation of old fears and popular hysteria in relation to the Classical Houses of Confinement as putative centres of "disease" and "contagion," which lead to the dismantling of the system of Classical confinement, the reabsorption of most inhabitants into a rapidly industrializing society, and the "benevolent" confinement of the insane within the thoroughly medicalized universe of the psychiatric asylum⁴⁴.

Now, the fact that madness has been reinterpreted and defined in different ways within western knowledge since the Renaissance is not that surprising. Indeed,

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.3-37

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.70.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.40-65.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.213-220.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.199-220.

traditional Enlightenment humanism, as manifested in self-congratulatory histories of the human sciences, has its own version of discursive change with respect to the unity of madness. Prior to the Enlightenment, so the story goes, thought could not but produce distorted and unstable unities, and perception could not but be clouded and impure, because all pre-Enlightenment thinking was by definition prejudiced, ideological, or mythological. With the Enlightenment, science could finally proceed autonomously, free from the impurities of power, prejudice and mythology, according to the principles of logic and scientific reason, with its project of capturing nature in its true, objective being. With the advent of the medical specialty of psychiatry, then, the history of madness's misunderstanding and maltreatment comes to an end with the discovery of its true being as "mental illness" and its delivery from persecution through benevolent supervision in the asylum⁴⁵. "The age of positivism," Foucault writes, "for over a century, constantly claimed to have been the first to free the mad from a lamentable confusion with the felonious, to separate the innocence of unreason from the guilt of crime."⁴⁶ Having discovered the essential reality of madness, modern psychiatry and psychology claim to constitute agents of progressive reform in the perception and treatment of the insane. It is this hubristic and self-congratulatory history of modern approaches to madness which Foucault debunks, as we shall see in Chapters Three and Four.

Having said that, as an anti-essentialist critique of the objectivities of the human sciences as capturing stable unities or identities putatively lying at the centre of the being of humanity, Foucault's Madness and Civilization is somewhat ambivalent. As much as Foucault tried to effect a certain relativization of historical knowledges of madness, he

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.221-222.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp.221-222.

was unable to resist suggesting that something of the truth of "madness itself" had been lost in the Western experience of madness since the Renaissance. As more than one commentator pointed out⁴⁷, and as Foucault himself eventually acknowledged, Madness and Civilization proceeded on the basis of an apparently essentialist and naturalistic conception of madness which ties his argument to humanistic terrain in spite of itself. His critique of the entire development of the western experience of madness since the Renaissance as a progressive silencing of the voice of "madness itself" reads like a humanist *Verfallgeschichte* of repression and alienation. If such a thing as "madness itself" exists, then, by implication, if it is the truth of this genuine thing-in-itself which psychiatry represses and misrepresents, there must exist not only a subject of the madness which Foucault wishes to let speak for itself, but a thing he calls "madness itself" which is susceptible to representation⁴⁸. In at times lyrical and romantic passages, Foucault laments the suppression and silencing of "madness itself" at the hands of psychiatry, and posits madness as a unique and worthy being or experience of the world in its own right⁴⁹. Furthermore, far from constituting an unfortunate torment from which patients must be relieved, Foucault suggests that the life of the madman, even the frenzied lunatic, can be fully lived. He argues, for example, that the confined lunatic, chained for his own protection, was better off free to rave in "solitary exaltation" than he would be "liberated" into the observing, judging, fearful, and punishing world of the

⁴⁷ The extent to which Foucault's argument depended upon the very essentialist assumptions he rejects was first noted in an important article by Jacques Derrida entitled, "Cogito and the History of Madness" which appeared in 1964. See: Derrida, Jacques, "Cogito and the History of Madness," in Derrida, Jacques, Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, pp.33-34, 41.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp.33-34.

⁴⁹ Foucault, MC, pp.ix-xii.

psychiatric asylum⁵⁰. The beacon of reason shone into the Houses of Confinement and delivered mental illness into the light, but madness was better off in the dark obscurity of the Houses which protected as well as hid⁵¹. Classical confinement preserved madness in its "being", whereas modern psychiatric confinement maintained the insane in fearful silence and subjected them entirely to rhythms not their own. By suggesting that the Modern experience of madness had imposed a certain silence upon it, and opened up a gap between knowledge of madness and madness itself, Foucault comes perilously close to valorizing the Renaissance perception of madness on the very register of validity and truth which he claims to set aside. Foucault's tendency to privilege the Renaissance experience of "madness itself" and to lament the costs of its subsequent confinement and medicalization reflects the vestigial remainder of the existential psychology of his earliest writings on madness, from which he was attempting to free himself, and the influence of a certain romantic and humanistic trope of reification and alienation which he would struggle to shed throughout the rest of his career, achieving only partial success as we shall see⁵².

Foucault's next work, The Birth of the Clinic, delves into the archaeological depths of medical knowledge. The substantive preoccupation of this work is with the history of medical perceptions of illness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp.248-252.

⁵¹ Foucault suggests that the merely confined madman enjoyed a sort of freedom denied the psychiatric patient, that of a "mind lost in the excess of a liberty which physical constraint limits only in appearance." Ibid., pp.248.

⁵² For a discussion of the humanistic vestiges contained in Foucault's early writings on mental illness and psychiatry see: Bernauer, James, Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought, Atlantic Highlands: The Humanities Press, 1990, pp.24-36.

captured in the unity of "disease". However, as in his earlier work, metatheoretical issues are also at stake. The express aim of Foucault's work on medicine is to discredit humanist explanations of the development of modern medical perception and knowledge. He offers a history of medical perception and knowledge of disease in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which undermines the objectivist, continuist, and progressive pretensions maintained by the profession and its celebrants in the history of ideas. As with psychiatry, Foucault draws sharp contrasts between successive medical perceptions of disease from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century and reveals the discursive, and to some extent social, conditions which caused or enabled these sudden ruptures in medical perception and knowledge to occur. By historicizing medical perception and knowledge at this "archaeological" level he exposes the unconscious, social, and discursive determinants of their development, and by relativizing all medical knowledge in terms of the discursive rigor inhabiting substantively dissimilar forms of medical perception he undermines the continuist and rationalist conceits on the basis of which the putative superiority of contemporary medical knowledge is sustained.

The Birth of the Clinic opens with a detailed historical discussion of the various ways medicine perceived and knew "disease" from the late-seventeenth to the early-nineteenth century in France. This history, which we need not reproduce in detail, begins with a discussion of the lyrical, speculative, and imaginative eighteenth-century understanding of illness as caused by "disease," conceived of as a virtual species unto itself and as an alien entity distinct from the body. In this "medicine of species," disease was treated as an alien and invading presence in the body⁵³. The "medicine of species"

⁵³ Foucault, Michel, The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, London: Tavistock, 1973, p.3-20. Hereinafter cited as BC.

constituted a nosology, in which the task of the physician was to determine the essence of the disease through a hermeneutic reading of signs and symptoms described by the patient or evident on the *surface* of the patient's body. By the nineteenth century, however, the "medicine of species" was replaced by what Foucault called a "medicine of pathological reactions," in which the notion of disease as an invading essence foreign to life was replaced by a conception of disease as a pathological degenerescence of the normal functioning of organic life⁵⁴. According to this new anatomo-clinical experience of illness, the truth of disease as *degenerate* life was best revealed by a gaze which sees *in depth*, that is, one which goes beneath the surface of the presentation of symptoms and of the body to observe the state of organic tissue. This kind of seeing was made possible by the practice of autopsy and the science of pathological anatomy⁵⁵. In the latter form of medical experience, knowledge of illness was acquired by the silent, one-way examination of bodies, as well as the *post-mortem* inspection of organic tissues, whereas in the former, knowledge was accumulated via a hermeneutic, reciprocal, and dialogic process in consultation with the patient.

As with the concept of madness, Foucault also deploys an archaeological analysis in order to disperse the putative unity and identity of what goes for disease in the modern western experience. Rather than pointing to its origins in empirical discoveries of previously hidden facts or essences, Foucault attributes the appearance of new medical knowledge and discourse to the enabling limits of a new "anatomo-clinical" experience of disease and what he calls its unconscious "structures of visibility."⁵⁶ Discoveries in

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.173-194.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.124-173.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.90.

pathological anatomy were instrumental in changing the way in which disease and illness were conceived, of course, but it contributed to the development of knowledge only to the extent that what was seen and what was said were determined by a prior alteration to the "concrete *a priori*" of medical experience, one in which seeing in depth, going beneath the surface of things, and the "brightness of death," were endowed with a new epistemological privilege⁵⁷.

As with the analysis of the knowledge of madness, the effect of this archaeology of medical knowledge is to displace our explanations for the transformations in knowledge from the registers of adequacy to reality and progressive accumulations of facts onto one of discontinuous ruptures and reorganizations of the enabling "positive unconscious" of systems of thought which make their appearance as objects possible to begin with. Behind all these changes in the substance of medical knowledge, "one supposes that the subject and object of knowledge remained what they were: their greater proximity and better adjustment simply made it possible for the object to reveal its own secrets with greater clarity or detail and for the subject to dispense with illusions that were an obstacle to truth." "But this is surely a project on history," Foucault continues, "an old theory of knowledge whose effects and misdeeds have long been known." An archaeological analysis of these changes "reveals a quite different principle of adjustment beyond these adjustments:

"it bears jointly on the types of objects to be known, on the grid that makes it appear, isolates it, and carves up the elements relevant to a possible epistemic knowledge (*savoir*), on the position that the subject must occupy in order to map them, on the instrumental mediations that enables it to grasp them, [...] and on the forms of conceptualization that it must practice and that qualify it as a subject of knowledge. What is modified in giving place to anatomico-clinical medicine is not, therefore, the mere surface contact between the knowing subject and

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.123-173.

the known object; it is the more general arrangement of knowledge that determines the reciprocal positions and the connexion between the one who must know and that which is to be known. The access of the medical gaze into the sick body was not the continuation of a movement of approach that had been developing in a more or less regular fashion since the day when the first doctor cast his somewhat unskilled gaze afar on the body of the first patient; it was the result of a recasting at the level of epistemic knowledge (*savoir*) itself, and not at the level of accumulated, refined, deepened, adjusted knowledge (*connaissances*).⁵⁸

Thus, changes in the object to be known and the subject that knows in medical thought are contingent upon deep, epistemic conditions of possibility, rather than the result of relations of greater or lesser attunement between them as otherwise stable identities. The dispersing and displacement effect of this kind of analysis of the conditions of possibility for modern medical experience, Foucault hopes, will undermine gradualist and continuist histories of science, as well as render the various unities and objectivities comprising each system of thought into epiphenomenal and contingent artifacts, without necessarily challenging directly their validity. The point of such analysis is not to show that our current knowledge is in *error* but, rather, to show that, were the epistemic fundamentals of our thought to change, we might see things *differently*, and without necessarily sacrificing anything in the way of coherence or rigour. "What counts in the things said by men," according to archaeological analysis and critique, "is not so much what they may have thought [...] as that which systematizes them from the outset, thus making them thereafter endlessly accessible to new discourses and open to the task of transforming them."⁵⁹

Foucault's next major work, The Order of Things, constitutes a broad analysis of knowledge in the human sciences in general. With this work, his metatheoretical

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.xix.

objective is not only to destabilize humanistic knowledge at the level of the content of discrete scientific unities such as madness and disease, but to challenge the very unity of Man itself, suggesting that the very appearance of Man as an object of scientific and philosophical inquiry in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries reflects changes at the level of the deepest structures of knowledge without reference to a stable object, unity, or identity. Man is not, Foucault argues, "the intemporal object of a knowledge which [...] must itself be thought of as ageless."⁶⁰ Foucault attempts via an archaeological analysis of the very appearance of Man as an object of knowledge to undermine our sense that Man constitutes an intrinsic unity and identity. By showing that Man has appeared to us as an object of thought only as a result of autonomous events and laws of change at the epistemic level of knowledge, archaeology disturbs the sense of attunement attached to our current forms of knowledge of ourselves, as well as the sense of necessity and gravity which have accompanied the question, "What is man?" for the last two centuries.

Substantively, the subject of interest in this work is the "positivities" or "empiricities"⁶¹ by which the being of humankind has come to be known in the human sciences since the nineteenth century. The Order of Things offers an archaeological analysis of the emergence and contents of the modern empirical and human sciences, such as biology, political economy, and philology, which take Man as a living, labouring, and language-using being as their object. According to Foucault, what has been presented in traditional history of science as the gradual accumulation of knowledge about Man since the Renaissance, culminating in the attunement of

⁶⁰ Foucault, OT, p.371.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.250.

knowledge to the being of Man as an object in the nineteenth century, has constituted in fact a very different phenomenon and series of events. Examining three general areas of inquiry concerning the being of Man since the Renaissance - life, labour, and language - Foucault argues that knowledge of Man has been marked by profound ruptures and discontinuities, as well as the complete disappearance of certain "objectivities" once deemed central to that knowledge, followed by the emergence of entirely new ones in no way related to those which preceded them. Foucault locates one such rupture at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, which divides what he calls the "Classical" and the "Modern" epochs⁶². Classical analysis of life, labour, and language was conducted under the rubric of three sciences: natural history, the analysis of wealth, and general grammar, respectively. According to Foucault, each of these sciences took as its central object of inquiry a certain "positivity" or "empiricity". Classical natural history privileged the concepts of *structure* and *character*, using these to classify, differentiate, and hierarchize living organisms on a table of *visible* similarities and differences⁶³. The Classical study of economics, associated with figures like Adam Smith, took as its object the creation and exchange of *wealth*. Wealth, trade, and value, as represented in money transactions, were the primary positivities through which the economic and productive life of Man was understood⁶⁴. Finally, general grammar took as its object the *names* of things, or verbal signs, and understood the linguistic being of Man in terms of the rules for constructing, employing, and altering the names by which things are represented in speech⁶⁵.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.xxii.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.125-162.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.166-214.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.78-124.

By the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Foucault argues, significant changes occurred in the scientific understanding of life, labour, and language; changes so profound that they cannot be understood, he claims, as having been produced out of, as in a process of internal unfolding, the Classical sciences. Changes in knowledge between the Classical period and the Modern one are marked by rupture and discontinuity at the level of the objects which are taken as central. The beginning of the nineteenth century marked the emergence of the human sciences proper, in particular biology, political economy, and philology, which replaced Classical natural history, analysis of wealth, and general grammar, respectively, as the sciences by which the being of Man was understood. What Foucault's archaeological analysis of these three human sciences reveals, first of all, is that each takes as its central object of inquiry a new objectivity or positivity which reveals little if any epistemic or conceptual continuity with or relationship to preceding Classical understandings of life, labour, and language. In the life sciences, for example, Classical concern with visible character and structure as the basis of classification gives way to the concepts of *organic structure* and *life function*, such as respiration, digestion, and reproduction, as the primary positivities or empiricities by which living things are understood⁶⁶. Cuvier's privilege of *organic function* over visible structure, for example, indicates a momentous change in the understanding of the order of living things in terms of identity and difference. After Cuvier, Foucault writes:

"It matters little that gills and lungs may have a few variables of form, magnitude, or number in common; they resemble one another because they are two varieties of that non-existent, abstract, unreal, unassignable organ, absent from all describable species, yet present in the animal kingdom in its entirety, which serves for *respiration in general*. From Cuvier onward,

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.263-279.

function [...] is to serve [...] to make it possible to relate together totalities of elements without the slightest visible identity."⁶⁷

As a result of the emergence of the concept of function, a new order of identity and difference by which living things are ordered and divided up was established beneath the level of Classical visibility. In the study of economic life, political economy privileges human labour and modes of production over the mere exchange and circulation of wealth⁶⁸. Marx's labour theory of value and analysis of the capitalist mode of production revealed the underlying relations of alienation and exploitation beneath the appearance of equality, consent, and reciprocity in Classical theories of wealth and exchange. Finally, in the analysis of language, philology privileged the autonomous, mechanistic rules of grammatical systems which determine the meaning of words over general grammar's focus on nomination and the representative adequacy of names in relation to things⁶⁹. In other words, Foucault suggests, what the conventional history of our understanding of ourselves treats as the gradual and continuous attunement of knowledge to an otherwise stable object - living, economic, and linguistic Man - does not in fact exist. Our knowledge of ourselves has been marked by profound breaches and discontinuities. The empiricities of the nineteenth-century human sciences - *organic structure, production, and language* - are entirely unrelated, epistemically-speaking, to the objectivities of *character, wealth, and the name* which they replaced. In the case of economics, for example, Foucault insists that we must "avoid a retrospective reading of these things that would merely endow the Classical analysis of wealth with the ulterior unity of political economy in the tentative process of constituting itself."⁷⁰ This is not, of course, how the

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.264-265.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.253-263.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.280-300.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.166.

history of the human sciences is normally portrayed. Typically, Foucault claims, the nineteenth century human sciences are portrayed as each having evolved, developed, and emerged out of the respective Classical sciences which preceded them. Each is portrayed as closely related, conceptually-speaking, to that which preceded it. According to Foucault's archaeological analysis, however, within the history of each of these separate sciences of Man there have occurred profound ruptures from one period to the next, marked by the virtual disappearance of certain empiricities and the emergence of new ones:

"Philology, biology, and political economy were established, not in the places formerly occupied by *general grammar*, *natural history*, and the *analysis of wealth*, but in an area where those forms of knowledge did not exist, in the space they left blank, in the deep gaps that separated their broad theoretical segments and that were filled with the murmur of the ontological continuum. The object of knowledge in the nineteenth century is formed in the very place where the Classical plenitude of being has fallen silent."⁷¹

The idea, therefore, that, as a result of methodological refinements or new observations, knowledge has gradually become more and more closely attuned to the being of Man as a stable object of reflection is difficult to sustain in light of this archaeological analysis.

What, then, precipitates these changes in the order of things? According to Foucault's archaeological analysis, we must look to the epistemic level of the deep structures of knowledge for answers. By the epistemic level, which we shall examine in greater detail in the following chapter, Foucault refers to the rules governing the very conditions of possibility for the emergence of statements regarding the truth or falsity of things. It is at this level that fundamental ruptures and changes in knowledge are determined, as a result of "events" which we can barely grasp. Changes in the substance of knowledge from, say, natural history to biology, reflect an alteration at the deepest

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.207. Emphasis in original.

levels of the arrangements of knowledge, Foucault claims. Changes in the analysis of living things from natural history, in which the order of identity and difference among living things was determined by immediately visible and describable structures and characteristics, to biology, in which the order of identity and difference is altered to refer to organic structures and life functions which are *not* immediately present or visible, became possible only on the basis of a prior epistemic shift, according to which the qualities of depth, invisibility, and concealment receive epistemic privilege over the surface visibility of things. "From Cuvier onward," Foucault observes, "it is life in its non-perceptible, purely functional aspect that provides the basis for the exterior possibility of a classification [...] the possibility of classification now arises from the depths of life, from those elements most hidden from view."⁷² In other words, organic structure and function emerge to dictate the new order of identity and difference in the classification of living things only after the hidden organic structure and life functions of organisms have come to be seen as constituting a deeper reality of living things. Only when, for example, the nature of reproduction, gestation, and birth among creatures like whales and dolphins is privileged over their visible resemblances to other fish does it become possible for them to be differentiated from the latter as *mammals* rather than fish. In the absence of the epistemic privilege granted to the hierarchy of *life functions*, such an identity between whales, dolphins, and other mammals would simply not appear. Neither would the concept of *life* itself, as sustained by a hierarchy of imperceptible functions like digestion, respiration, and reproduction, appear in the absence of epistemic conditions of possibility in which knowledge comes to be seen as being

⁷² Ibid., p.268.

grounded in the invisible, hidden depths of things. "Up to the end of the eighteenth century," Foucault argues, "life does not exist" as an object of knowledge⁷³. Since the Classical naturalist "is the man concerned with the structure of the visible world,"⁷⁴ the empiricity of life *cannot* appear to him and he *cannot* appreciate the biological kinship that exists between whales, dolphins, and other mammals.

The event taking place here, which we will examine below in Chapter Three, is the replacement of the Classical epistemic theme of *representation* by a new arrangement of the fundamentals of knowledge which Foucault dubs the *analytic of finitude*. Whereas classical knowledge was based on the assumption that the nature of things revealed itself more or less unproblematically to the subject of thought endowed with the capacity to adequately reflect it in the form of linguistic representations more or less isomorphic to it in a "continuum of representation and being,"⁷⁵ modern knowledge is treated as the hard-won achievement of a search for the being of things which conceal themselves behind a certain density and opacity which cannot be pierced without engaging in a form of depth hermeneutics, in which one finds the truth of being in the obscure depths of things such as we saw with respect to *function* in the science of biology, in Marx's concept of *ideology*, or in the importance of pathological anatomy to clinical medicine. Nothing, not even Man, presents itself transparently to the understanding. Indeed, as soon as Man, himself, took on that same depth and opacity as a result of the discovery of his finite nature - at the centre of which lies his being as a living, labouring, and language-using creature - all knowledge becomes *dubious*, since it

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.160.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.161.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.206.

issues from this finite being. The human sciences, Foucault argues, emerge in response to this crisis of knowledge in order to resecure its foundations. Such a foundation will be based on a thorough understanding and accounting of the forms of human finitude. And herein, Foucault claims, lies the epistemic origin of the emergence of Man as an object of knowledge. Lacking this epistemic configuration, neither Renaissance nor Classical humanism were able to conceive of Man in quite this way. While each assigned human beings a certain privileged position in the world, Man, as a "primary reality with his own density, as the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge," has no place within them. "Classical language," Foucault claims, "as the *common discourse* of representation and things, as the place within which nature and human nature intersect, absolutely excludes anything that could be a 'science of man'."⁷⁶ As soon as Man takes on a certain density and opacity to himself, as a result of his finite being as a living, labouring, and language-using animal, he turns himself, as a subject of knowledge, into an object as well. Thus, Man the knowing subject as an object of the human sciences was born.

Now, Foucault's objective here is not to attack the credibility or objectivity of these various forms of knowledge, nor to deny the brute facts of human existence as only illusory discursive constructs. Foucault brackets the question of objectivity in order to treat the positivities of knowledge as events and emergences contingent upon changes at the deep, unconscious levels of knowledge and perception. By throwing into relief the contingent and event-like nature of the emergence of new forms of knowledge, Foucault hopes to disturb the sense of necessity and continuity attached to the set of objectivities

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.310-311. Emphasis in original.

by which we currently understand ourselves. Furthermore, by retrieving and highlighting the various epistemic rationalities or systematicities underpinning historical forms of knowledge - say, the Classical emphasis on ocular metaphors of the visibility and transparency of things in relation to an autonomous, representing subject, or the Modern theme of the density and opacity of things according to which the being of things, including Man, can only be decoded by various forms of depth hermeneutics - Foucault in fact rehabilitates and elevates them in opposition to detractors who dismiss them as irrational and mythological. Even the knowledge of the Renaissance, as much as it appears to us a mixture of reason and magic, reveals a certain epistemic "rigour"⁷⁷. By restoring the epistemic "sense," rationale, or systematicity to historic forms of knowledge Foucault does not so much challenge our current unities and objectivities in terms of the remnants of ideology and mythology detectable within them as he does undermine the validity of their exclusive, monopolistic claim on rationality. Finally, while Foucault emphasizes the degree to which objects of knowledge are made to appear for us as a result of discursive and epistemic structures of visibility, it does not follow from such an argument that a world external to discourse must therefore be denied. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have made this point succinctly:

"The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has *nothing to do* with whether there is a world external to thought [...] An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists [...] But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God', depends on the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁷⁸ Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, trans. Winston Moore and Paul Cammack, London: Verso, 1985, p.108. Emphasis in original.

Having said that, Foucault's scepticism with respect to the existence of Man as a stable, originary identity remains clear. Indeed, he recruits the nineteenth and twentieth-century sciences of Man themselves, such as psychiatry and linguistics, in order to dispel the illusion of Man as a stable object or unity of knowledge. "[I]n so far as these investigations into man as a possible object of knowledge (*savoir*) were deployed," Foucault claims, "something very serious was discovered:"

"that this famous man, this human nature [...] was never discovered. When one analyzed for example the phenomena of madness or neurosis, what was discovered was an unconscious, an unconscious completely traversed by impulses and instincts, an unconscious that functioned according to mechanisms and according to a topological space which had absolutely nothing to do with what one could expect of the human essence, of freedom or human existence [...] And consequently, insofar as man was sought out in his depths, to that extent he disappeared. [...] And similarly for language. From the beginning of the 19th century the human languages had been investigated in order to try and discover some of the great constants of the human mind. [...] Yet, by penetrating into language, what did one find? One found structures, correlations, a system that is in some way quasi-logical, and man, in his liberty, in his existence, there again had disappeared."⁷⁹

What each successive period in thought takes as the essence or fundamental unity at the centre of the being of Man has undergone profound transformation and discontinuity, which archaeological analysis shows to have its origins at the epistemic level of knowledge rather than in a gradual attunement of thought to Man as a stable object. By showing how knowledge of the being of things in the past was contingent upon certain underlying epistemic conditions of possibility, Foucault suggests that the very empiricities by which we currently understand the being of things, including Man itself, might disappear as a result of a new round of epistemic change. Should such changes occur, he speculates, it would no longer be possible for us to think the being of things,

⁷⁹ Foucault, Michel, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," interview in Foucault, Michel, Foucault Live: Interviews 1966-1984, Sylvere Lotringer, ed., trans. John Johnston, New York: Semiotext(e), 1989, p.37. Hereinafter cited as FL.

including ourselves, in terms of the empiricities and positivities we currently do. The appearance of Man in the nineteenth-century human sciences, Foucault concludes:

“was not the liberation of an age-old anxiety, the transition into luminous consciousness of an age-old concern, the entry into objectivity of something that had remained trapped within beliefs and philosophies: it was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.”⁸⁰

Beginning in the 1970s, as we know, Foucault's work made a significant methodological turn away from analysing and criticizing knowledge in relation to its epistemic and discursive conditions of possibility, in which the role played by non-discursive factors was often treated as minimal, to a genealogical analysis of knowledge forefronting the degree to which the production of knowledge - or the “objectification of objectivities” as he once phrased it⁸¹ - is imbricated with myriad strategies and relations of power, including the strategic interests of states, social classes, and the scientific professions themselves. Discipline and Punish, Foucault's first major genealogical analysis of the human sciences, departs from his previous archaeological preoccupations with discourses and epistemic sensibilities and turns to an analysis of the non-discursive rationalities, practices and institutions associated with the production of knowledge around the social phenomenon of illegality and the practice of punishment in nineteenth-century France. Inspired by the new methodological direction he set out in the Nietzsche essay, this work introduces several new elements into Foucault's historical analysis of the human sciences with major implications for his understanding and analysis of Man. The first of these, coming in the form of the notion of “power-knowledge”, reintroduces non-

⁸⁰ Foucault, OT, p.387.

⁸¹ Foucault, “Questions of Method,” p.116.

discursive factors - namely, power - back into his method of historical analysis.

"Perhaps," he writes,

"we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge [...] that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."⁸²

While, arguably, the role of the non-discursive was significant in his study of madness and, to a lesser extent, medicine, Foucault's archaeological study of the human sciences and prescriptions for a science of discourse more or less ignored the role of non-discursive factors in the constitution of knowledge. Only in The Archaeology of Knowledge does Foucault concede once again to the role played by non-discursive factors in the transformation of knowledge⁸³, a point I elaborate upon in Chapter Three. With Discipline and Punish, however, Foucault offers an explicit and detailed analysis and explanation for the emergence of the human sciences which ties them directly to the pursuit and solidification of state power, social interests, and scientific authority. With this turn to a genealogical approach, Foucault reintroduces power into his explanation for discursive continuity and change.

Substantively speaking, Discipline and Punish offers a genealogical analysis of the concepts of "crime" and "criminality" in eighteenth and nineteenth-century France, as well a reflection on the practices and penal response which grew up around them. At the

⁸² Foucault, Michel, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage, 1979, p.27. Hereinafter cited as DP.

⁸³ Foucault, Michel, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, London: Tavistock, 1972, pp.67-68.

level of the unities of the human sciences, Discipline and Punish does similar work on essentialist conceptions the nature of Man - particularly its disorders and abnormalities - to that of his previous work, especially on madness. Foucault's objective, here, is to undermine the essentialist human sciences of nineteenth-century criminology and penology which treat these unities of "crime," "criminality," or "delinquency" as indicative of natural classes of objectively self-evident acts and qualities susceptible to scientific identification and classification. In the early stages of his argument Foucault shows how, historically, the definition of and response to crime in eighteenth and nineteenth-century France underwent significant change, revealing how it neither referred nor was applied, historically, to the same kinds of conduct or the same object. "No doubt," he writes, "the definition of offences, the hierarchy of their seriousness, the margins of indulgence, what was tolerated in fact and what was legally permitted - all this has considerably changed over the last 200 years..."⁸⁴. Foucault demonstrates this discontinuousness in the perceived unity of "crime" by locating and specifying the meaning of the term, as well as the kinds of acts to which it referred in the period immediately preceding the present one. Prior to the mid-eighteenth century, he finds, the state was preoccupied with violent crime, while social attitudes with regard to petty crimes of all kinds, including theft, poaching, customs violations, and tax avoidance dictated considerable forbearance of such "necessary illegality"⁸⁵. The perception and treatment of "crime" at this time was dominated by a "criminality of blood". From mid-century onward, however, a growing concern for property crime manifested itself as an

⁸⁴ Foucault, DP, p.17.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp.82-89.

effect of a burgeoning mercantile economy⁸⁶. Efforts to root out and eliminate a "criminality of fraud" began to take precedence in the minds of state rulers and administrators. The contrast between the "criminality of blood" and the "criminality of fraud" allows us to see how the various acts and transgressions which have made up the category of "crimes" in a given period can undergo considerable change, permitting us to see and think of certain acts, such as petty theft, as perhaps *not* signifying the presence of some essential pathological trait.

More significantly, however, the historical analysis Foucault provides demonstrates the historicity and discontinuity at the heart of our very understanding of what "crime" or "criminality" are as objects in themselves. That acts constituting "criminality" as well as the laws designed to prevent and punish them should undergo historical change is hardly surprising and "perhaps not the most important fact:" he writes,

"the division between the permitted and the forbidden has preserved a certain constancy from one century to another. On the other hand, 'crime', the object with which penal practice is concerned, has profoundly altered: the quality, the nature, in a sense the substance of which the punishable element is made, rather than its formal definition."⁸⁷

Foucault shows how the understanding of criminality underwent a dramatic shift in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. During this period, the understanding of crime, as a thing, was transformed from a preoccupation with unlawful acts which individuals happened to commit, to a concern for the nature of the individual who committed them, the state of their "soul", and signs of a disposition to reoffend⁸⁸. Criminality went from being a juridical term describing or specifying acts or conduct

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.77.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.17

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.18-22.

which transgressed the law of the land and the royal authority of the monarch to one indicating the presence of dangerous, disorderly proclivities and inclinations in the souls of offenders, a population increasingly perceived as constituting a whole sub-species or natural sub-class with a "criminal" nature. As a result, a whole new penal practice emerged which was targeted less at simply punishing offenders as juridical subjects and more at identifying, isolating, punishing, and, if possible, correcting, those among the population at large in whom resided any "kernel of danger"⁸⁹. Thus was born the idea of the criminal or the delinquent as something apart from a merely juridical subject gone astray: a "pathological gap in the human species;"⁹⁰ a "dangerous individual" in whom resided inherently disorderly, predatory, and anti-social tendencies⁹¹.

This rupture in perceptions of criminality itself initiated changes in penal practices and responses to crime. From a concern to inflict punishment upon the body of the convicted in proportion to the criminal act and its offensiveness to the sovereign will embodied in the law⁹², penological attitudes shifted to a belief that incarceration was the appropriate response to criminal acts and qualities. Being a matter of qualities in the nature of certain individuals which left them inclined to illegality, incarceration was justified in part by the offender's likelihood of reoffense and the opportunity to "reform" their character provided by detention⁹³. Thus, Discipline and Punish recounts the birth of

⁸⁹ Ibid., p.254.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.253.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.252. Foucault also discusses the emergence of the concept of "the dangerous individual" at length in his lecture: "The Dangerous Individual," in MF, pp.125-151.

⁹² Foucault, DP, pp.47-49.

⁹³ Ibid., pp.120-131.

the prison and its virtual "colonization of the penalty" in France in the space of a few decades in the early nineteenth century⁹⁴.

As has become quite standard in Foucault's historical works, the reader is once again confronted with markedly discontinuous perceptions, definitions, and practices in relation to an "objectivity" endowed with a putatively stable identity or essence. And once again, explanations for this discontinuity based on the humanistic tropes of disenchantment, discovery, and adequacy are rejected by Foucault. What took place in the nineteenth century was not a discovery of the "truth" of crime as residing in a nexus of inclinations and proclivities empirically observable in the souls of individual offenders but, rather, a reorganization of the economy of power in which conceptions of crime and criminality were produced. Following the Nietzsche essay, Discipline and Punish treats knowledge as inherently bound up with power. Indeed, all knowledge is treated as *produced* by power, or in relations of struggle, confrontation, domination, and subordination. With this work, the concept of power both supplements and supplants Foucault's archaeological approach to the historical analysis of knowledge. In the place of epistemic conditions of possibility and structures of visibility and perception, there are now economies and strategic configurations of power. The epistemic condition of possibility has been replaced by the "economy of power"⁹⁵ or the "political rationality"⁹⁶ of the state, which determines the form, object domain, and practices of knowledge. Instead of ruling epistemes, we now find economies of power, such as the "monarchical" and the "disciplinary", which pursue different strategies of control, domination,

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.117.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.79.

⁹⁶ Foucault elaborates on the complex relationship between rationalities of governance and control and the production of knowledge in his lecture, "Politics and Reason," in MF, pp.58-85.

regulation, incitement and inscription in relation to the social body and the body itself⁹⁷. As a result, as well, we see the archaeological periodization of knowledge in terms of epistemic structures replaced by a genealogical one of "economies of power" - monarchical, disciplinary, and biopolitical.

The genealogical analysis of crime and criminality as stable identities or objects has the effect of dispersing and dissolving their very unity as well. Far from constituting a natural object, species, or social fact, the "delinquent," for example, constitutes a discursive and strategic unity invested with a host of discursive, cultural, economic, scientific, and administrative determinations. Foucault's analysis of "criminality" and "delinquency" as objects of knowledge multiplies the "analytical salients" germane to the explanation of their emergence as objects of knowledge, subjecting the former to a "causal multiplication" which has the effect of dispersing them into a "profusion of entangled events". Among the complex web of factors with which the unities of "criminality" and "delinquency" were invested, and which we will examine in greater detail in Chapter Three, Foucault included: Christian confessional techniques and practices in which individuals were exhorted to examine their souls, to construct themselves as spaces of deep interiority, as seats of dangerous desires, and to acknowledge and take responsibility for them⁹⁸; a proliferation of techniques and institutions of a disciplinary and panoptic nature for the objectification of the social, which had the effect of producing highly individualized knowledge of "cases," as well as aggregate knowledge of populations and statistical norms allowing for a cadastral

⁹⁷ Foucault contrasts the monarchical with the nineteenth-century disciplinary economy of power in DP, pp.77-103

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.123.

mapping of the social body⁹⁹; increased state interest in administrative and technical means of ensuring *order* while optimizing the forces of the state, which Foucault calls "the disciplines"¹⁰⁰; the strategic utility of moral panics to dramatize the sense of social danger, disorder, and pathology within the social body in order to justify the spread of surveillance and power¹⁰¹; and, finally, the professional interests of penal authorities, psychiatrists, and physicians charged with supervising, classifying, and correcting offenders, which were served by identifying a whole new field of knowledge, expertise, and inquiry into the nature of "the dangerous individual"¹⁰². Drawing our attention to all of these multiple discursive and strategic investments, Foucault attempts to disperse the object - delinquency - into that profusion of lost events and determining influences which served to crystalize and produce it as a thing.

In the last of his studies in the history of the human sciences, The History of Sexuality, Foucault offered a genealogical analysis of the emergence of the scientific unity of "sexuality," along with a host of related objectivities such as "perversion," "homosexuality," "the masturbating child," "the hysterical woman," and the Malthusian

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp.141-149. Foucault also discusses the rise and significance of this "mapping" of the social body, beginning in seventeenth-century Europe, in the following: Foucault, Michel, "The Political Technology of Individuals," in Luther Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick Hutton, eds., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, pp.150-151; and Foucault, "Politics and Reason," pp.58-85, in which he traces this relationship between governing and the production of knowledge to the exercise of Christian pastoral authority. The relationship between the growth of statistical knowledge and state power has been examined at length in Ian Hacking's, The Taming of Chance, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, DP, pp.135-141.

¹⁰¹ Foucault discusses the strategic use of "delinquency" by state authorities at Ibid., pp.271-285.

¹⁰² Foucault, "The Dangerous Individual," pp.125-151.

heterosexual "couple"¹⁰³. In this work, Foucault makes a remarkable claim. While the division between the permitted and the forbidden in matters of sexual pleasure has been a relative constant over the centuries, the nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of something entirely new - the emergence of "sexuality" as a medical and psychiatric object or unity of knowledge unto itself. Prior to this time, Foucault memorably claimed, "sexuality" did not exist¹⁰⁴. Which is not to say, of course, that individuals did not have sex or experience bodily pleasures. The emergence of sexuality signaled at least two important changes, according to Foucault. Firstly, the gathering together under the *dispositif* of "sexuality" a host of different acts and pleasures signaled the ascendance of a single medicalized and psychiatrized experience of what had previously been regarded as heterogeneous. What had been experienced as multiform ways in which individuals sought and experienced bodily pleasure, with multiple and overlapping kinds of private, social, and moral significance, was now subject to the insistent gaze and classificatory ordering of medical and psychiatric discourses of "sexuality," which endowed sexual behaviour with a new etiological power to produce a host of medical, psychiatric, and social pathologies. Henceforth, "bodies and pleasures," as Foucault says, were experienced and perceived on a new medicalized and psychiatrized horizon of the "normal" and the "abnormal"¹⁰⁵. Secondly, this new unity of "sexuality" was located at the very core of identity, where it was constituted as the deepest truth of human beings, as the site of a deep interiority, and fount of powerful drives and potentially dangerous

¹⁰³ Foucault, Michel, The History of Sexuality: Volume 1 An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Random House, 1978, pp.103-105. Hereinafter cited as HS.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp.150-156.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp.36-73.

impulses¹⁰⁶. The anti-essentialist work of The History of Sexuality has a number of important targets, then. Under genealogical scrutiny are not only the various "strategic unities" according to which various sexual acts and tendencies have been medicalized and classified, such as "homosexuality" or "onanism", but the very idea that there exists in the deepest interiority of the self some original and essential sexual identity.

The History of Sexuality begins by debunking the mythology surrounding the nineteenth-century Victorian era as one of extreme discretion, silence, and denial on sexual matters. Foucault records, instead, a virtual explosion and proliferation of discourses surrounding sexuality at the time, reflecting very intense state and scientific, as well moral, concern¹⁰⁷. What lay at the heart of this new Victorian "incitement to discourse" on sex was an emerging Malthus-inspired medical, scientific, and strategic concern for the ways in which sexual conduct intersected with and affected such collective or strategic concerns as public health, population growth, and demographics. This had the effect of both medicalizing the experience of sex under the rubric of "sexuality" and linking the sexual conduct of individuals to the overall health of the state and its population¹⁰⁸. Thus was born "sexuality" as a matter of state and scientific concern and as a matter of heightened individual identity and "responsibility". With the emergence of "sexuality" come a host of other sexual "unities" as well, where before there had existed only bodies and pleasures. Where, before, there had existed to the pre-modern experience of sex simply acts of "libertinage" or "sodomy" there now appeared "perversity" and "homosexuality". Where, before, there had existed "onanism" there now

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp.53-73.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., pp.3-13, 17-35.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp.135-148.

appeared the problem of the "masturbating child". In other words, where before there had, of course, existed these forms of bodily pleasure many of which were forbidden on moral and religious grounds, there appeared a medico-scientific unity or condition increasingly ascribed to the whole of the individual. As a result, an individual was no longer someone who happened to derive pleasure from same-sex partners but, increasingly, someone who was by nature "homosexual"¹⁰⁹. The upshot of Foucault's argument, here, is to show that aside from the ways in which the boundary between the permitted and the forbidden in matters of sex has changed historically, there has been an even more significant and dramatic rupture in the Western experience of sex - one in which we have come increasingly to see ourselves as defined and identified as who we are by some deep, irreducible space of interiority at the centre of which lies a reservoir of sexual urges and impulses that we call our "sexuality". In addition to indicating the radical nature of this change in the Western experience of sex, Foucault is also interested in tracing the roots of this change and in dispersing the emergence of the new "strategic unities" of sexuality into the kaleidoscopic profusion of events out of which they were produced.

As only an introduction to a projected six-volume history of the objectification of sexual objectivities, The History of Sexuality is understandably sparse on historical and analytical detail, particularly relative to the painstaking and monumental study of criminality and punishment in his Discipline and Punish. Unfortunately, the projected fourth volume of the series, tentatively entitled The Confessions of the Flesh, in which Foucault intended to provide a detailed study of the appearance of sexual unities like the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp.36-49.

"masturbating child," the "frigid woman," and the "homosexual," was never published. Nevertheless, Foucault's research on the proliferation of knowledge surrounding the new scientific objectivity of "sexuality" offered a number of hints as to what might have been seen in this fourth volume. Much of Foucault's research at this time focused on the increasingly hysterical medical and psychiatric discourse of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries on the dangers of childhood masturbation. A growing body of medical theory since the eighteenth century assigned a wide-ranging "etiological power" to sexuality as the source, if abused, of a host of medical, psychiatric, and social pathologies. This discourse reached a crescendo in nineteenth-century campaigns against childhood masturbation, in which this historically constant and recalcitrant behaviour was singled out, medicalized, and psychiatrized for the first time as a unique species of anomaly and danger in the field of sexuality¹¹⁰. Of course masturbation existed prior to the nineteenth century, along with a host of other sins and evils associated with the flesh and its pleasures, on a horizon of moral and religious experience. However, with its medicalization and psychiatrization in the nineteenth century, a whole new scientific objectivity - the "masturbating child" - was produced. According to Foucault, however, the emergence of childhood masturbation as a privileged object of medical and psychiatric knowledge and discourse in no way reflects the discovery of some natural species of sexual abnormality or anomaly relative to some objective unity of healthy, normal sexuality. Rather, the emergence of the masturbating child within the field of scientific knowledge of sex reflects, he argues, a host of strategic developments at the level of rationalities and relations of power within early-nineteenth century society in

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p.104.

Europe. We shall have occasion to examine these at considerable length in Chapter Five. Suffice to say, for now, that Foucault attributes the emergence of the unity of "sexuality" to a new "biopolitical" rationale of governing in which European states took an increasing interest in sex as the strategic intersection of the conduct of individuals and health and biological security of the population as a whole. The endowment of sex with the etiological power to determine the destiny of whole populations demanded a whole new form of regulation and surveillance around the population and its sex, as well as the production and proliferation of scientific knowledge of "sexuality" and its pathologies so that the latter, in particular, might be identified, classified, and corrected. Out of the general theme of sex and its dangers emerged a host of "strategic unities" which were implanted in the popular imagination and served to "responsibilize" the inhabitants of society in relation to the signs of abnormality and danger in others, as well as themselves. The objectivity of the "masturbating child" was only one such "strategic unity," which served to intensify and hystericize popular awareness of sex and its insidious dangers, as well as to justify a host of measures to regulate, observe, and intervene in families and responsibilize parents in relation to their children.

The lesson of The History of Sexuality, then, is that while the boundary between the forbidden and the permitted in matters of sex has been relatively constant, the way in which it has been perceived, known, spoken about, and regulated as a thing has been subject to significant historical variation. While, according to Foucault, prior to the nineteenth century, sex was perceived in terms of bodies and pleasures on a horizon of moral and religious experience, it has since been experienced through the medical and psychiatric lenses of science which encourage us to think of sex in terms of a "sexuality" which must be located on a scientific register of normality and abnormality and a

strategic register of health and pathology. By no means intending to call into question the brute facticity of sex in terms of the body, anatomy, or physiological processes, functions, and sensations, Foucault wishes nonetheless to disperse the unity of "sexuality" by historicizing the medical and psychiatric experience of sex which produced it; not to elide the reality of the body and its sensations, but to demonstrate that they have been experienced differently in the past and that our current experience of sex and our "sexuality" is "not as necessary as all that".

Having surveyed Foucault's various attempts throughout most of his major works to "eventalize" and "disperse" the unity of Man as it has appeared in the various objectivities and empiricities of the human sciences since the nineteenth century, let us now turn to critically assessing the results of this work. Firstly, what is it Foucault intends and achieves with these archaeological and genealogical critiques of Man as an object of knowledge? His conceptual histories of the human sciences of psychiatry, medicine, and criminology were intended to effect a certain "breach" in what have been taken as self-evident in knowledge, to show how past perceptions of "what is" have not only differed from ours, but that they have been produced under certain epistemic and strategic conditions. This is not a critique of the contents of knowledge in a given epoch as ideological or irrational. In fact, Foucault often shows how historical forms of knowledge are *intelligible* as products of certain epistemic or strategic rationales, depriving our current knowledge of its putative monopoly on rationality. Foucault links directly the practice of historicizing the unities of past knowledge, and the epistemic and strategic rationalities upon which they were contingent, with the contemporary task of understanding the extent to which our own knowledge is circumscribed by

simultaneously enabling and limiting grids of perception and rationality. "What reason perceives as *its* necessity, or rather, what different forms of rationality offer as their necessary being," he claims:

"can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of contingencies from which it emerged can be traced. Which is not to say, however, that these forms of rationality were irrational. It means that they reside on a base of human practice and human history; and that since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made."¹¹¹

Keeping alive the memory of how things were made - *that* they were made - preserves the possibility that they might become otherwise. Showing how things have been seen and done differently in the past, and throwing into relief the "sense" embedded within them, is the first step in shaking us loose from our own sense of what is necessary and essential in our surroundings today.

Foucault also achieves a certain dispersal of the objects of knowledge in a given epoch via a "multiplication of analytical salients" responsible for producing knowledge as an emergence. His intent, ultimately, was to weaken our own sense of the necessity and self-evidence of the unities on which our current knowledge is based, and to shake us from complacency stemming from the assumption that our knowledge has been purified of all cultural and strategic investments. The dispersal of our current objects of knowledge into their heterogeneous causes and "analytical salients" demands a perspective that is historical. "[H]istory serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; ie., that the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history."¹¹² Recourse to history, therefore, becomes a "history of the present," and makes

¹¹¹ Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," p.37.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.37.

"that-which-is" appear as "something that might not be". Such a history of the present, Foucault hopes, will "open up the space of freedom understood as a space of concrete freedom, i.e., of possible transformation."¹¹³

Now, does all of this mean, as some critics suggest, that things like "mental illness," "disease," "criminality," and "paedophilia," or, conversely, "health," "rationality," and "sex" do not exist; that they reflect nothing of the reality given to us in experience and, perhaps, that reality itself is "made" and without any necessity or solidity whatsoever? Does Man really not exist? And if all knowledge is susceptible to unmasking as interpretation contingent upon discursive and strategic conditions of possibility, does this not amount to a disavowal and relativization of all knowledge and truth? While it hardly seems necessary to emphasize that Foucault does not question the facticity of certain realities of human experience, the need to do so arises in the face of charges that Foucault's analysis of knowledge is informed by an overarching aestheticism which proposes that all of reality, including human biology and physiology, have been "made" and lack any necessity or weight at all. Richard Wolin and Allan Megill have launched this kind of criticism at Foucault most aggressively¹¹⁴. Each attributes to Foucault a Nietzschean "pan-aestheticism" in which the whole field of human experience is treated in strictly aesthetic terms, that is, as essentially contingent and fabricated. All of reality as such is nothing but what human discourse and practice have made it. In other words, there are no brute facts of existence or reality.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.36.

¹¹⁴ See: Megill, Allan, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; and Wolin, Richard, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," *Telos*, No. 67, (1986), pp.71-86.

Now, while Foucault was certainly given to rhetorical excesses rendering him susceptible to this kind of selective overreading of aestheticist and textualist elements in his work, he was emphatically not calling into question the brute existence or reality of certain aspects of human experience. With respect to madness, for example, his genealogy of "mental illness" in no way calls into question the fact of "madness proper," alluding to the existence of individuals in society clearly wired up differently than most, and whose condition may well warrant their restraint in some form, both for the protection of others as well as themselves. As Paul Veyne has argued, Foucault's archaeology of psychiatric knowledge in no way doubts that there are present in the insane individual "neural molecules arranged in a certain way, sentences or gestures that an observer from Sirius might see as different from those of other humans [...]"¹¹⁵. At issue in the French anti-psychiatry movement, of which Foucault was a supporter, was "not at all the truth value of psychiatry in terms of knowledge (of diagnostic correctness or therapeutic effectiveness)," but, rather, "the absolute right of nonmadness over madness."¹¹⁶ In other words, the point was to historicize and, therefore, challenge the necessity and inevitability of the exclusively psychiatric contemporary experience of insanity. Similarly, with regard to the practice of medicine, Foucault does not believe that "disease" and "health" are nothing but discursive and strategic artifacts: "[G]ood health and bad health," he asserted in one interview, "however crude or subtle the criteria used, are facts: physical states and mental states."¹¹⁷ And in spite of the conditions in

¹¹⁵ Veyne, Paul, "Foucault Revolutionizes History," in Davidson, Arnold, ed., Foucault and His Interlocutors, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, p.168.

¹¹⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Psychiatric Power," in Foucault, Michel, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume I, Paul Rabinow, ed., New York: The New Press, 1997, p.47. Hereinafter cited as EST.

¹¹⁷ Foucault, Michel, "Social Security," interview in MF, p.170.

which the notion of "public health" emerges, Foucault is far from denying that such exists. Foucault was impressed by the urgency of many public health concerns. On returning from a visit to northeastern Brazil he remarked: "The morbidity rate there reaches 100%, parasitosis - however 'anti-doctor' one may be - really does exist; and parasitosis can be eliminated"¹¹⁸. In relation to the problem of crime, Foucault was only too well aware of the existence of the criminally insane and the dangerously predatory, and called into question only the adequacy of psychiatry and medicine as discourses capable of getting a handle on such forms of experience without remainder. Finally, with respect to the *dispositif* of "sexuality," to say that it was produced out of a certain strategic context is not the same as saying that it is nothing. Sexuality is comprised of "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions..."¹¹⁹. And Foucault far from denies the brute facts of sex, or "bodies and pleasures". Contrary to his critics, Foucault does not speak of "sexuality as if sex did not exist." The genealogy of sexuality in no way elides the body and its organs, biology, anatomy, functions, or sensations¹²⁰. Nevertheless, he rejects the idea that such facts, and the effects that their objectification may have, can ever be completely disentangled from the social conditions out of which they emerge and in which they are deployed. All such facts are still "cultural fact[s] in the broadest sense of the term, which is to say at once political, economic, and social."¹²¹ The embeddedness of these experiences and the knowledge in which they are captured

¹¹⁸ Foucault, Michel, "Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison," interview in MF, p.195.

¹¹⁹ Foucault, Michel, "The Confession of the Flesh," interview in PK, p.194.

¹²⁰ Foucault, HS, pp.150-151.

¹²¹ Foucault, Michel, "Social Security," p.175.

within finite historical and cultural frameworks ensures that all knowledge and discourse constitutes a certain imposition or falsification with respect to things. Foucault once suggested we think of knowledge and discourse as "a violence which we do to things"¹²². This embeddedness and violence in no way touches upon or throws into question the experiences captured by such categories. What it does signal for Foucault, however, is the need for vigilance with respect to the deployment of such concepts and categories within the context of social relations and the functioning of institutional and therapeutic practices. While Foucault certainly wished to expose the extent to which knowledge is contingent upon a host of complex cultural and strategic investments, he did not go so far as to suggest that all of reality is nothing but discourse or power "all the way down", so to speak. Pan-aestheticist or pan-textualist readings of Foucault engage in a certain overinflation of the aesthetic in his work, and are belied by a host of remarks in which he clearly acknowledges the brute facticity of many aspects of human experience.

Nonetheless, Foucault emphasizes the degree to which all of our knowledge is inextricably bound up with cultural and strategic investments. With respect to the human sciences, he presents compelling grounds for rejecting traditional histories of science which portrayed the human sciences in the nineteenth century as having discovered certain essential qualities or unities previously hidden by prejudice, ideology, superstition, or power. It must be admitted at this point, however, that Foucault's genealogies of knowledge were often aimed at relatively easy targets, that is, the naive epistemology of classical humanism and the boosterish image of science offered up in traditional history of ideas. If his main point is that the contents of previous systems of

¹²² Quoted in Connolly, William, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," Political Theory, Vol.13, No.3, August 1985, p.366.

knowledge have been inflected by a host of cultural and strategic investments then he can be situated on already well-trodden terrain. To argue that nineteenth-century knowledge is shot through with moral prejudices, cultural blindspots, and the strategic interests of power is hardly original or earthshattering. In this respect, Foucault might be accused of fabricating something of a straw man against which to contrast his own genealogical subtlety. As Charles Taylor has pointed out, Foucault's work is only one of the more recent efforts to underscore the status of knowledge as simultaneously enabled and constrained, and enabling and constraining. This position on knowledge has gradually become the "generally accepted thesis" on knowledge¹²³, with the exception of a few "hard-headed reductivists"¹²⁴. Thus to some extent, by setting himself up almost solely against traditional history of science, which buys into the classical humanist themes of correspondence and representation *holus bolus*, Foucault's own achievements are somewhat diminished by the weakness of his opponent. On the other hand, in the context of twentieth-century history and philosophy of science within France, like his predecessors Bachelard and Canguilhem, Foucault was responding to a tradition which still tended to grant a certain epistemological privilege and superiority to the "noble sciences"¹²⁵. Without directly engaging the natural and theoretical sciences Foucault hoped, by recourse to the history of scientific objectivities with more obvious signs of the relationship between practices and knowledge, to erode some of their certainty by a kind of flanking manoeuvre. His many critics might have been more impressed, however, had he been as successful at exposing the crudeness, clumsiness, and utility to power of

¹²³ Taylor, Charles, "Connolly, Foucault, and Truth," Political Theory, Vol.13, No.3, August 1985, p.378.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.385.

¹²⁵ See: Foucault, "Introduction by Michel Foucault," in Canguilhem, The Normal and the Pathological, pp.7-13.

more contemporary forms of knowledge, rather than simply alluding to it. An even more impressive feat, perhaps, might have been to expose the entanglements of the empirical, natural sciences in the strategies of power, something which, while he did not rule it out as a possibility, he deferred on the grounds that such a task was rendered extremely difficult by their much higher "epistemological profile"¹²⁶.

The intention behind his work, however, was never simply to expose the entanglement of nineteenth-century knowledge in prejudice and power, but to demonstrate the necessary entwinement in relations of power on the part of knowledge and truth *tout court*. Foucault, as we know, takes the more radical position that all knowledge and truth always already constitute falsification of and a certain imposition upon the very objects they seek to represent. What goes for knowledge in the nineteenth century, goes for our own knowledge as well, although Foucault never devoted a book-length study to any examples of the latter. By taking this position, Foucault has become the focus of compelling critiques by a number of formidable thinkers, including Taylor and Jurgen Habermas, which need to be taken seriously here. According to Taylor, Foucault's ability to confront us with the discontinuities within and hidden costs imposed by our forms of life and knowledge is laudable¹²⁷. However, we can follow his work only so far before arriving at a paradoxical position that is "ultimately incoherent" and self-contradictory¹²⁸. To begin with, Taylor argues that, with respect to knowledge and truth, Foucault refuses the concept of truth as a result of his overarching commitment to the Nietzschean view of knowledge and truth as, in Taylor's words, "subordinated to

¹²⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Truth and Power," in PK, p.109.

¹²⁷ Taylor, Charles, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in Taylor, Charles, Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp.181-182.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.167.

power”¹²⁹. On this view, every form of knowledge, including our own, is based on an imposition of power. As a result, according to Taylor, Foucault is driven to adopt a relativistic stance of neutrality in relation to the various forms of knowledge or “regimes of truth” he analyses, and deprives us of the means with which to adjudicate between competing truth claims. Thus, Foucault refuses to recognize the existence of truth. His monolithic view of power and knowledge compels him to see the emergence of every new regime of truth, including the modern one, as reflecting the substitution of a new system of power rather than an advance toward a deep, culture-independent truth.

Taylor’s reading tends, however, to overinflate the concept of power in Foucault’s theory of knowledge to such an extent that knowledge is entirely reduced without remainder to its substrate of power. By overinflating the importance of power in Foucault’s analysis of the relation between them, however, Taylor implies, like Wolin and Megill, that there is nothing to knowledge in Foucault’s view *but* the will-to-power. While Foucault may have formulated the relation in this extreme formula during flights of rhetorical excess for which he is famous, he did not seriously intend to level the distinction between knowledge and power altogether. As his archaeological work makes clear, systems of knowledge are constituted by a nexus of cultural sensibilities, rationalities, and epistemic conditions of possibility which are far from exhausted by power alone. Furthermore, he admits that certain developments within knowledge cannot be accounted for in terms of external determinants and must therefore be attributed to developments internal or endogenous to discursive practices themselves. At a certain level, knowledge is sometimes “endowed with its own rules for which external

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.177.

determinations could not account"¹³⁰. And while in his works of the 1970s the role of power in the production of true discourses receives increasing attention, only in high rhetorical flight does he conflate knowledge with power completely, such as we saw in the Nietzsche essay, where he refers to knowledge as a tool for "cutting" imbued with "instinctive violence". In the methodological prolegomenon to Discipline and Punish, Foucault suggests that:

"[...] we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests [...that] the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge [...] that power and knowledge directly imply one another..."¹³¹

What is seldom noticed by Foucault's critics in statements such as this is that he does not claim that in the absence of power there would be nothing left of knowledge, or that power is all that is constitutive of knowledge. He clearly leaves room for the sensibilities, rationalities, and epistemic limits mentioned above, a fact suppressed by Taylor's monolithic reading of his theory of power. Strictly speaking, Foucault himself argued, he cannot be fairly characterized as conflating power and knowledge, "since to study their relation is precisely my problem. If they were identical, I would not have to study them [...] The very fact that I pose the question of their relation proves clearly that I do not *identify* them."¹³² To suggest, then, that Foucault reduces knowledge to power to such an extent as to identify them, and to argue therefore that Foucault denies any truth-value or cognitive validity to all knowledge is a clear overstatement. Finally, Taylor also appears to ignore Foucault's repeated methodological claims to bracket or set aside the question

¹³⁰ Foucault, quoted in Davidson, Arnold, "Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics," in David Couzens Hoy, ed., Foucault: A Critical Reader, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986, p.227.

¹³¹ Foucault, DP, p.27.

¹³² Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," p.43.

of truth or validity claims with respect to knowledge in favour of an analysis which treats the appearance of unities of knowledge simply as "events", the emergence of which needs to be explained.

Jurgen Habermas suggests a critique of the Nietzschean view of power and knowledge similar to Taylor's when he faults Foucault, among others, for failing to distinguish between the "context of discovery" and the "context of justification"¹³³ in the analysis of knowledge. We must distinguish between the contexts in which certain objects and forms of knowledge emerge, including the non-discursive context of power, from the context in which competing validity claims are adjudicated. Habermas' assumption, of course, is that the validity of knowledge can be verified only in the context of uncoerced, reciprocal ideal speech situations in which the only force that prevails is that of the better argument. While Habermas is aware of a certain inescapable intertwining or "impurity" of knowledge in relation to power, he holds the conviction that once this impurity is admitted the spheres of power and validity could gradually be separated "procedurally and step by step through the mediation of thought."¹³⁴ Foucault's analysis of knowledge is truncated, therefore, by its failure to consider it outside the strategic context of discovery in terms of an "internal theoretical dynamic which constantly propels the sciences [...] *beyond* the creation of merely technologically exploitable knowledge[...]"¹³⁵ Habermas is correct at a certain level. Foucault deliberately brackets the sphere of validity in favour of focusing on the conditions of emergence of knowledge. He is able, however, to easily differentiate between, say, the

¹³³ Habermas, Jurgen, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Rereading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," *New German Critique*, No. 26, Spring/Summer 1982, p.30.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.30.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.18.

impetus behind the pursuit of chemistry in a rapidly industrializing capitalist economy and the cognitive validity of its truth claims. And while, in the case of psychiatry, for example, "one can show, [...] that the medicalization of madness [...] was connected to a whole series of social and economic processes at a given time [...] This fact in no way," Foucault admits, "impugns the scientific validity or the therapeutic effectiveness of psychiatry: it does not endorse psychiatry, but neither does it invalidate it."¹³⁶ On the other hand, unlike Habermas, he rejects the idea that the two are in practice ever completely separable. The validity of truth claims, especially in the human sciences, was not Foucault's "problem" and was seldom of concern to him. "[W]hat seem to me to be more interesting to analyze," Foucault explains,

"is how science, in Europe, has become institutionalized as a power. It is not enough to say that science is a set of procedures by which propositions may be falsified, errors demonstrated, myths demystified, etc. Science also exercises power: it is, literally, a power ..."¹³⁷

Taking into consideration even a "pure" science like mathematics, Foucault connects it to relations of power, "if only in the way it is taught, the way in which consensus is organized,"¹³⁸ without impugning its validity claims. "This in no way means that mathematics is only a game of power, but that the game of truth of mathematics is linked in a certain way - without thereby being invalidated in any way - to games and institutions of power [...] in any case, one simply cannot say that games of truth are nothing but games of power."¹³⁹ The "context of discovery" was his chief problem, animated by the conviction that the context of today's discovery, as well as use, of

¹³⁶ Foucault, Michel, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," interview in EST, p.296.

¹³⁷ Foucault, Michel, "On Power," interview in MF, p.106.

¹³⁸ Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern For Self as a Practice of Freedom," p.296.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p.296.

knowledge was inescapably one of power relations as well as validity claims. "What struck me, in observing the human sciences,"

"was that the development of all these branches of knowledge can in no way be dissociated from the exercise of power. Of course, you will always find psychological or sociological theories that are independent of power. But, generally speaking, the fact that societies can become the object of scientific observation, that human behaviour became, from a certain point on, a problem to be analyzed and resolved, all that is bound up, I believe with the mechanisms of power..."¹⁴⁰

While Foucault seldom mentioned them, and certainly abstained from launching a critique of the natural sciences anything like the trenchant analyses and critiques of the human sciences he offered, his remarks on numerous occasions suggest that he thought that the "noble sciences" might be susceptible to genealogical critique as well, if not straightforwardly so. For example, in one interview he explains why he directed his attentions to the human sciences instead:

"...if, concerning a science like theoretical physics or organic chemistry, one poses the problem of its relations with the political and economic structures of society, isn't one posing an excessively complicated question? Doesn't this set the threshold of possible explanations impossibly high? But on the other hand, if one takes a form of knowledge (*savoir*) like psychiatry, won't the question be much easier to resolve, since the epistemological profile of psychiatry is a low one and psychiatric practice is linked with a whole range of institutions, economic requirements and political issues of social regulation? Couldn't the interweaving of effects of power and knowledge be grasped with greater certainty in the case of a science as 'dubious' as psychiatry?"¹⁴¹

Not only does Foucault leave open the possibility for genealogical criticism of the "noble sciences", albeit to better minds, but the ironic reference to the dubiousness of the human sciences suggests that he does not defer entirely to the epistemological status of the former. A genealogy of the "noble sciences" may well be "excessively complicated" and difficult, but not necessarily impossible. The games/context of power is inextricably

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, "On Power," p.106.

¹⁴¹ Foucault, "Truth and Power," p.109.

linked to the games/context of validity claims, such that attempts to privilege or extricate the latter hold little practical interest for Foucault. Referring explicitly to Habermas's work, Foucault remarks:

"The idea that there could exist a state of communication that would allow games of truth to circulate freely, without any constraints or coercive effects, seems utopian to me. This is precisely a failure to see that power relations are not something that is bad in itself, that we have to break free of. [...] The problem, then, is not to try to dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules [...] that will allow us to play these games of truth with as little domination as possible."¹⁴²

None of this suggests, however, that the strategic context of discovery exhausts all that is constitutive of knowledge. Habermas implies, with this distinction, that Foucault overinflates power to engulf knowledge entirely. However, as we have seen, Foucault intends no such dedifferentiation on power's behalf, but clearly rejects the notion that these two contexts are practicably separable. The context of justification is simply never pure, in Foucault's view; the scientist or philosopher can never ascend to a position of externality in relation to objects or competing validity claims in order to adjudicate between them. Such justification is always itself already epistemically limited. What counts as true is always already "a thing of this world"; verified, that is, within a general "politics of truth" made up of "the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true."¹⁴³

If it were indeed the case that Foucault wished simply to subordinate knowledge to power, that is, to reduce the content of the former to the latter entirely, then one might

¹⁴² Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," p.298.

¹⁴³ Foucault, "Truth and Power," p.131.

wonder what the point of studying the history of knowledge at all would be. For his part, Foucault does not see the concept of power-knowledge as rendering the analysis of knowledge futile at all. Rather than its destruction, genealogy actually has the effect of proliferating knowledge by rendering all of its objectivities or positivities into ever more complex configurations of determination, intelligibility, and conditions of possibility. Rather than reducing knowledge to power, Foucault's approach has the effect of constructing an ever more complex "'polyhedron' of intelligibility"¹⁴⁴ around each of its objects. Another tactic which Foucault deliberately pursued was the excavation of "subjugated knowledge"¹⁴⁵ in the form of archival documents, records, and the memoirs of historically marginalized figures such as Barbin and Riviere, which we will examine further below. Far from destroying knowledge or rendering its study pointless, archaeology and genealogy have the effect of engendering new knowledge and disinterring subjugated ones about ourselves and how we have become what we are today.

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.105.

¹⁴⁵ Foucault, Michel, "Two Lectures," in PK, p.81.

Chapter Three

The Death of Man II: Displacing the Subject

"[A]mong all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order [...] only one, that which began a century and a half ago and is now perhaps drawing to a close, has made it possible for the figure of man to appear. And that appearance was not the liberation of an old anxiety, the transition into luminous consciousness of an age-old concern [...] it was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. [...] If those arrangements were to disappear [...] then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face in the sand at the edge of the sea."

Michel Foucault
The Archaeology of Knowledge

"Slowly, in the course of the classical age we see the construction of those 'observatories' of human multiplicity [...] Side by side with the major technology of the telescope, the lens and the light beam [...] there were the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen; using techniques of subjection and methods of exploitation, an obscure area of light and the visible was secretly preparing a new knowledge of man."

Michel Foucault
Discipline and Punish

Foucault's metatheoretical critique of humanism does not stop at scepticism with regard to the unities in which it purports to capture the essence of human nature as an object of knowledge. His work constitutes a direct challenge to humanistic Man as a certain kind of *subject* of thought and knowledge as well. By his proclamation of "the death of the subject" Foucault means "of the Subject in capital letters, of the subject as origin and foundation of Knowledge (*savoir*), of Liberty, of Language and History."¹ His

¹ Foucault, Michel, "The Birth of a World," interview in Foucault, Michel, Foucault Live: Interviews 1966 - 1984, trans. Sylvere Lotringer, New York: Semiotext(e), 1989, p.61. Hereinafter cited as FL.

critique aims to unmask the metaphysical subject of classical humanism, that is, the Cartesian subject of seventeenth-century thought which became the foundation for the philosophical Enlightenment. This form of humanism posits the centrality of a putatively autonomous and self-transparent subject of reason to the acquisition of objective knowledge of nature and the attribution of meaning to the universe. Here, Man constitutes the autonomous, dispassionate, and self-transparent subject of reason which, through diligent, patient and disinterested observation, and logical analysis, reconstructs and represents objects to consciousness in the form of objective knowledge of things. In other words, the subject's representations of things to itself are wholly adequate to and exhaustive of the reality of the objects of representation. The putative self-transparency and autonomy of the classical subject of reason, as well as the putatively isomorphic relation between representation and reality, constitute the hallmarks of classical humanism as identified by Heidegger, among others. In addition, the humanist analysis of knowledge also tends to present the history of thought in terms of development and progress toward an ideal autonomy and purity of the subject and attunement of knowledge to the being of things. Western knowledge, on this view, has progressed on the basis of a series of struggles to overcome ignorance, irrationality, and prejudice waged by an autonomous, disinterested, and benign subject of scientific consciousness. According to Foucault, however, not only does classical humanism offer a naive conception of the subject of knowledge but an unjustifiably continuist and Whiggish account of the development of knowledge as well. It is to this Man, then, the subject of knowledge, that Foucault's metatheoretical analysis and critique of humanistic knowledge is addressed as well.

Now, within the humanist tradition itself the Cartesian subject of reason began to be problematized in the late-eighteenth century, as we know. The work of figures like Kant and Hegel raised questions about the finite limits of reason and subjectivity, thus giving birth to various branches of what I call critical humanism. Since Kant and Hegel, figures like Marx, Freud, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and members of the Frankfurt School have stressed the situatedness of the subject and the entwinement of reason and knowledge in assorted background practices and forms of power. Critical humanists treat this acknowledgement of the situatedness of reason and subjectivity as a progressive advance in rationality and knowledge, a further step in the enlightenment of the Enlightenment about itself. However, the situatedness of reason and subjectivity threatens to invalidate or relativize all knowledge and rationality, including the achievements of critical humanism, in relation to the background practices and cultural grids of perception determining them. To escape this problem the critical humanist tradition gives rise to a host of analyses of human finitude in the hopes that an exhaustive account of all that weighs upon the subject will allow it to master them and free itself truly and for the first time.

Foucault's analysis and critique of the situated subject of critical humanism, however, deprives this tradition of the comfort which goes along with its claims both to represent a genuinely enlightened view of knowledge and to offer a satisfactory resolution to the problems engendered by the finite nature of reason and subjectivity. As we shall see, while he recognizes that the theme of finitude in critical humanism represents a certain advance over the naivete of the Classical *cogito*, Foucault rejects the situated subject as it appears in the work of figures like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty as either a form of Cartesianism in disguise or an insuperably unstable and paradoxical

figure which threatens to paralyze thought altogether. Finally, Foucault also argues that the very concept of Man as the situated subject of reason, and all the philosophical problems it engenders, represent epiphenomenal events determined by changes to the deep structures of knowledge beneath the level of consciousness, rather than the result of reason's autonomous discovery of its own finite limits. The fact, therefore, that, in the nineteenth century, Man the subject of thought was turned into an object of thought was an *effect* of epistemic events of which the subject was unaware and over which it exercised no control. The fact that the very figure of Man at the centre of critical humanism represents little more than an epiphenomenon of profound changes to the deep, unconscious fundamental arrangements of knowledge also suggests, Foucault claims, that the very figure of Man and all the themes of the situated subject might disappear for us should these arrangements change once more.

The archaeological means by which Foucault drains away much of the sense of gravity and inevitability attached to the question of Man are eventually eclipsed by a number of genealogical studies of the objectification of Man in the nineteenth-century human sciences. In works like Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality, the emergence of the human sciences, as well as the objectivities to which they give rise, are increasingly attributed to various strategic "conditions of possibility," thus effecting a further displacement of the subject of scientific consciousness from explanations of the development of knowledge. Genealogical analysis of knowledge in the human sciences imperils not only the classical humanist account of the role played by the autonomous subject in its production, but casts a shadow over the critical humanist commitment to the human sciences and its belief in the emancipatory interest inherent in the objectification of those factors which limit and determine Man.

Among the first orders of business in all of his histories of knowledge is to debunk the mythology of autonomy, disinterestedness and curiosity surrounding the subject of philosophic and scientific knowledge. Foucault's analyses stress how, to a large extent, the subject of knowledge is determined, even "overwhelmed," by a host of factors which impinge upon them, from the narrow practical interests of a profession or a class, to unexamined moral prejudices, unconscious grids of cultural perception, and strategic rationalities. Foucault's account of the development of knowledge also decentres the subject from the central place it occupies in classical humanist accounts of the history of knowledge. In all of his histories of the development of the human sciences, the putative genius, curiosity, independence, and perseverance of individual scientific subjects, or the various aspects of "scientific consciousness", are dismissed or downplayed in an analysis which emphasizes what he calls the "positive unconscious" of knowledge, comprised of cultural sensibilities, moral prejudices, grids of perception, and epistemic strategic conditions of possibility, of which the contents of scientific knowledge are little more than epiphenomenal effects². Foucault's archaeological and subsequent genealogical analyses of modern knowledge both have the effect of displacing Man, that is, the putatively autonomous subject of reason, from all accounts of the "development" of knowledge. The multiplication of epistemic and strategic "salients" germane to the emergence of new forms of knowledge examined in the previous chapter have the effect not only of dispersing Man as an object or originary identity, but of displacing Man as the subject or originating source of knowledge as well.

² Foucault, Michel, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences, New York: Vintage, 1973, p.xi. Hereinafter cited as OT.

Foucault's critique of classical humanism and the metaphysical subject of scientific reason proceeds on the basis of two main propositions for the analysis of knowledge. Firstly, he offers counterhistories of the empirical and human sciences which emphasize ruptures and discontinuities in the history and development of knowledge, where traditional history of science and ideas portrays things in terms of continuity and progress. Secondly, his later works emphasize the degree to which the development of knowledge has been inflected by its imbrication with power relations and complex strategic "conditions of possibility" in which scientific subjects are deeply implicated, thus impugning the subject's pretense to autonomy.

i) Discontinuity and the Positive Unconscious of Knowledge

Traditional history of science takes putatively continuous developments and progress within the fields of scientific knowledge and discourse as evidence of the gradual accumulation and disenchantment of knowledge as a result of the rational, autonomous activity of scientific consciousness. According to Foucault, one observes in French history of science, particularly in regard to the "noble" sciences, "the almost uninterrupted emergence of truth and reason"³. According to this view, truth is that which remains "hidden to men's eyes, provisionally inaccessible, sitting in the shadows" waiting to be revealed by luminescent gaze of the scientist. In which case, "[t]he history of truth be [...] its delay, its fall or the disappearance of the obstacles which have impeded it until now from coming to light."⁴ Moreover, all of the collective mentalities,

³ Ibid., p.ix.

⁴ Foucault, Michel and Noam Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," in Davidson, Arnold, ed., Foucault and His Interlocutors, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, p.116.

habits of thought, and grids of cultural perception which make up the "common thought," the myths, and prejudices of a culture constitute "obstacles which the subject of knowledge had to surmount or to outlive in order to have access to the truth"⁵.

At the centre of this narrative of progress, continuity, and disenchantment one finds the subject of scientific consciousness. The traditional historian of science "traces the progress of discovery, the formulation of problems, and the clash of controversy; [s/he] also analyses theories in their internal economy; in short, [s/he] describes the processes and products of the scientific consciousness."⁶ According to Foucault, this claim of *attribution* to a subject is central to traditional history of science, for which "each discovery should not only be situated and dated, but should be attributed to someone; it should have an inventor and someone responsible for it."⁷ The impulse to attribution evinces a certain romanticism, Foucault claims, of "the solitude of the man of truth" who, in relation the "common thought" of the period, stakes out an "'eccentric' position in order to 'discover'."⁸

Against such continuist and "Whiggish" analyses of knowledge Foucault throws into relief epistemic gaps between historically contiguous cultural grids of perception and systems of knowledge in order to dramatize the discontinuous nature of the development of knowledge. In The Order of Things, for example, Foucault claims to uncover two major epistemic breaks in the history of western thought since the Renaissance. The first occurred in the mid-seventeenth century and separates the Renaissance from what Foucault calls the "Classical" age of reason. At the end the

⁵ Ibid., p.116.

⁶ Foucault, OT, p..xi.

⁷ Foucault and Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," p.115.

⁸ Ibid., p.116.

eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, the Classical age gave way to the modern "Age of Man". These breaks are reflected, he argues, in the contents of knowledge. In the study of living things, as we saw in the previous chapter, Foucault finds that modern biology shares little epistemic common ground with its antecedents in natural history. Similarly, in the study of economics, he finds little resemblance between the classical analysis of wealth and modern theories of labour and production. According to Foucault, each of these epochs in the history of western thought was governed by a unique configuration or system of knowledge which was radically different from that governing the preceding one. Hence, the traditional explanations for the history and development of knowledge - continuity, progress, disenchantment - cannot be sustained. Without denying the role of influence, genius, or technological innovations in the development of thought altogether⁹, Foucault maintains that historical change from one system of thought to another cannot be accounted for in rationalist and continuist terms. Each system of thought has its own logic or rationale, but the process by which one succeeds another is marked by rupture and discontinuity, as opposed to continuity and progress.

"The order on the basis of which we think today does not have the same mode of being as that of the Classical thinkers. Despite the impression we may have of an almost uninterrupted development of the European *ratio* from the Renaissance to our own day, [...] all this quasi-continuity on the level of ideas is doubtless only a surface appearance; on the archaeological level we have seen that the system of positivities was transformed in a whole-sale fashion at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. 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."¹⁰

⁹ Foucault, OT, pp.xi-xiii.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.xxii.

While not hermetically sealed off from one another, historically successive systems of thought are not related in the traditional terms of genesis, influence, or logical development. The seeds of succeeding systems of thought are not necessarily contained in the ideas, concepts, or logic of those which precede them. And while traditional history of ideas has acknowledged the role of periodic ruptures and revolutions in thought, these have typically been attributed to the individual genius of the subject of scientific consciousness. Against these metaphysical, subject-centred touchstones of continuity and genius from traditional histories of science, Foucault's early archaeological works offer a competing model for the analysis of the history of knowledge.

According to Foucault, the ruptures and discontinuities which mark the history of knowledge have their origins in deep, structural changes at the level of the epistemic and strategic conditions of possibility for knowledge. These conditions of possibility, that is, the epistemic and strategic grids of perception and systems of knowledge which make possible what is seen and said in a given epoch, constitute what Foucault calls the "positive unconscious" of knowledge. "[T]he history of science and of knowledge [...],"

"doesn't simply obey the general law of reason's progress; it's not human consciousness or human reason that somehow possesses the laws of its history. Underneath what science itself knows there is something it does not know; and its history, its progress (*devenir*), its periods and accidents obey a certain number of laws and determinations. These laws and determinations are what I have tried to bring to light. I have tried to unearth an autonomous domain that would be the unconscious of science, the unconscious of knowledge (*savoir*), that would have its own laws, just as the individual human unconscious has its own laws and determinations."¹¹

Foucault wished to develop an analysis of the *constitutive* role played by such "general or collective phenomena" which traditional history of ideas devalues with reference to

¹¹ Foucault, Michel, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," interview in FL, pp.39-40.

tradition, mythology, and superstition and portrays in "the negative role of a brake in relation to the 'originality' of the inventor."¹² The archaeological method developed by Foucault in the 1960s for bringing such discursive ruptures and conditions of possibility to light was admittedly tentative and experimental. "In distinguishing between the epistemological level of knowledge (or scientific consciousness) and the archaeological level of knowledge," he wrote in the Foreword to The Order of Things,

"I am aware that I am advancing in a direction that is fraught with difficulty. Can one speak of science and its history [...] without reference to the scientist himself [...]? [...] Is it legitimate, is it even useful, to replace the traditional 'X thought that' by a 'it was known that...'? I do not wish to deny the validity of intellectual biographies, or the possibility of a history of theories, concepts, or themes. It is simply that I wonder whether such descriptions are themselves enough, whether they do justice to the immense density of scientific discourse, whether there do not exist, outside their customary boundaries, systems of regularities that have a decisive role in the history of the sciences. I should like to know whether the subjects responsible for scientific discourse are not determined in their situation, their function, their perceptive capacity, and their practical possibilities by conditions which dominate and even overwhelm them."¹³

Eschewing the traditional history of ideas according to which knowledge gradually progresses on the basis of blockages, prejudices, and blindnesses overcome by reason, Foucault's analysis of knowledge and its development treats it as proceeding on the basis of successive unconscious grids of perception and epistemic structures which are simultaneously constraining and enabling. Thus, thought and knowledge are enabled by, or have as their conditions of possibility and emergence, deep and unconscious roots in prevailing epistemic grids of perception. As a result, the ruptures and discontinuities which mark the history of thought have their origins not in the labour of the autonomous subject of scientific consciousness but, rather, in more fundamental alterations at the epistemic level of knowledge as a whole. In archaeological studies of psychiatry, medical

¹² Foucault and Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," p.116

¹³ Foucault, OT, pp.xiii-xiv.

perception, and the human sciences in general, which we examine below, Foucault attributes the emergence of new unities and objects to epistemic "events" and discontinuities which take place beneath the level of subjective consciousness. Indeed, it is these archaeological "events" - changes in the "epistemic" structures of visibility and knowledge (*savoir*) - which lead to changes at the epistemological level of knowledge (*connaissance*). "I am not concerned, therefore" he writes,

"to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today's science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility."¹⁴

While this archaeological analysis of the history of knowledge suffers from a number of potentially serious methodological difficulties, including a tendency toward a certain discursive determinism which we will examine below, it remains consistent with Foucault's overall anti-humanist project. His analysis of the history of knowledge in terms of ruptures and discontinuities provoked by alterations at the deep, unconscious, epistemic level of thought displaces the subject of scientific consciousness from explanations of the development of knowledge almost entirely. Respecting the great complexity of the development of scientific discourse, Foucault did not intend archaeology to displace other methods or explanations in the history of knowledge altogether, but he proposed it with the explicit intention of subverting and displacing one of its major humanist competitors:

"If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that [...] which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity - which, in short, leads to a transcendental

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xxii.

consciousness."¹⁵

ii) Power/Knowledge

The second major methodological premise Foucault brings to bear on the analysis of the history of knowledge concerns the relationship between knowledge and power. In traditional histories of science the role played by power is strictly a negative one. Power, in the form of arbitrary authority, custom, tradition, and cultural prejudice, is that which restricts, blocks, and resists the progress of knowledge. In such histories, knowledge proceeds by resisting and overcoming power, by the subject's heroic perseverance against power. It has been "one of the traditional themes in philosophy", Foucault writes in The History of Sexuality:

"that truth [...] 'demands' only to surface; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. [...] truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom..."¹⁶

This heroic image of knowledge and scientific consciousness portrays them as standing in relations of externality to power. The autonomous and disinterested subject of scientific consciousness advances knowledge only where power retreats. This view of knowledge:

"allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge."¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid., p.xiv.

¹⁶ Foucault, Michel, The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Vintage, 1980, p.60. Hereinafter cited as HS.

¹⁷ Foucault, Michel, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage, 1979, p.27. Hereinafter cited as DP.

Foucault proposes an account of the history of knowledge and truth in which power is seen as that which enables and produces them in certain forms, as their strategic condition of possibility. "[T]ruth is not by nature free," he writes, "- nor error servile - [...] its production is thoroughly imbued with relations of power."¹⁸ In a methodological prolegomenon to Discipline and Punish he suggests:

"We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations."¹⁹

According to Foucault, a genealogical understanding of knowledge constitutes another mode of analyzing the history of knowledge in which the constitutive role of the subject of consciousness has been displaced.

"These 'power-knowledge relations' are to be analysed, therefore, not on the basis of a subject of knowledge who is or is not free in relation to the power system, but, on the contrary, the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power-knowledge and their historical transformations. In short, it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge."²⁰

Which is not to say that individual scientists play no part in the production of knowledge. Rather, Foucault offers an account of the development of knowledge in which the subject of scientific consciousness is portrayed not only as inextricably mired in social relations and various economic, cultural, governmental, and professional practices of power, but as an agent *of* a power in its own right which it exercises even as

¹⁸ Foucault, HS, p.60.

¹⁹ Foucault, DP, pp.27-28.

²⁰ Ibid., pp.27-28.

it produces knowledge. Individual scientists exercise power over the objects under investigation, especially in the human sciences; their ability to isolate and observe them presupposes relations of power, and the very techniques of knowledge constitution such as one-way, hierarchical observation not only presuppose but have effects of power as well. The extent to which individual practitioners of the human sciences are implicated in the exercise and spread of power is the subject of Chapter Four.

In his genealogical analyses of the history of knowledge Foucault debunks the self-image of the modern human sciences as having emerged and developed in a relation of externality and autonomy with respect to power. Contrary to heroic portrayals of the human sciences as having proceeded in opposition to power, Foucault offers a reading of their emergence and development as inherently bound up with its exercise and spread. As with his archaeological studies, the autonomous, disinterested scientific subject labouring to discover the truth is displaced by the determining role played by power in the production of scientific unities such as delinquency and sexuality. Foucault's works on the relation between power and the rise of the human sciences identify a number of forms of power or political rationalities, such as what he calls "police," "discipline," and "biopower," which have since the seventeenth century depended for their operation, maintenance, and spread on the production of knowledge and truth about the nature of Man in terms of his normal and abnormal, healthy and pathological, and regular and irregular states, dispositions, habits, and conduct. Indeed, Foucault argues, "if man - if we, as living, speaking, working beings - became an object for several different sciences, the reason has to be sought not in an ideology but in the existence of [these] political

technolog[ies] which we have formed in our own societies."²¹ Thus, the conditions of possibility for knowledge take on an increasingly strategic nature rooted in the dominant form of power at the time. Far from being discovered as a result of the patient, disinterested and rational pursuit of scientific inquiry, such fields and "objectivities" emerged only after new sensitivities, prejudices, and configurations of state, socio-economic, and professional interests put certain groups and populations at the disposal of physicians and scientists, creating the conditions under which science "could be there" in the midst of the insane, the sick, the undisciplined, and the sexually non-conforming. Only when, for example, a new sensitivity to the "insane" emerged in the Houses of Confinement, largely on the part of the other inhabitants, were the insane proper separated from other forms of unreason, turned over to physicians and placed in institutions for exclusively "mental" disorders. This "new division" between the insane proper and the merely idle or "socially useless" originated from new sensitivities and prejudices having little to do with disinterested and humane scientific curiosity and inquiry²². Criminology, meanwhile, only became possible with the emergence of the prison as the primary form of legal punishment in the nineteenth century, in which large populations of offenders were gathered under one roof and subjected to isolation and continuous surveillance - laboratory-like conditions for the study of "criminal man" and his pathologies. Scientific interest in sexuality, finally, appears when the Malthusian state of the nineteenth century linked the sexual conduct of the individual to the

²¹ Foucault, Michel, "The Political Technology of Individuals," in Martin, Luther, et al, eds., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p.162.

²² Foucault, Michel, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Vintage, 1973, pp.221-240. Hereinafter cited as MC.

biological health and welfare of the social body as a "population" to be managed and optimized.

iii) The Emergence of the Human Sciences

Let us return to the substantive analyses of knowledge contained in Foucault's major works, beginning with Madness and Civilization. According to Foucault, and as we saw in the previous chapter, the appearance of psychiatry and the unity of "mental illness" did not signal the piercing of some veil of ignorance obscuring an otherwise objective "being" of madness awaiting discovery. Furthermore, neither does psychiatry constitute the culmination of a gradually developing body of knowledge which emerged as the result of patient, logical, and rational scientific inquiry conducted with regard to the insane since the end of the Renaissance. Nor was it guided in its development or approach to its object by progressive and humane motives on the part of physicians who first came in contact with the insane in the eighteenth century. The medicalization of the experience of madness as "mental illness" and, with it, the emergence of psychiatry were largely fortuitous, dependent upon sudden events and new sensibilities which have inflected modern knowledge of madness and its treatment ever since.

According to Foucault, the real history of the changing interpretation and treatment of madness has yet to be told. Enlightenment humanism's self-understanding in relation to madness is seriously undermined by the history Foucault recounts. Changes in the perception and treatment of madness cannot be accounted for in rationalist or continuist terms. The development of the western experience and knowledge of madness has not proceeded on the basis of an orderly, gradual, and logical accumulation of facts adding up to the truth of madness as "mental illness". Rather, the changes he points to

are attributable to a series of essentially non-linear, non-progressive, and discontinuous alterations in the fundamental cultural experience of madness, or what he calls certain "sensibilities," as well as a host of other discursive and non-discursive factors, demonstrating their connection and subordination to the broad cultural sensibilities of a given age, and to various other historical determinants, such as the material interests of emerging capitalism, the moral prejudices of bourgeois physicians, and the professional interests of psychiatrists.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Foucault contends that what madness has been taken to be - the behaviours, qualities and symptoms which constitute its unity as a thing - and what significance it has been accorded in the West, have undergone radical transformation over the centuries. Dominant perceptions of madness in western history since the Renaissance have ranged from the mystical and theological, economic and moral, to the scientific and medical. Since the Renaissance, madness has been variously identified with mystical or divine inspiration²³, a wild animality²⁴, a form of uneconomic disorderliness and social uselessness²⁵, a self-inflicted outcome of moral lassitude or the overstimulation of the senses²⁶, and, finally, as a psychiatric illness²⁷. These varying experiences of madness have also determined the ways in which the insane were treated. Foucault contrasts a certain forbearance and tolerance of the insane in Renaissance society with subsequent Classical and Modern approaches in which the insane were confined, initially in penal institutions and, eventually, in therapeutic ones.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.3-37

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.70-75.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.40-65.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.147-158, 208-220.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.203-276.

Corresponding to each of the historical perceptions of madness and responses to the insane, as we saw, was some dominant but equally contingent and transitory cultural sensibility and experience. Renaissance forbearance was supported by a certain tragic and theological view in which madness was seen as one of the afflictions of humanity in its Fallen state, rather than as an illness or abnormality to be cured or corrected²⁸. Informing the Classical view was an acute sensibility to the problems of order and disorder, poverty, production, and work in the new socio-economic and cultural framework of emerging mercantilist and capitalist society, and a tendency to view the world and the cosmos in strict binary terms²⁹. By the eighteenth century, the generalization of bourgeois morality increasingly located madness on a horizon of guilt and moral lassitude, contemporaneous with growing concerns about the effects of rapid liberalization, industrialization, urbanization, and the prevalence of leisure³⁰. Finally, the experience of madness was medicalized in the nineteenth century on the basis of a certain reactivation of old fears and popular hysteria in relation to the Houses of Confinement as putative centres of "disease" and "contagion," which lead to the dismantling of the system of Classical confinement, the reabsorption of most inhabitants into a rapidly industrializing society, and the "benevolent" confinement of the insane within the thoroughly medicalized universe of the psychiatric Asylum³¹.

Foucault's archaeology of madness does not treat these cultural experiences or epistemic sensibilities as evidence of the irrational or mythological nature of knowledge in a given period, however. Modern scientific understandings of madness, no less than

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.3-37.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.38-64.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.211-220.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.199-220.

their Classical or Renaissance predecessors, have succumbed to the influence of cultural biases and epistemic sensibilities, as well as other non-discursive factors. Foucault does not dismiss them as irrational or unscientific, however. To do so would place his analysis on the terrain of traditional histories of science. Rather, by shedding light on the extent to which these discontinuous understandings of madness obeyed the logic of given epistemic sensibilities or cultural codes at the time, he attempted to retrieve a certain rigor or "sense" for each successive form of knowledge of madness which the mythology of the history of modern science denies them, while at the same time depriving the subject of its foundational role in the formation of knowledge. Foucault conceded that Classical confinement itself made a certain "sense" given the dominant epistemic sensibilities surrounding the problem of order, as well as the Classical tendency to view the cosmos in strictly binary terms³². As one among numerous sources of disorder requiring neutralization, and as a negation of human experience, madness was inevitably confined. The medicalization and psychiatrization of the experience of madness also has its roots in certain practical events as well. Bourgeois morality and popular fear of madness as a contagion placed the problem of the insane into the hands of physicians. Psychiatry, the modern medical understanding of madness, developed as a result of this historical event. Suddenly, the medical profession was able to medicalize madness because it *could be there* in the Houses of Confinement, and soon after, in the spaces of the asylum where it exercised exclusive control over the new object domain of the "mentally ill"³³. In "discovering" madness in its specificity as a "mental illness" afflicting

³² *Ibid.*, pp.38-64.

³³ My emphasis on the importance of medicine's ability "to be there" in the Houses of Confinement is owed to Edward Said's discussion of European orientalism, which itself is indebted to Foucault. See: Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, New York, Random House, 1978, pp.5-8.

humanity, psychiatry claimed to restore to the insane their rightful dignity as human beings. But as Foucault argues, no such acute scientific perception of the uniqueness and specificity of madness was responsible for the eventual isolation of the insane away from other prisoners in the Houses of Confinement. Denunciations of the "inhumanity" of mixing the insane with other inhabitants of the Houses were issued on behalf of the *other* prisoners, in fact, who were constantly exposed to the insane. "[C]onsciousness of madness," writes Foucault:

"[...] did not evolve in the context of a humanitarian movement that gradually related it more closely to the madman's human reality, [...] nor did it evolve under the pressure of a scientific need that made it more attentive, more faithful to what madness might have to say for itself. [...] No medical advance, no humanitarian approach was responsible for the fact that the mad were gradually isolated, [...] this perception was the result of the confined themselves..."³⁴

Humane sensitivity, then, was on behalf of others in the Houses of Confinement, whose protests succeeded in having the insane removed and placed under the supervision and control of physicians. For reasons having far more to do with their moral standing than expert knowledge, the medical profession was asked to identify and separate the insane from other inhabitants of the Houses of Confinement, such as the idle poor and criminals. Thus, the emergence of the whole medical sub-discipline of psychiatry had as its condition of possibility not the discovery of some previously hidden and misunderstood affliction by a sensitive and heroic medical profession, but the emergence of a whole new cultural sensibility toward the insane which called for their eviction from the Houses of Confinement and the need for some form of authority to be constituted in

³⁴ Foucault, MC, p.224.

order to identify and supervise them. Thus, psychiatry emerges because this task was thrust upon the medical profession.

By recovering the sense embodied within a given knowledge of madness, a sense supplied by its dependence upon a certain cultural code or epistemic sensibility in relation to madness, Foucault intends to undermine our convictions as to the superiority, relative to the unscientific and irrational views of the past, of our own present psychiatric experience of madness as "illness". Furthermore, by dramatizing the epistemic discontinuity between these historic experiences of insanity, Foucault undermines traditional gradualist and continuist histories of science in which knowledge is assumed to progress toward an ever more fine-tuned adequacy and attunement in relation to reality and identity. Finally, by showing us how others in the past have experienced and approached madness differently, but still within a certain rigorous framework, he begins to do the work of making it possible for us to see it differently as well.

Foucault's next major work, The Birth of the Clinic, delves into the archaeological depths of medical knowledge. He offers a counter-history of medical perception and knowledge of disease in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which undermines the subject-centred and continuist assumptions maintained by the medical profession and its celebrants in the history of science. As with his work on psychiatry, Foucault attempts to reveal the discursive, and to a lesser extent social, "conditions of possibility"³⁵ which caused or enabled changes and shifts in medical perception and knowledge over the last two centuries. By historicizing medical perception and

³⁵ Foucault, Michel, The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, London: Tavistock, 1973, p.xix. Hereinafter cited as BC.

knowledge at this archaeological level Foucault exposes the extra-rational, unconscious, social, and discursive determinants of medical knowledge. In it, perceptions and bodies of knowledge are treated as resting upon underlying conditions or structures which organize experience and perception, that is, which regulate what, how, and in what form things come to be perceived and known by us. It is these underlying conditions of possibility for perception and knowledge which more or less make it possible for medicine to perceive and know disease in one way and then another. Foucault suggests, here, a way of understanding knowledge and its transformations not in terms of their relation to truth or proximity to objects "as they really are", but as "events" which reflect developments, far below the epistemological level of scientific consciousness, at the level of the conditions which make different configurations or systems of knowledge possible in the first place. With respect to the historical forms of medical knowledge, Foucault claimed to be interested solely in "determining the conditions of possibility of medical experience," a task lying "outside all prescriptive intent."³⁶ With each of these forms of perception came underlying structures and rules governing their proper object, techniques of investigation, and methods of verification. Positivist clinical perception did not emerge and supersede eighteenth century medicine by choice because it was more rational and objective, Foucault argues, but as the result of a "reorganization in depth" of the very conditions of possibility for what is seen and what is said in the field of medicine³⁷.

³⁶ Ibid., p.xix.

³⁷ Ibid., p.xiv.

The Birth of the Clinic describes the major forms of medical perception in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, from the former's "medicine of species"³⁸ and of "epidemics"³⁹ to the latter's "clinical"⁴⁰ and "anatomo-clinical"⁴¹ forms of perception. As we saw in the previous chapter, the medical experience and perception of illness underwent dramatic change from the Classical to the Modern period; from a view of disease as constituting an invasion of the body by a foreign species antithetical to life, to one of disease as pathological degeneration of the living tissues. The Classical experience of illness called for the physician's interpretation of symptoms in dialogue with the patient, whereas the latter culminates in the *post-mortem* confirmation of the nature of the illness.

How are we to analyse or understand this change? Historians of medical ideas have told a story similar to that offered in psychiatry's account of itself. The nineteenth century inaugurated a new era of objectivity in medical perception, in which disease was finally offered up to a medicine free from the illusions and distortions of the theoretical and speculative approaches of the past:

"This ideal account, which is to be found so frequently at the end of the eighteenth century, must be understood in relation to the recent establishment of clinical institutions and methods. It presented them as the restitution of an eternal truth in a continuous historical development in which events alone have been of a negative order: oblivion, illusion, concealment."⁴²

From the outset, Foucault is suspicious of such an approach to modern medical knowledge and wishes to attempt a new analysis of knowledge free of such pretensions.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.3-20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.22-37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.88-122.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.135-146.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.57.

The first element of such a new approach involves bracketing the question of objectivity or truth in the analysis of medical knowledge. Foucault offers a different picture of the nature and significance of changes in medical perception from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries:

"How can we be sure that an eighteenth-century doctor did not see what he saw, but that it needed several decades before the fantastic figures were dissipated to reveal, in the space they vacated, the shapes of things as they really are? [...] What occurred was not a 'psychoanalysis' of medical knowledge, nor any more or less spontaneous break with imaginary investments; 'positive' medicine is not a medicine that has made an 'objectal' choice in favour of objectivity itself. [...] What has changed is the silent configuration in which language finds support..."⁴³

It took, Foucault argues, a profound reorganization of the structures of experience and perception, well below the epistemological level of scientific consciousness, for nineteenth-century medical knowledge to ground itself in the exercise of "opening up a few corpses"⁴⁴ instead of the hermeneutic practice of the physician in consultation with the patient. "Reflecting on its situation," Foucault writes, modern medicine:

"identifies the origin of its positivity with a return - over and above all theory - to the modest but effecting level of the perceived. In fact, this supposed empiricism is not based on a rediscovery of the absolute values of the visible, nor on the predetermined rejection of systems and all their chimeras, but on a reorganization of that manifest and secret space that opened up when a millennial gaze paused over men's sufferings. [...] At the beginning of the nineteenth century, doctors described what for centuries had remained below the threshold of the visible and the expressible, but this did not mean that, after over-indulging in speculation, they had begun to perceive once again, or that they listened to reason rather than to imagination; it meant that the relation between the visible and the invisible - which is necessary to all concrete knowledge - changed its structure, revealing through the gaze and language what had previously been below and beyond their domain."⁴⁵

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.x-xi.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.124-146.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.xii.

Before the hidden depths that autopsy revealed could be construed as revealing the truth of disease, according to Foucault, something had to have changed in the medical experience of illness and its very "structures of visibility"⁴⁶.

Foucault's point in examining each of these forms of perception is not, however, to expose them as misguided, primitive, ideological, or lacking in objectivity. Archaeological analysis does not examine perceptions, discourses, or knowledge in relation to "truth", and harbours no implicit understanding of the objects of knowledge to which it must do justice. These are the marks of an analysis which remains on the terrain of humanism. "[T]his book," he insisted, "has not been written in favour of one kind of medicine as against another ...or against medicine in favour of an absence of medicine. It is a structural study that sets out to disentangle the conditions of its history..."⁴⁷. At the outset of his study of perceptions of disease he cautions us against following into humanist pretensions:

"For us, the human body defines, by natural right, the space of origin and of distribution of disease: a space whose lines, volumes, surfaces, and routes are laid down, in a now familiar geometry, by the anatomical atlas. But this order of the solid, visible body is only one way - in all likelihood neither the first, nor the most fundamental - in which one spatializes disease. There have been, and will be, other distributions of illness. [...] The exact superimposition of the 'body' of the disease and the body of the sick man is no more than a historical, temporary datum. Their encounter is self-evident only for us,..."⁴⁸

Foucault's interest is in the discursive, social, and cognitive structures underlying and governing changes in these various perceptions and ways of knowing disease, not in the latter's relation to truth. The Birth of the Clinic, in his own words, "is concerned, - outside all prescriptive intent - with determining the conditions of possibility of medical

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.90.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.xix.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.3.

experience in modern times."⁴⁹ Again, "[w]hat counts in the things said by men," he continues, "is not so much what they may have thought [...] as that which systematizes them from the outset..."⁵⁰.

While the metatheoretical thrust of The Birth of the Clinic is to establish the determinate role of deep "structures of visibility" and discursive "conditions of possibility" governing the expressible and the knowable, Foucault continues to explore the more mundane relation between knowledge and power as well. He continues to count political power, interests of state, institutional organization, and the professional interests of physicians among the conditions upon which perceptions and knowledge of disease depend. In spite of his efforts to uncover medicine's "positive unconscious", much of this work points repeatedly to relations between knowledge and relatively easily identifiable political, social, and institutional interests, as we shall see in the following chapter. The history Foucault recounts is similar to that of madness and psychiatry. Contrary to the self-image of the medical profession, medical knowledge did not emerge progressively, objectively and scientifically in spite of the protestations of power but, in fact, as a result of and along with various constellations and configurations of interests and power. Moreover, Foucault argues, the medical profession exercised a kind of power of its own out of which medical knowledge emerged in a particular way. Constellations of force, interests, and power produced and inflected medical knowledge in certain ways through new operations, the organization of objects, the institutionalization of the profession, and the treatment of patients. Scientific medical knowledge, then, like its psychiatric counterpart, is caught up in and inextricable from a web of social relations and power.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.xix.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.xix.

The dimensions of medicine's entwinement in relations of power are examined in more detail in the following chapter.

In Foucault's next major work, The Order of Things, Foucault's archaeological analysis of the history of knowledge shifts to an examination and explanation of the emergence, as well as developments within, the human sciences as a whole. Now, Foucault seeks to displace the foundational role of the subject not only from explanations for changes undergone within individual fields of inquiry, but from the explanation for the very appearance of the human sciences, in which Man first turns himself into an object of thought. Moreover, Foucault suggests in this work that the appearance of the figure of Man within Continental philosophy at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and which has preoccupied it ever since in the form of critical humanism, also cannot be explained on the basis of the role of the subject, which in this case would be a subject which discovers its own finitude. According to the archaeological analysis offered by Foucault here, all of these developments in knowledge - substantive changes within the sciences, the very emergence of the sciences of Man, and the turning of Man into an object of knowledge in the first place - have roots in the deep, unconscious epistemic conditions of possibility of a culture, which simultaneously enable and constrain what it is subjects *can* know, and in changes and ruptures to these fundamentals of thought which are subject to the autonomous rules of epistemic change and equilibrium currently beyond our comprehension.

Drawing upon examples from the history of the study of living things, economics, and language from the last several centuries, Foucault sets out to demonstrate that the history of these forms of knowledge is marked by profound ruptures and discontinuities

which cannot be explained in terms of the workings of an autonomous subject of reason. These changes have as their basis, his analysis reveals, more profound changes at the level of a series of successive but unconscious grids of perception and knowledge which are simultaneously enabling and constraining. These "deep structures" of knowledge and truth (*savoir*), which Foucault now formally calls *epistemes*⁵¹, provide the conditions of possibility for both equilibrium and change at the level of the substance of knowledge (*connaissances*). The fundamental epistemic arrangements of knowledge constitute "a sort of historical *a priori*" of thought in a given age. This historical *a priori* consists of "what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man's everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true."⁵² Archaeology is the method Foucault devises by which the obscure, epistemic depths of knowledge, its "positive unconscious," can be thrown into relief. All of the knowledge in a given era, Foucault argues, shares the same historical *a priori* in common: "in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one *episteme* that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge [...]"⁵³. Now, according to Foucault's archaeological reading of Western culture since the Renaissance period, Western thought has been governed by not one but three chronologically successive epistemes - the Renaissance, the Classical, and the Modern - between which have occurred brief periods of epistemic instability and rupture, signalling that one episteme is being eclipsed and succeeded by

⁵¹ Foucault, OT, p.xxii.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.158.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.168.

another⁵⁴. Foucault's epistemic periodization of Western thought locates two such ruptures: one, in the mid-seventeenth century, in which the Classical age eclipsed the Renaissance era; and a second, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which inaugurated the Modern episteme, which is still with us today⁵⁵.

The succeeding epistemes of western thought are found by Foucault to share very little in common in terms of the historical *a priori* each provides for knowledge in its respective era. Thus, in the very periodization of the epistemic development of Western thought, Foucault challenges the typically continuist, rationalist, and subject-centred history of thought offered by the classical tradition of humanism. According to Foucault, "[t]he order on the basis of which we think today does not have the same mode of being as that of the Classical thinkers."⁵⁶ "Despite the impression we may have of the almost uninterrupted development of the European *ratio*," he continues,

"from the Renaissance to our own day, despite our possible belief that the classifications of Linnaeus, [...] can still lay claim to some sort of validity, that Condillac's theory of value can be recognized to some extent in nineteenth-century marginalism, that Keynes was well aware of the affinities between his own analyses and those of Cantillon, that the language of *general grammar* [...] is not so very far removed from our own - all this quasi-continuity on the level of ideas and themes is doubtless only a surface appearance"⁵⁷

The epistemic foundations of the Classical era were provided by the theme of *representation*, according to which the being of things presented itself visibly and transparently to the gaze of the subject of knowledge, which is portrayed as endowed with the autonomous and rational capacity to generate representations of the world, in the form of linguistic signs, which are perfectly adequate and isomorphic to it. Classical

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xxii.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.xxii.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.xxii.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.xxii.

knowledge was based, Foucault writes, on an epistemic and ontological "continuum of being and representation," in which the "general representability of being," that "being is offered to representation without interruption," and the expressibility of being without remainder in language as the "primary grid of things"⁵⁸ are all assumed⁵⁹. In this continuum of being and representation, the order of the being of things offers itself up as a transparent object of knowledge in so far as it presents itself as both *visible* and *describable*. As a result of the epistemic privilege granted to things which present themselves as such, the Classical era tends to authorize within the field of knowledge that which can be seen and represented by consciousness as, to use Rorty's phrase, the "mirror of nature". In this configuration of representation, at the centre of which lies the traditional subject of scientific consciousness, we recognize the epistemic roots of classical scientific humanism itself.

At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, Foucault claims, the epistemic theme of representation entered into a crisis and was soon replaced by the Modern episteme, which he also calls the epistemic "Age of Man". In the Modern era the historical *a priori* of *representation* is replaced by the new epistemic theme of what Foucault calls the *analytic of finitude*, according to which, as we have seen, "a profound historicity penetrates into the heart of things"⁶⁰ and "the theory of representation disappears as the universal foundation of all possible orders."⁶¹ According to the analytic of finitude, the being of things like economic systems, living organisms, or languages, and even humanity itself, assume a certain density and opacity, in which

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.xxiii.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.206.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.xxiii.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.xxiii.

the surface appearance of things is viewed as concealing their genuine mode of being. As a result, the Modern episteme privileges forms of perception and analysis which are hermeneutical in nature, which probe beneath the surface visibility of things, in depth, to reveal their hidden mode of being. Hence, Marx's political economy and labour theory of value are authorized in the Modern episteme because they probe beneath the superficial aspects of bourgeois economic exchange, in the form of the wage-labour contract, to reveal its true exploitative and coercive nature as a result of the capitalist's surreptitious expropriation of surplus value. With the advent, therefore, of the analytic of finitude, European culture invented for itself "a depth in which what matters is no longer identities [...] but great hidden forces developed on the basis of their primitive and inaccessible nucleus, origin, causality, and history."⁶² After the eighteenth century, "things will be represented only from the depths of this density [...] darkened by its obscurity, but bound tightly to themselves, assembled or divided, inescapably grouped by the vigour that is hidden down below, in those depths."⁶³ According to the analytic of finitude, nothing, not even Man, presents itself in full transparency to consciousness. As a result, those forms of thought which engage in the hermeneutics of depth (political economy, biology, clinical medicine, and psychoanalysis) to find the hidden unity and identity of things, and those objects of knowledge which resist representation by remaining hidden in the opaque depths of things (labour, life function, organic tissue, or the unconscious) receive epistemic privilege.

Between these two great epistemes of Western knowledge, Foucault claims, there is little if any common ground. Once the being of everything that presents itself in

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.251.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.251.

experience, including the very being of the subject that knows, is penetrated to the core by history and finitude, the continuum of being and representation at the heart of the Classical episteme is broken. With the shift from the Classical to the Modern period in knowledge, the very "mode of being of things" and of "the order that divided them up" is profoundly altered⁶⁴.

Having fleshed out the two dominant epistemes governing Western thought since the seventeenth century, we are now in a better position to understand Foucault's explanation for the kinds of breaches and discontinuities evident in such fields of inquiry as the study of living things, economics, and language which we observed in Chapter Two. According to Foucault, it is these epistemic conditions of possibility, as well as profound ruptures between them, which account for the various forms and ruptures at the level of the substance of scientific knowledge. Limiting ourselves to the example of the science of living organisms and the shift from natural history to biology, we can see both how archaeological analysis works as well as its implications for the subject in classical humanist analyses and histories of thought.

In Classical natural history, as we know, the mode of being of living things and the order of identity and difference by which they were divided up presented itself in terms of visible and describable structures and characteristics. Thus, the objects of natural history presented themselves in the form of "surfaces and lines," in which plants and animals were seen by the "visible patterning of their organs. They [were] paws and hoofs, flowers and fruits"⁶⁵. The precedence granted to the visible and the describable in natural history reflects the latter's dependence on the Classical theme of representation,

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xxii.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.137.

in which the mode of being of things presents itself visibly and transparently along the continuum of being and representation. The rule of the epistemic theme of representation also produced a certain bias on the part of natural history, Foucault argues, in favour of botany: "in so far as there are a great many constituent organs visible in a plant that are not so in animals, taxonomic knowledge based on immediately perceptible variables was richer and more coherent in the botanical order than the zoological."⁶⁶ Furthermore, Foucault stresses the extent to which Classical natural history was *determined* or bound to privilege the botanical order of things by this same epistemic foundation. Botany did not take precedence in natural history as a result of a conscious choice or the simple curiosity and preferences of scientists. "We must [...] reverse what is usually said on this subject," Foucault argues,

"it is not because there was a great interest in botany during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that so much investigation was undertaken into methods of classification. But because it was possible to know and to say only within a taxonomic area of visibility, the knowledge of plants was bound to prove more extensive than that of animals."⁶⁷

Classical natural history, therefore, knew what it did and said what it did, based only on what it could *see*. Here we see the simultaneously enabling and limiting effects of the epistemic arrangements of knowledge. The importance of the fundamental arrangements of knowledge in the Classical episteme, Foucault suggests,

"does not lie essentially in what they make it possible to see, but in what they hide and in what, by this process of obliteration, they allow to emerge: they screen off anatomy and function, they conceal the organism, in order to raise up before the eyes of those who await the truth the visible relief of forms"⁶⁸

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.137.

Thus, we must not look to the subject of scientific consciousness but to the epistemic arrangements by which it is determined in order to explain periods of both change and relative equilibrium in knowledge.

Alternatively, archaeological analysis of the field of nineteenth-century biology reveals its contingency upon the epistemic analytic of finitude. By substituting the abstract unity of *life function* for Classical character and structure, biology privileges something that is *not* immediately visible or perceptible as the *real* mode of the being of living things. Furthermore, the priority of imperceptible functions like respiration and digestion over visible structures like paws and hoofs altered profoundly the order of identity and difference by which living things were divided up, by making it possible "to relate together totalities of elements without the slightest visible identity,"⁶⁹ that is, to see whales and dolphins, for example, as mammals rather than fish. In the inherent bias toward the invisible depths of things, nineteenth-century biology could not help *but* see living things in a new way which broke apart the Classical order of living things based on visible structures. Once again, the role of the originating, autonomous subject of scientific consciousness is superseded by the determining weight of the nineteenth-century epistemic themes of depth, opacity, and invisibility.

Now, this dependency and contingency of knowledge on underlying and determining epistemic foundations was also suggested to Foucault by the degree of epistemic affinity or resemblance he detected between contemporaneous but otherwise disparate fields of knowledge such as biology, political economy, and philology. All these forms of knowledge privilege the epistemic themes of depth, opacity, and historicity definitive of the analytic of finitude. At the same time, Foucault was struck by

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.265.

how discontinuous these individual fields of knowledge were, at the epistemic level, with historical predecessors in the same field but lying across the epistemic divide between the Classical and Modern age. As a result, nineteenth-century biology had greater epistemic affinities, Foucault claims, for its contemporary counterparts like political economy or philology than it did for its Classical predecessor in natural history⁷⁰.

Similarly, with respect to Classical forms of knowledge, Foucault writes:

"I saw the emergence, between these different figures, of a network of analogies that transcended the traditional proximities: between the classification of plants and the theory of coinage, between the notion of generic character and the analysis of trade, one finds in the Classical sciences isomorphisms that appear to ignore the extreme diversity of the objects under consideration."⁷¹

All of this suggested to Foucault that beneath the substantive heterogeneity of knowledges in a given epoch, there exists a more profound and determining epistemic arrangement common to them and of which the subjects of these knowledges are largely unaware.

Furthermore, the change from one form of knowledge to the next takes place according to events similarly independent of the activity or consciousness of the subject of scientific thought. Cuvier's reordering of the world of living things on the basis of the hierarchy of functions relative to sustaining life "does not reveal a new curiosity directed towards a secret that no one had the interest or courage to uncover, or the possibility of uncovering, before. It is rather, and much more seriously, a mutation in the natural dimension of Western culture"⁷². The same goes, Foucault argues, for the changes witnessed at this time in the shift from the analysis of wealth to political economy, and

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.xxii-xxiii.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.xi.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.138.

from general grammar to philology. In all these cases, periods of both equilibrium and change in fields of knowledge are determined by the epistemic fundamentals of knowledge beneath the level of the consciousness of a culture:

"How were these ways of ordering empiricity - *discourse*, the *table*, *exchange* - eclipsed? [...] What new mode of being must they have received in order to make all these changes possible, and to enable to appear, after scarcely more than a few years, those now familiar forms of knowledge that we have called, since the nineteenth century, *philology*, *biology*, and *economics*? We tend to imagine that if these new domains were defined during the last century, it was simply that a slight increase in the objectivity of knowledge, in the precision of observation, in the rigour of our reasoning, in the organization of scientific research and information - that all this, with the aid of a few fortunate discoveries, themselves helped by a little good luck or genius, enabled us to emerge from the prehistoric age in which knowledge was still stammering out the *Grammaire de Port-Royal*, the classifications of Linnaeus, and the theories of agriculture. But though we may indeed talk of prehistory from the point of view of the rationality of learning, from the point of view of positivities we can speak, quite simply, of history. And it took a fundamental event - certainly one of the most radical that ever occurred in Western culture - to bring about the dissolution of the positivity of Classical knowledge, and to constitute another positivity from which, even now, we have doubtless not entirely emerged."⁷³

Now, what precipitates this momentous change in the epistemic historical *a priori* of knowledge between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Foucault does not actually say. While his analysis is sprinkled with vague references to an "enigmatic," "historical" and "radical" *event*, he did not specify what this event *was*, nor did he think he was capable of doing so at the time.

"What event, what law do they obey, these mutations that suddenly decide that things are no longer perceived, described, expressed, characterized, classified, and known in the same way, [...] For an archaeology of knowledge, this profound breach in the expanse of continuities, though it must be analysed, and minutely so, cannot be 'explained' or even summed up in single word. It is a radical event that is distributed across the entire visible surface of knowledge, and whose signs, shocks, and effects it is possible to follow step by step. Only thought re-apprehending itself at the root of its own history could provide a foundation, entirely free of doubt, for what the solitary truth of this event was in itself."⁷⁴

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.220.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.217-218.

Foucault admitted the shortcomings of his own attempted archaeology of this event:

"It is not always easy to determine what has caused a specific change in a science. [...] Questions like these are often highly embarrassing [...] the role of instruments, techniques, institutions, events, ideologies, and interests is very much in evidence; but one does not know how an articulation so complex and so diverse in composition actually operates. It seemed to me that it would not be prudent to force a solution I felt incapable, I admit, of offering [...] In this work, then, I left the problem of causes to one side..."⁷⁵

If there was one form of causal explanation, however, which Foucault did reject, it was that based on the foundational role of the autonomous, rational, self-present subject of classical humanism.

Finally, with respect to the objects of humanistic knowledge, the argument of The Order of Things effects one final and significant displacement on the subject. According to Foucault, not only are individual sciences in fields like economics or the study of living things the epiphenomenal effects of the epistemic historical *a priori* of a given period, but the very appearance of the human sciences themselves in the nineteenth century reflects not the discovery of Man as a result of a new curiosity but, rather, a rupture at the level of the deep, unconscious structures of thought between the Classical and Modern periods. Prior to the Modern period, in fact, Foucault claims that Man did not even exist to the Renaissance or Classical thinker, since the epistemic conditions necessary for Man, the subject of thought, to be turned into an object of thought were not in place. Man, he claims, "is only a recent invention"⁷⁶. Now, this is not to say that, prior to the nineteenth century, forms of inquiry devoted to the life of humanity did not exist, since sciences like natural history, the analysis of wealth, and general grammar obviously did. When Foucault credits the nineteenth century with posing the question of Man for

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp.xii-xiii.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.xiii.

the first time, the Man in question is a peculiar one. With the penetration of historicity and finitude into the being of everything in experience, including human nature, in the nineteenth-century episteme, the foundations of human knowledge, including our own self-knowledge, are thrown into doubt. This is the inevitable result of the recognition of humanity's fundamental finitude and opacity to itself, which has the effect of situating the subject of thought within a matrix of background practices and cultural grids of perception which determine what it sees, says, and does beneath the level of consciousness, as we know. As a result, Man cannot but become the object of his own thought as a result of ruling epistemic themes of depth, opacity, and historicity. The Man made into an object of thought in the nineteenth century, therefore, is Man as a *subject who knows*, but who is at the same time determined in what he knows by his own finitude as a biological, labouring, and cultural being. Man as an object of thought in the nineteenth century, therefore, constitutes a paradoxical one: an "enslaved sovereign" and "observed spectator"⁷⁷. According to Foucault's archaeological analysis, the analytic of finitude, according to which Man as the subject of knowledge is conceived of as impinged upon by a host of determinations arising from its finite existence gives rise to whole new fields of inquiry into Man as a *finite* being, in hopes that the founding role of Man, now as a "situated subject," might nonetheless be preserved by a thorough analysis and understanding of the forms of determination which bear upon him. Thus, the human sciences arise in the hopes that the displacement of the subject which the finite nature of Man's being and consciousness seem to demand might be offset by a thorough understanding of Man as a finite being. With the emergence of the human sciences, the hope was:

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.312.

"somehow to make this knowledge [...] of man exist so that man could be liberated by it from his alienations, liberated from all the determinations of which he was not the master, so that he could, thanks to this knowledge of himself, become again or for the first time master of himself, self-possessed."⁷⁸

Thus, Foucault claims:

"man - the study of whom is supposed by the naive to be the oldest investigation since Socrates - is probably no more than a kind of rift in the order of things, or, in any case, a configuration whose outlines are determined by the new position he has so recently taken up in the field of knowledge. Whence all the chimeras of the new humanisms, all the facile solutions of an 'anthropology' understood as a universal reflection on man, half-empirical, half-philosophical."⁷⁹

Insofar as the Classical episteme of representation rested on the unproblematic configuration of being, mind, transparency, and language, in which the being of Man as a subject that knows was not in question, it "absolutely exclude[d] anything that could be a 'science of man'" in the nineteenth century sense⁸⁰. Once again, therefore, the fact that Man appeared and was turned into an object of thought in the nineteenth century cannot be attributed to the work of an autonomous subject of thought previously burdened by old mythologies and beliefs. "[A]mong all the mutations that have affected the knowledge of things and their order [...] only one, that which began a century and a half ago[...] has made it possible for man to appear. [...] it was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge."⁸¹

Now, Foucault's analysis reveals that the analytic of finitude produced not one but two historical forms of inquiry: the nineteenth-century human sciences; and their philosophical counterpart in the tradition of philosophical anthropology, or what I call critical humanism - that reflexive and more historically and culturally sensitive tradition

⁷⁸ Foucault, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," in FL, p.36.

⁷⁹ Foucault, OT, p.xxiii.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.311.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.386-387.

of thought which, since the nineteenth century, has acknowledged and taken up the problem of the situatedness of subjectivity and rationality. The archaeological explanation for the emergence of the human sciences imperils traditional history of science, as we know. With his engagement with the philosophical offspring of the analytic of finitude, however, Foucault's work now also begins to take aim at philosophies of the situated subject at the heart of critical humanism, as well.

In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the work of figures like Kant and Hegel on the finite and historically situated nature of reason gave rise to the tradition of philosophical anthropology, which has extended into the twentieth century in such forms as Marxism, existentialism, phenomenology, and Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Consistent with the epistemic framework of the analytic of finitude, the various branches of philosophical anthropology are bound together by, *inter alia*, an acknowledgement of the historicity and situatedness of the subject in opposition to the classical humanist *cogito*. On the other hand, philosophical anthropology treats the discovery of the situatedness of the subject and the historicity of reason and Man as continuous with the Enlightenment's project of demystification. A genuinely enlightened view of the subject constitutes one in which the essential finitude of the subject is acknowledged. Consciousness of Man's finitude, therefore, constitutes the new *vigilance* of reason. However, once the situated, finite nature of subjectivity and reason are conceded, the self-assurance and putative autonomy and objectivity of subjective reason are cast in doubt. If the autonomy of subjective reason is in doubt, so are all its products, including its own self-understanding. Thus, the situated subject, along with the rest of the objects presented to consciousness, take on a new opacity and density. The tradition

of philosophical anthropology was aware of this problem from the beginning, and much of the tradition has been devoted to overcoming it.

The analytic of finitude gives birth to philosophical reflection on finite Man - as the "enslaved sovereign" and "observed spectator" - definitive of the anthropological tradition. Once the analytic of finitude cast the subject's autonomy and self-transparency in doubt, the task of specifying and analyzing the forms of human finitude, in hopes that the subject might be liberated once and for all from them by the establishment of a "grounding finitude," became the most compelling problem and task for philosophy. According to Foucault, however, and in one of the few instances in which Foucault engages with the tradition in sustained fashion and on its own terms, philosophical anthropology's quest for that grounding finitude both reveals a certain philosophically retrograde desire for the cognitive certitude of the *cogito* and produces a ceaseless, ultimately futile and self-defeating analysis of finitude which he likens to an "anthropological sleep"⁸². Foucault rejects the residual Cartesianism he detects in the work of the phenomenologist, Husserl, "which gives absolute priority to the observing subject."⁸³ Foucault pursued this line of criticism in The Archaeology of Knowledge, in which he takes explicit aim at the criticisms launched against The Order of Things by his Marxist humanist opponents, particularly Sartre. From the ranks of these critics, the cry went up that Foucault was "murdering history". "But one must not be deceived," Foucault warned:

"what is being bewailed with such vehemence is not the disappearance of history, but the eclipse of that form of history that was secretly, but entirely related to the synthetic activity of the subject: what is being bewailed is the 'development' (*devenir*) that was to provide the

⁸² Ibid., pp.340-343.

⁸³ Ibid., p.xiv.

sovereignty of the consciousness with a safer, less exposed shelter [...] that ideological use of history by which one tries to restore to man everything that has unceasingly eluded him for over a hundred years. All the treasure of bygone days was crammed into the old citadel of this history [...] it was made the last resting-place of anthropological thought..."⁸⁴

Having said that, Foucault also engages with due philosophical seriousness attempts within the tradition of philosophical anthropology to resolve its inherent tensions. But, according to Foucault, in the course of its attempts to establish the "grounding finitude" of thought philosophical anthropology produces a series of philosophical "doublets" which elaborate the problem of the foundations of knowledge posed by Man's finitude without overcoming it. In the doublet of "the empirical and the transcendental," produced in the work of figures like Kant and Husserl, Man both constitutes and is constituted by the external world, grounding the certainty of knowledge either in the *a priori* categories or the purification of consciousness via reduction, respectively⁸⁵. But if, Foucault writes, man is "that paradoxical figure in which the empirical contents of knowledge necessarily release, of themselves, the conditions that have made them possible, then man cannot posit himself in the immediate and sovereign transparency of a *cogito* [...]". Nor, he continues, "can he inhabit the objective inertia of something that, by rights, does not and never can lead to self-consciousness."⁸⁶

In "the cogito and the unthought"⁸⁷ doublet, Man is simultaneously determined by external forces and, as a result of his awareness of this determination, able to liberate himself from it. Here, Foucault claims, writing with figures like Sartre and Merleau-

⁸⁴ Foucault, Michel, The Archaeology of Knowledge, London, Tavistock, 1972, p.14. Hereinafter cited as AK.

⁸⁵ Foucault, OT, pp.318-322.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.322.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp.322-328.

Ponty in mind, Man is conceived as "a mode of being which accommodates that dimension - always open, never finally delimited, yet constantly traversed - which extends from a part of himself not reflected in a *cogito* to the act of thought by which he apprehends that part."⁸⁸ Yet, how can Man *be* "that life whose web, pulsations, and buried energy constantly exceed the experience that he is immediately given of them?" How can he *be* "the subject of a language that for thousands of years has been formed without him..."⁸⁹ How can the subject master all that is other to it, particularly those aspects of itself, its unthought, such as the unconscious, which it experiences as opaque and other to itself? The theme of the unthought produces the modern *cogito*, whose ceaseless task it becomes to "traverse, duplicate, and reactivate in an explicit form the articulation of thought on everything within, around it, and beneath it, which is not thought"⁹⁰. Yet, with each new insight into the unthought which determines him, as in psychoanalysis, Man himself is more thoroughly dissolved, as we saw in the previous chapter. The analyses of embodiment, the unconscious, or language have only succeeded in revealing that Man in his liberty and self-consciousness does not exist.

Finally, in the doublet of "the retreat-and-return of the origin,"⁹¹ while history is treated as preceding Man, insofar as Man is the phenomenological source of history's unfolding he can master it as well. Thus, in the work of figures like Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, Man can gain access to his original identity as a finite historical being via an analysis of all those historicities which make up his being. And yet, Foucault argues:

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.322.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.323.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.324.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.328-335.

"when he tries to define himself as a living being, he can uncover his own beginning only against the background of a life which itself began long before him; when he attempts to re-apprehend himself as a labouring being, he cannot bring even the most rudimentary forms of such a being to light except within a human space and time which have been previously institutionalized, and previously subjugated by society; and when he attempts to define his essence as a speaking subject, prior to any effectively constituted language, all he ever finds is the previously unfolded possibility of language, and not the stumbling sound, the first word upon the basis of which all languages and even language itself became possible. It is always against a background of the already begun that man is able to reflect on what may serve for him as origin."⁹²

As a result, he continues:

"Far from leading back, or even merely pointing, towards a peak [...] of identity [...] the original in man is that which articulates him from the very outset upon something other than himself; it is that which introduces into his experience contents and forms older than him, which he cannot master; it is that which, by binding him to multiple, intersecting, often mutually irreducible chronologies, scatters him through time and pinions him at the centre of the duration of things. Paradoxically, the original, in man, does not herald the time of his birth, [...] it links him to that which does not have the same time as himself; and it sets free in him everything that is not contemporaneous with him; it indicates ceaselessly, [...] that things began long before him, and that for this very reason, and since his experience is wholly constituted and limited by things, no one can ever assign him an origin."⁹³

According to Foucault, all of these anthropological forms of reflection in which Man is recognized as a being "who lives, speaks, and works in accordance with the laws of an economics, a philology, and a biology," but who also "by a sort of internal torsion and overlapping", is endowed with the ability to "know them and to subject them to total clarification,"⁹⁴ are profoundly paradoxical. They are motivated by a profound urge to establish firm footings for knowledge against the displacements demanded by Man's finite being. In so doing, while it recognizes the situatedness of the subject and rejects the classical theme of representation, in so far as it attempts to liberate the subject from

⁹² Ibid., p.330.

⁹³ Ibid., p.331.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p.310.

the weight of its determinations, philosophical anthropology, ultimately, is still about reaffirming the fundamental character of the subject⁹⁵. As such, the project of philosophical anthropology is really about establishing, for the first time, the genuine *cogito*⁹⁶.

Moreover, as his analysis of Man and his "doubles" attempts to show, the figure of finite Man is so unstable, ambiguous, and paradoxical as to render the project of philosophical anthropology self-defeating; doomed as it is to the "interminable to and fro" of Man and his doubles which take the form of the "monotony of a journey which [...] probably has no end."⁹⁷ In the doublets, the problem of the situated subject is posed with great insight, delicacy, and nuance, but not *solved*. Foucault likens the effects of this analytic of finitude upon thought to an "anthropological sleep," a sleep "so deep that thought experiences it paradoxically as vigilance."⁹⁸ We must, Foucault argues, awaken thought from its slumber in order to "think afresh"⁹⁹. In order to achieve such an uprooting, or the removal of Man as an obstacle to thought, Foucault argues, we must look to the examples of Nietzsche and, among others, the structuralists like Levi-Strauss and Lacan, on the basis of whose work the anthropological framework is "disintegrating before our eyes"¹⁰⁰.

"[...] Nietzsche rediscovered the point at which man and God belong to one another,

⁹⁵ Foucault, Michel, "How an 'Experience-Book' is Born?," interview in Foucault, Michel, Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori, trans. James Goldstein and James Cascaito, New York: Semiotext(e), 1991, pp.30-31. Hereinafter cited as RM.

⁹⁶ Foucault's interpretation of the Cartesian biases of the work of, say, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, has been confirmed by many others commentators, including Lebrun, MacCann, and Descombes. See Chapter 2, fn65.

⁹⁷ Foucault, OT, p.314.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.341.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.342.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.342.

at which the death of the second is synonymous with the disappearance of the first, and at which the promise of the superman signifies first and foremost the immanence of the death of man. In this, Nietzsche, offering this future to us as both promise and task, marks the threshold beyond which contemporary philosophy can begin thinking again [...] the end of man [...] is the return of the beginning of philosophy. It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man's disappearance."¹⁰¹

Taking inspiration from the lessons of Nietzsche, Foucault concludes his critique of philosophical anthropology with this taunt:

"To all those who still wish to talk about man, about his reign or his liberation, to all those who still ask themselves questions about what man is in his essence, to all those who wish to take him as their starting-point in their attempts to reach the truth [...] who refuse to think without immediately thinking that it is man who is thinking, to all these warped and twisted forms of reflection we can answer only with a philosophical laugh."¹⁰²

And yet, Foucault responds with more than this. Archaeological analysis attempts to displace not only Man conceived as the subject of thought in both the classical and critical forms of humanism, but to undermine the putative centrality of the very question of Man which thought has taken as its most enduring and compelling for the last two centuries. By subjecting the epistemic analytic of finitude which generated the question of Man in the first place to archaeological analysis, demonstrating the contingency of both the question of Man as well as the very epistemic arrangements on which it is based, Foucault hopes to disturb the centuries-old sense of urgency, gravity, and necessity which has been attached to the question. Such disturbance constitutes one component of the form of "thinking afresh" both against and beyond humanism, which Foucault struggled to articulate throughout his career and which we will examine in Chapter Six.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.342.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp.342-343.

Foucault's stunning claim that, "as a problem for human knowledge, man is a recent invention," and that this problem may well disappear once more, constituted a radicalization of his attack on humanism and the figure of Man. No longer was his work aimed solely at what might be considered, from the Continental perspective, the relatively easy target of naive scientific humanism and the epistemological theme of "representation". By articulating a critique not only of the crude subjectivism of Enlightenment epistemology, but of the "anthropological slumber" induced by the very question of Man as posed within the "analytic of finitude," Foucault's anti-humanism clearly reached out to embrace the more reflexive and critical forms of humanism manifested in philosophical anthropology, including existentialism and phenomenology. No doubt these approaches constitute the least naive and reflexively most "advanced" positions *within* the tradition of humanism, yet in so far as they are committed to the aporetic project of the foundation of knowledge upon the ever more thoroughgoing analysis of the representing subject's finitude, they remain epistemically rooted in humanism, in the original sense of the "metaphysics of subjectivity". Meanwhile, what the positive human sciences have succeeded in doing, for the most part, is reveal not humanity's deepest secret or essence hidden by historically sedimented layers of its modes of production or cultural sensibilities but, rather, the secret that Man *has* no nature or essence. Each time a new level of determination is discovered, Foucault claims, the human sciences have probed deeper, with the effect that we have come not closer to Man's essence but to the realization that Man does not exist. It is in this archaeological sense of critical humanism's futility and dead-end that Foucault welcomed the "death of man". The Man whose death he looked forward to was that figure of thought around which the analysis of the representing subject's finitude endlessly revolves, resulting in a

kind of "anthropological sleep". What is put to sleep, and increasingly imperiled by the persistence of humanism is the activity of *thinking* itself. Only by exposing the contingency of not only the metaphysical subject, but of the very centrality of the questioning of Man's being central to critical humanism, can thought be shaken from this form of sleep. Revealing the epistemic contingency of the questioning of Man's finitude constitutes but a first, tentative effort on Foucault's part to rouse thought from its "sleep".

With the appearance of the essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault signalled that his analysis of the conditions of possibility for knowledge would take a new tack. The Nietzsche essay laid out the terms of a *genealogical* analysis of knowledge in which the *non-discursive* and *strategic* conditions underlying the emergence of forms of knowledge become central. The archaeological concern with the "cultural unconscious" of knowledge rooted in the discursive rules of equilibrium and change endogenous to its epistemic grounds is set aside in favour of an emphasis upon the forms and relations of power, the conflicts and struggles, and strategic interests which give rise to knowledge in a given epoch. Throughout the 1970s, Foucault's analyses of the modern human sciences stress their contingency upon the emergence of a host of strategic conditions and events involving the interests of states, classes, emerging professions, and various marginalized groups and forms of life. In this work Foucault was particularly preoccupied with the sciences of medicine, psychiatry, criminology, penology, and sexology, but it also advanced a number of general propositions with respect to the origins of the human sciences as a whole. According to Foucault, along with that of the rest of the human sciences, the appearance of the sciences of criminology, penology, and sexology was contingent upon a number of strategic

developments broadly connected with a shift in the nature and requirements of governing in the regimes of the West beginning in the seventeenth century. Foucault recounts the emergence and spread of theories and practices of statecraft in which traditional monarchical concerns with questions of sovereignty, legality, legitimacy, and territory were eclipsed by concerns with social order, well-being, prosperity, security, and the optimization of the state and all its forces. Foucault identifies a number of such forms or rationalities of governing, including: *raison d'etat*, "police," "discipline," "biopower," and "governmentality". Given the state's new preoccupation with ensuring order and prosperity, the concerns of governing shift from problems of law, sovereignty, and obedience to an interest in norms of conduct and patterns of regularity and irregularity in the daily lives of its citizens, and in norms of health as well as rates of mortality and disease within the population. As a result, the nature of positive state action changes as well, from a concern with maintaining and fortifying legality and monarchical sovereignty to one of identifying, classifying, correcting, and punishing sources of abnormality, pathology, and irregularity which threaten the order, prosperity, well being, and, ultimately, security of the society as a whole. This political rationality also gives rise to state demands for the production of knowledge with respect to all of its forces - human and non-human - in the form of both a totalized cadastral mapping of the society and its resources as well as an individuating, case knowledge of each inhabitant as they relate to and deviate from statistical norms and averages within the population as a whole. It is as a consequence of this historic shift at the level of the political rationality of modern power, Foucault contends, that the human sciences emerged in the first place. Let us begin with Foucault's analysis of the conditions of possibility for the human sciences in Discipline and Punish.

Discipline and Punish offers a genealogical analysis of not only the rise of the prison as the almost exclusive form of punishment in nineteenth-century France, but of the science of criminology, as well as psychiatry and sociology, which grew up around it. The immediate condition of emergence for criminology was a shift in the target and practice of punishment in the late-eighteenth century from "the body of the condemned" who committed an illegal *act*, to the "soul" of the offender in which resided a dangerous *disposition*¹⁰³. What became of issue in this new penal theory was as much one's *nature* as one's guilt. The delinquent and criminal nature of the offender, which called for "correction", replaced the individual perpetrator of criminal *acts*, to whom "legal punishment" was applied. With this shift of concern from the act of transgression to the whole ensemble of biographical considerations behind the scene, to the disposition of the convict, a whole new science of the criminal disposition, nature, inclination, and prognosis for correction is called forth in the form of criminology. Proper judgement and treatment of criminality becomes a matter of assessing each individual "case": "the knowledge of the criminal, one's estimation of him, what is known about the relations between him, his past and his crime, and what might be expected of him in the future."¹⁰⁴ Penal practice, meanwhile, was reoriented to "correct, reclaim, [and] 'cure'" through techniques of improvement designed to eliminate even the thought of wrong-doing, as opposed to the traditional function of punishment as "the strict expiation of evil-doing"¹⁰⁵. But the shift in penal attention from the *body* of the condemned to the *soul* of the offender summoned a whole new object of inquiry and potential body of biographical

¹⁰³ Foucault, DP, p.16

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.18.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.10.

knowledge. Access to the offender's soul called for new institutional arrangements and punitive techniques for producing the truth of the offender and his nature.

In practical terms, Foucault traces the origins of this new "gentle way in punishment" to a drive for a more efficient, effective, and certain system of punishment as a result of underlying economic and political changes occurring in late-eighteenth-century France. The impetus for reform had its origins, Foucault argues, in the emergence of the new bourgeois economy and growing fears of the "criminality of fraud" over that of "blood"¹⁰⁶. The interest of penal reformers was in making punishment more effective and "generalized" in order to reduce incidences of fraud and petty theft. A new system for the punishment of offences, especially those against property, was called for. A decreased use of violence against the body was accompanied by a general increase in surveillance and a heightened intolerance of petty crime - less violence, but more *policing* in general¹⁰⁷. Reformers objected not to the violence of pre-modern forms of punishment like public torture but to their *irregularity* and *inefficiency* within a legal system that punished spectacularly but intermittently, sometimes too harshly, and at times not at all. The new mercantilist, bourgeois economy could not tolerate such a "bad economy of power" in the penal system¹⁰⁸. Penal reformers, then, sought means of ensuring *generalized* punishment which would punish *better* and more effectively in the face of widespread petty illegality. "The economic changes of the eighteenth century," Foucault argues elsewhere, "made it necessary to ensure the circulation of effects of power through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.75-77.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.76-8.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.79.

their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions.”¹⁰⁹ Foucault locates the birth of criminology here amidst this reorganization of the nineteenth-century economy of the power to punish.

The prison was soon recognized as providing the spatial and institutional conditions which afforded minute access to and knowledge of the individual. Moreover, the prison as reformatory was a product of growing expertise in the use of architecture, spatial arrangements, and relations of visibility and invisibility within institutions in order to manipulate and alter the behaviour and conduct of those confined to them. The ultimate objective of prison reform was not simply to punish the offender's illegal acts but to ensure his or her good conduct in future by removing, via the process of correction, even the thought of wrong-doing in the future. As a result, the emergence of criminology is owed not to discovery of the humanity and corrigibility of offenders thanks to the humane sensitivities of science but, rather, to a number of powerful strategic forces and interests.

The shift in penal concern and practice to the soul of the offender, to the “nature” of the criminal, gives birth to new sciences of “man” - criminology and penology - which actually depend upon the prison, or at least prison-like practices, in order to accumulate and produce knowledge of their objects. By drawing attention to the relation between this shift, its causes, and the emergence of the human sciences, Foucault challenges the traditional understanding of criminology and penology as progressive, humane and emancipatory discourses in relation to the barbaric and inhuman practices of pre-nineteenth-century punishment. The human sciences of criminology and penology, far from discovering the “humanity” of the offender, and attempting, through penitentiary

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, Michel, “The Eye of Power,” interview in PK, pp.151-152.

technique, to rehabilitate and free them, had as their very conditions of emergence the confinement of persons to prison. Criminology and penology are implicated from the very outset in the confinement of offenders to prisons and their subjection to coercive spatial arrangements, regimens, and practices which were the methods of punishment as well as the necessary conditions for the accumulation of humanistic knowledge of 'criminal man'.

Furthermore, Discipline and Punish offers a genealogical explanation for the emergence of the human sciences as a whole. Like the sciences of criminology and penology, many other human sciences, including sociology, psychiatry, and educational psychology, owe their emergence and development to strategic conditions of possibility and institutions and practices marked by the prison. Discipline and Punish describes the seepage and spread of disciplinary techniques from the prison to a host of other institutions and practical contexts in eighteenth and nineteenth-century society, including hospitals, schools, factories, poor-houses, and military barracks¹¹⁰. For the emerging disciplinary form of power in the nineteenth century, Foucault claims, the problem of governing came to be seen increasingly in terms of cultivating habitual "norms" of conduct and behaviour, as opposed to simply enforcing obedience to the law¹¹¹. Replacing the problem of disorder was that of abnormality or pathology, which threatened the disciplinary objectives of optimizing the forces of the state as well as ensuring order. We will take up this argument in considerably more detail in Chapter Five, in which we discuss his overall characterization of political modernity. Foucault also locates in this new form of power the strategic conditions of possibility for the very concept of the

¹¹⁰ Foucault, DP, p.138.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp.177-184.

human sciences. Hence, not only criminology, but the human sciences in general are seen by Foucault as deeply invested in a political rationale having little to do with humane or emancipatory interests.

"These sciences, which have so delighted our 'humanity' for over a century, have their technical matrix in petty, malicious minutiae of the disciplines and their investigations. These investigations are perhaps to psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy, criminology, and so many other strange sciences, what the terrible power of investigation was to the calm knowledge of the animals, the plants and the earth."¹¹²

Foucault attributes to the other human sciences, including economics and sociology, similar disciplinary conditions of possibility and methods as those of criminology. The correction and normalization of society called for new and exhaustive forms of knowledge, like that produced in the prison, offering a simultaneously totalizing overview of society and individualizing snapshots of its members - *omnes* and *singulatum*. As a result, Foucault argues, the lessons of the prison, as an institution capable of producing normalizing effects of power and statistically useful knowledge simultaneously, were gradually incorporated into other institutions. Disciplinary techniques long in existence prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became so widespread across institutions as to constitute a whole disciplinary generalization. This introduction of disciplinary techniques of observation and subjection into increasing areas of human activity always had the effect of producing new knowledge. "[B]y being combined and generalized," Foucault argues,

"they attained a level at which the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process [...] any growth of power could give rise in them to possible branches of knowledge; it was this link, proper to the technological systems, that made possible within the disciplinary element the formation of clinical medicine, psychiatry, child psychology, educational psychology, the rationalization of labour."¹¹³

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.226.

Thus, if objects of knowledge like "the poor," "the unemployed," "the truant," or the "irresponsible parent," came into increasingly sharp focus in the nineteenth century, they did so less as a result of the curiosity of scientists or the humanity of philanthropists than as effects of the new disciplinary form of power. "Slowly, in the course of the classical age," Foucault writes,

"we see the construction of those 'observatories' of human multiplicity [...] Side by side with the major technology of the telescope, the lens and the light beam [...] there were the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen; using techniques of subjection and methods of exploitation, an obscure area of light and the visible was secretly preparing a new knowledge of man."¹¹⁴

Every extension of disciplinary techniques into new areas of human activity and conduct called for the production of knowledge, agents through whom to pursue it, and new unities or objectivities - "man", "delinquency", "deviancy" - rendered instrumentally useful to power. The human sciences did not emerge only out the prison, but their emergence and operation were intrinsically bound up with disciplinary concerns about order, regularity, and normality, and the techniques and institutions of constraint, confinement and subjection which arose out of them. "I am not saying," writes Foucault,

"that the human sciences emerged out of the prison. But, if they have been able to be formed and to produce so many profound changes in the episteme, it is because they have been conveyed by a specific and new modality of power; a certain policy of the body, a certain way of rendering groups of men docile and useful. [...] The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible. Knowable man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called) is the object-effect of this analytical investment, of this domination-observation."¹¹⁵

All of these technologies of knowledge constitution had a certain political investment related to domination, Foucault insists. More so than ideology, it was at this level of

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.224.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.170-1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.305.

technology that the political investment of the human sciences reveals itself. And we find Foucault offering a kind of strategic corollary to the epistemic explanation for the emergence of Man as an object of knowledge he offered in The Order of Things. Knowledge of "man" was gathered in the nineteenth century by the technical means of discipline - observation, confinement, coercive individuation, and objectification. "It is not simply," then, "at the level of consciousness, of representations and in what one thinks one knows, but at the level of what makes possible the knowledge that is transformed into political investment."¹¹⁶ At the general level, then, Foucault establishes the political investment of the human sciences as existing in the coextensiveness of their emergence with and on the basis of the prison and other prison-like disciplinary institutions.

In the The History of Sexuality Foucault extends the metatheoretical proposition explored in Discipline and Punish, according to which the human sciences emerged as a result, and in response to the needs of, the increasingly dominant political rationality of liberal statecraft and governance. Along with the problem of order and security associated with the concerns of "police," there emerged in the nineteenth century a growing awareness of society as a "population," in the biological sense, with specific regularities and pathologies with implications, for better or worse, for the overall prosperity, health, and well-being of all¹¹⁷. Thus, along with the task of managing and securing the forces of the state against threats of disorder was added the imperative of

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.185.

¹¹⁷ Foucault, HS, p.142.

protecting and optimizing the biological life of the population. "[T]he management of this population," Foucault writes:

"required, among other things, a health policy capable of diminishing infant mortality, preventing epidemics, and bringing down the rates of endemic diseases, of intervening in living conditions in order to alter them and impose standards on them (whether this involved nutrition, housing, or urban planning), and of ensuring adequate medical facilities and services."¹¹⁸

Foucault gives the name "biopolitics" to this new aspect of liberal governance, which "tends to treat the 'population' as a mass of living and coexisting beings who represent particular biological and pathological traits and who thus come under specific knowledge and technologies."¹¹⁹ Where the chief concern of "police" was the problem of order, "biopolitics" concerns itself with the administration and optimization of "life" conceived of in biological terms¹²⁰. All those aspects of daily life which impact upon the health and biological security of the population - sexuality, birth rates, living arrangements, disease, hygiene, housing, and demographics - become targets of biopolitical concern and intervention as a result. Biopolitics may still be understood, however, in terms of the general theme of police, as a *medizinische Polizei*, devoted to "the management of state forces"¹²¹.

Sexual conduct, in particular, became the privileged target of biopolitical manipulation and control in the nineteenth century. Concerns about sexuality intensified in the nineteenth century, thanks in part to eighteenth-century medicine, as the sexual conduct of individuals was increasingly viewed as ramifying across a broad range of

¹¹⁸ Foucault, Michel, "Security, Territory, Population," in Foucault, Michel, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954 - 1984, Volume I, James Rabinow ed., New York: The New Press, 1997, p.71. Hereinafter cited as EST.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.71.

¹²⁰ Foucault, HS, pp.136-145.

¹²¹ Foucault, "Security, Territory, Population," p.71.

biopolitical interests, including population growth, disease and epidemics, public health and morality, marriage and family, and urban overcrowding¹²². Biopolitical interest in sex received impetus from a growing medical consensus around sex conduct as a prolific source of a variety of individual and social maladies. According to Foucault, in fact, prior to the nineteenth century, "sexuality," as a discrete scientific unity, did not exist. Foucault attributes the objectification of "sexuality" into a discursive and strategic unity referring to the sexual tendencies, conduct, and identity of individuals, to the biopolitical state's need for some mechanism or apparatus, (Foucault calls it a *dispositif*), by which to manage and administer the life and health of the population. Just as the strategic unity of "delinquency" was deployed to heighten popular vigilance around the problem of disorder, and to neutralize resistance to the spread of disciplinary forms of power, Foucault claims that the strategic unity of sexuality was "implanted" and circulated in the social body in order to increase popular awareness and vigilance around sexual conduct and deviance¹²³. An explosion of interest in sex in the nineteenth century gave rise to a whole new field of scientific and medico-legal intervention into the lives of individuals and groups. These interventions took the form of injunctions to speak of one's sex, as well as mechanisms of surveillance and regulation designed to identify and correct "abnormal" behaviour, including promiscuity, incest, masturbation, and "perversion". Foucault places the human sciences, medicine and psychiatry in particular, at the centre of coercive mechanisms of "incitement" and "implantation" designed to produce discourse and knowledge regarding the sexual conduct of the population while achieving

¹²² Foucault, HS, pp.146-147.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp.36-49.

effects of power simultaneously¹²⁴. These sciences prompted and recorded an explosion of discourse about sex, on the basis of which new "objectivities" of sexuality were fabricated and strewn across the social field - the "Malthusian couple," the "onanistic child," the "frigid, hysterical" woman, and the homosexual "pervert"¹²⁵. Sensational cases of "perversion," "homosexuality," and "hermaphroditism" functioned to spread moral panic, and justified the interventions of power, in the forms of police, educators, physicians, and philanthropic organizations, into the sexual lives of everyone. The existence of such threats and perversions also had the effect of "responsibilizing" the rest of society in relation to them, of making neighbours responsible for observing and reporting any abnormal sexual behaviour on each other's part, of making parents responsible for the conduct of children, and so on. Thus, Foucault argues, the unity of sexuality must be seen as "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power [...] endowed with great instrumentality: [...] and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies."¹²⁶ The regularities and dangers in the sexual life of the population served as new justifications and surfaces for biopower, as new objectivities within the social body on which to latch hold. Now, the strategic deployment and function served by the scientific unity of "sexuality" is the subject of detailed discussion in Chapter Five, so we will not examine it in any further detail here. Suffice to say that, as with the analysis of "criminality" and "delinquency" offered in Discipline and Punish, The History of Sexuality offers a genealogical analysis of the emergence of the science of "sexuality" from which the subject of scientific

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp.17-49.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.44.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.103.

consciousness has been displaced. When "sexuality" emerged as a new objectivity for scientific study in the nineteenth century, it did so not as the result of the discovery by physicians at of the time of some previously hidden unity obscured by the timidity and prudishness of their predecessors but, rather, as the result of strategic conditions of possibility related to a new biopolitical rationality of governance which demanded the objectification and "discursification" of sex in order to operate.

Foucault's archaeological and genealogical analyses of knowledge in general and of the human sciences in particular were aimed, as we have seen, at displacing or decentring the humanistic subject of thought or scientific consciousness. Archaeology and genealogy debunk the generative mythology of Man as the subject of his own thought and knowledge by revealing the extent to which the latter is contingent upon epistemic and strategic conditions of possibility which determine, beneath the level of consciousness, the objects of knowledge which present themselves in a given epoch. The main target of this anti-humanist displacement of the subject of thought is classical humanism's overly continuist, progressivist, and subject-centred account of the history of thought and knowledge and, to a lesser extent, the various forms of modern depth hermeneutics and the analysis of finitude, by which thinkers from Kant to Merleau-Ponty have attempted to ward off the "death of the subject" implied by the recognition of its essential finitude. Just as Foucault's work demonstrated a consistent preoccupation with dispersing the unity of Man as a historically constant and originary identity susceptible to capture in knowledge, as we saw in the previous chapter, so too does it reveal a persistent interest in debunking the myth of Man as the autonomous, self-present subject of his own thought and knowledge.

iv) The Liquidation of the Subject?

In assessing Foucault's anti-humanist critique of Man as the subject of knowledge, we might begin by setting aside one genre of criticism based on an especially caricatured portrayal of that critique. I am speaking, in particular, of the view that Foucault's intention was to *liquidate* or *eradicate* the subject of thought, that is, to abandon all reference to a thinking subject or consciousness in the analysis of knowledge. Such a view has been aggressively asserted by Luc Ferry and Alain Renault, for example, in their book, French Philosophy of the Sixties. Ferry and Renault argue that, along with figures like Derrida and Lyotard, Foucault's work "massively denounces[s] *all* subjectivity,"¹²⁷ such that it becomes impossible for us to retrieve or thematize the survival of subjective consciousness or agency of any kind, even one that is clearly not metaphysical. This hyperbolic misreading of Foucault is simply not supported by more careful reading of his analysis of subjectivity. As far as the analysis and critique of knowledge goes, if there is any subject whose eradication or liquidation he seeks, it is that of metaphysical classical humanism. The main purpose of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical analyses of knowledge was to displace or decentre the putatively autonomous, rational, and self-transparent subject of thought from explanations for the development of knowledge. The subject whose death he eagerly anticipates is "the Subject in capital letters"¹²⁸. Indeed, Ferry and Renault themselves acknowledge the value of this "questioning of the metaphysical foundations of

¹²⁷ Ferry, Luc and Alain Renault, French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism, trans. Mary H.S. Cattani, Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990, pp.30-31. Emphasis in original.

¹²⁸ Foucault, "The Birth of a World," p.61.

traditional naive humanism,"¹²⁹ and its account of the failures and even the dangers of such humanistic shibboleths as progress and total mastery¹³⁰. There is no question in Foucault's work, however, of eliminating or eradicating the subject of thought or agency altogether. In The Order of Things Foucault proposes archaeology as an attempt to explain the development of knowledge without resort to the metaphysical, autonomous subject of classical humanist philosophy. But he very explicitly declares that an archaeological analysis of knowledge does not exhaust all possible ones, and he leaves room for the role, "very much in evidence," played by technology, institutions, ideologies, and theories, but simply wonders whether such explanations are sufficient by themselves¹³¹. "Discourse in general," he concedes, "and scientific discourse in particular, is so complex a reality that we not only can, but should, approach it at different levels and with different methods."¹³² Archaeology is intended as a rejection and displacement of only one form of explanation, that is, the naive, metaphysical one which "gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity - which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness."¹³³ Thus, while archaeology is clearly hostile to the metaphysics of subjectivity, it is not intended, *pace* Ferry and Renaut, to liquidate subjectivity *tout court*.

¹²⁹ Ferry and Renaut, French Philosophy of the Sixties, p.xxviii.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.xxvi.

¹³¹ Foucault, OT, p.xiii.

¹³² Ibid., p.xiv.

¹³³ Ibid., p.xiv.

Similarly, criticisms that Foucault liquidates the subject have also been leveled at his genealogical works¹³⁴. Foucault's preservation of the subject as a thinking and active agent is clearer in his genealogical works. While he argues that both knowledge and subjectivity are inextricably linked to power, Foucault does not reduce them to it. Neither knowledge nor subjectivity are power "all the way down". The subject, in particular, is a relational and constituted one that is situated and fabricated within the constraints of power relations. That said, the subject, in Foucault's view, is not nothing. A genealogy of knowledge and the modern subject is, as Alan Schrift writes, "a matter of depriving the subject of its role as originator and analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse and power."¹³⁵ Foucault's subject constitutes a "fabricated reality," one which remains a thinking and desiring agent, which is not to suggest that it thinks or desires whatever it pleases under conditions of its own choosing. While Foucault wishes to displace the subject of philosophy, he still takes very seriously inquiry into the active subject and the self which is a product of subjectivating practices. If the subject were nothing but power all the way down, what would be the point of studying it? And yet, particularly toward the latter part of his career, Foucault embarked upon an ambitious project to study the subject as a real product of certain *subjectivating* practices. These took the form of the techniques of domination studied in works like Discipline and Punish as well as certain "technologies of the self," in which the subject engaged in

¹³⁴ See, for example: Fraser, Nancy, Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp.17-54; and Habermas, Jurgen, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," in Habermas, Jurgen, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1987, pp.266-293.

¹³⁵ Schrift, Alan, Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism, New York: Routledge, 1995, p.47.

certain practices to transform and give shape to itself, which were the subject of his last two works on sexuality. The questions posed during a course given at the College de France indicates Foucault's recognition of the importance of the subject:

"How was the subject established, at different moments and in different institutional contexts [...] How were the experience that one may have of oneself and the knowledge that one forms of oneself organized according to certain schemes. How were these schemes defined, valorized, recommended, imposed? [...] The guiding thread that seems most useful for this inquiry is constituted by what one might call the 'techniques of the self,' which is to say, the procedures, which no doubt exist in every civilization, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends..."¹³⁶

Refusals, like Ferry and Renaut's, to see Foucault's subject as a subject *per se* stem from their tendency, shared by many of Foucault's critics, to read the role of power in his work monolithically, as absorptive of all else.

In addition to the room left for subjectivity in Foucault's archaeological and genealogical analyses of knowledge, his views on the nature and possibilities of thinking, today, also suggest room for the efficacy of some kind of thinking subject. The subject left intact by Foucault is a thoroughly contingent and situated one¹³⁷. In place of the metaphysical subject of knowledge, Foucault suggests a subject that is "not one but split, not sovereign but dependent, not an absolute origin but a function ceaselessly modified."¹³⁸ Nonetheless, such a subject continues to engage in thought as what

¹³⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Subjectivity and Truth," in EST, p.87.

¹³⁷ There is some irony here, given Foucault's hostility to this notion in The Order of Things, as we saw above. However, I do not think Foucault intended this critique to question the fact that the subject is a situated one so much as to disturb the sense of urgency associated with all those philosophies which offer putative solutions to the problems for the foundation of knowledge engendered by it. Somewhat like the tradition of critical humanism, Foucault treats the subject as a situated one and promotes inquiry into the forces which have made it what it is. But in Foucault's hands, such an analysis seeks to jettison the question of Man, of what he is in his finitude, in favour of the question of how we became what we are as a precondition for becoming something else, something other than Man.

¹³⁸ Foucault, The Birth of a World," p.61.

Foucault calls "a practice of freedom". Foucault claims, and here he comes very close to positing a universal trait, that as humans we are fundamentally "thinking beings"¹³⁹. This almost primal activity of thought is not, however, the same kind of activity as that in which the metaphysical subject engages. Where the latter is conceived of in terms of autonomy, adequacy, representation, or correspondence, Foucault conceives of the kind of critical thought this subject can engage in as an effort to think, transgress, and escape the limits of current knowledge and practice, which is not, of course, to suggest that subjects are free to think as they please. In the essay, "What is Enlightenment?," Foucault suggests a way of conceiving of critique or "enlightenment" as, following Kant, a kind of *Ausgang* or exit from the tutelage of established structures of perception and thought¹⁴⁰. The subject of critique, as opposed to the traditional subject of philosophy, thinks against the limits and constraints of the ways in which things are currently thought, said, and done, especially when their lack of necessity is revealed to us as a result of a host of developments, discursive and non-discursive, which gradually shake us loose of them. "Thought [...]," he suggests,

"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. To say that the study of thought is the analysis of a freedom does not mean one is dealing with a formal system that has reference only to itself."¹⁴¹

Neither is this subject free to think the limits of, or the possibility of going beyond, anything it chooses because, "for a domain of action, a behaviour, to enter the field of

¹³⁹ Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals," p.148. See also the interview, "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault," in Martin, *Technologies of the Self*, p.14.

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?" in EST, p.305.

¹⁴¹ Foucault, Michel, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations," in EST, p.117.

thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it. These elements result from social, economic, or political processes."¹⁴² Foucault included among those factors currently enabling his own thinking of our current limits the rise and influence of "countersciences" like linguistics, psychoanalysis, and ethnography¹⁴³, and the increasingly vocal emergence of "subjugated knowledges" and experiences in the anti-psychiatry and prisoners' rights movements. His own archaeological and genealogical analyses constituted attempts to loosen things up a little "by restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability;" excavations of the "ground that is once more stirring under our feet."¹⁴⁴

v) Methodological Considerations

Having said that, serious methodological and metatheoretical difficulties remain. Critics and sympathizers alike have pointed to a number of unresolved, perhaps unresolvable, tensions and problems with the methods Foucault adopted for decentring the subject from the analysis of knowledge. The methodological shortcomings of archaeology, in particular, appear so grave that Foucault himself eventually disavowed some of the more grandiose claims he made on its behalf. Critics and sympathizers alike find fault with archaeology's claim to offer an outsider or ethnographic perspective on modern culture, and on the unconscious structures which determine all forms of knowledge, and with its apparent inability to account or provide causal explanations for

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.117.

¹⁴³ Foucault, OT, pp.373-386.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xxiv.

the epistemic changes it identifies. Critics like Habermas and Axel Honneth, for example, are dubious of Foucault's attempt to artificially distance himself from the epistemic and cultural horizons of modernity, and wonder how it is that archaeology gains a perspective from which to reveal the epistemic substrate of all forms of knowledge which is itself contextless and undetermined. By claiming to achieve such an "ethnographic" perspective on the epistemic fundamentals of the very horizon of cultural modernity out of which his own discourse emerges, Honneth notes, "Foucault places on himself a substantial burden of proof [...]":

"[...] he must be able to show how sociological research in connection with an investigation of its own cultural context is supposed to be capable of such a perceptual estrangement, since in its own understanding of reality, in its conceptual framework and logical convictions, it is initially so closely bound up with the cultural context to be examined."¹⁴⁵

Ultimately, Honneth concludes, Foucault's efforts to acquit archaeology falter under the weight of this burden. Habermas appraises the results of Foucault's archaeology more harshly, arguing that his attempt at achieving such a culturally neutral perspective was doomed from the outset to produce, ironically, an arbitrary "presentism". By eschewing any hermeneutical preunderstanding of the meaning of discursive events and totalities, Habermas argues, the point of view of the archaeologist becomes the sole point of departure, with the result that the past is understood exclusively in terms of the present situation of the archaeologist¹⁴⁶.

Foucault was sufficiently self-aware to acknowledge that his own views were constrained to some extent by the prevailing epistemic fundamentals of discourse. He

¹⁴⁵ Honneth, Axel, The Critique of Power: Reflexive Stages in the Critical Theory of Society, trans. Kenneth Baynes, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992, p.109.

¹⁴⁶ Habermas, Jürgen, "Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," in The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1987, pp.276-78.

concedes that the insights of archaeology itself are contingent upon epistemic factors bound up with his own time. "It would hardly behove me, [...]" he writes in the Foreword to The Order of Things, "to claim that my discourse is independent of conditions and rules of which I am very largely unaware, and which determine other work that is being done today."¹⁴⁷ Indeed, a number of archaeology's chief methodological propositions appear to imitate some of the very humanist gestures Foucault was attempting to escape from. For example, when Foucault claims that "[u]nderneath what science itself knows there is something it does not know," alluding to the forces of finitude bearing upon it, and that it was the laws of these determinations that were "what I have tried to bring to light,"¹⁴⁸ he appears to reproduce the theme of "the cogito and the unthought" from the very analytic of finitude he problematized in The Order of Things. In The Archaeology of Knowledge he more or less admits his own failure to address this problem adequately: "[F]or the moment, and as far ahead as I can see, my discourse, far from determining the locus in which it speaks, is avoiding the ground on which it could find support."¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, he claims an ability to begin to think the limits of modern culture which he attributes to a host of complex developments, including the rise of the "countersciences" like ethnography, psychoanalysis, and linguistics.

As a method for unmasking the dependence of knowledge and truth on deep, unconscious epistemic structures, archaeology also suffers from a certain self-referentiality, according to its critics. If the claims of archaeology are acceded to, what implications do they have for archaeology itself as a form of knowledge? If every form of

¹⁴⁷ Foucault, OT, p.xiv.

¹⁴⁸ Foucault, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," pp.39-40.

¹⁴⁹ Foucault, AK, p.205.

knowledge constitutes little more than a discursive epiphenomenon of more deeply rooted epistemic structures, must not the same follow for archaeology itself? This goes to the very truth or validity of archaeological analysis itself. Must it not be the case that, rather than a fundamental new insight into knowledge which offers privileged access to the epistemic rules for the formation and disintegration of all systems of knowledge, archaeology itself reflects simply the current conditions of possibility for knowledge at a time of considerable epistemic instability? Without denying the influence of conditions and rules of which he was unaware, Foucault's own claims on behalf of archaeology were, for a time, more ambitious than this. His archaeological works are filled with overweening claims to have uncovered the deep structures and silent configurations of knowledge, on the basis of which much of the history of science and ideas could be read as little more than "a surface appearance"¹⁵⁰. If, however, the insights of archaeological analysis are turned back on archaeology itself, then any claims that it provides a privileged insight into the true nature of all systems of knowledge are substantially weakened. Moreover, if such claims to privileged insight are steadfastly maintained, Foucault fails to explain in convincing fashion how it is that his methodology and the knowledge it provides escape from the limits and determinants governing all other systems and forms of knowledge. It is one thing to adopt an alternative cultural perspective as a means to achieve a certain critical distance from one's own. Aspiring and claiming to achieve an analytically neutral perspective outside *all* cultural horizons, one which purports to hold the master key to differentiating one from another, as well as the analytical and conceptual resources for understanding them all, is quite another. In this respect, some of Foucault's more grandiose claims on behalf of archaeology

¹⁵⁰ Foucault, OT, p.xxii.

contradicted his own convictions about the naivete and dangers of claims to achieve such context-independent perspectives on culture. "The claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall program of another [...] way of thinking [...]" threatens to revive certain dangerous traditions which he rejected himself¹⁵¹. In the conclusion to The Archaeology of Knowledge Foucault appears content to live with these tensions and instabilities regarding the methodological coherence and truth-status of archaeology. It may well turn out, he concedes:

"that archaeology is the name given to a part of our contemporary theoretical conjuncture. Whether this conjuncture is giving rise to an individualizable discipline, whose initial characteristics and overall limits are being outlined here, or whether it is giving rise to a set of problems whose present coherence does not mean that it will not be taken up later elsewhere, in a different way, at a higher level, or using different methods, I am in no position at the moment to decide. And, to tell the truth, it is probably not up to me to decide. I accept that my discourse may disappear with the figure that has borne it so far."¹⁵²

And, indeed, in moments of sober reflection Foucault conceded that we "must give up hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge (*connaissance*) of what may constitute our historical limits."¹⁵³

Numerous commentators have also found fault with archaeology's tendency to expunge all hermeneutical resources for the analysis of knowledge, such that no explanation or interpretation of the meaning of epistemic conditions or ruptures can be given. By depriving himself of all reference to non-discursive factors or to the meaning-giving activity of subjects in the formation of discourse, the argument goes, Foucault is compelled to conclude that the contents of knowledge, as well as its historical

¹⁵¹ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p.316.

¹⁵² Foucault, AK, p.208.

¹⁵³ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p.317.

development, are essentially meaningless, since they are the products of more or less autonomous rules of discourse lacking intentionality. Thus, while richly detailed and complex in its descriptions of the continuities and discontinuities between highly specialized scientific discourses, from the standpoint of explaining how and why various discursive formations come about, archaeology is seriously impoverished. According to Honneth, the explanatory deficits of archaeology inevitably result from its own ambition to offer a perspective external to and purged of the epistemic trappings of cultural modernity, among which Foucault includes the very intentional and meaning-giving subject on the basis of which some account of the meaning of various epistemes, as well as their historical succession, might be given. By defining as central to the epistemic horizon of modernity the philosophy of the subject and the intentional, meaning-giving activity of constitutive consciousness, and which must therefore be avoided in order to gain a truly ethnographic perspective on it, Foucault is forced to reject them *tout court*, as the guarantee of his own methodological distantiation and externality. Thus, Foucault deprives himself of the explanatory resources provided by anthropology and the philosophy of the subject, since these have been rejected in the conceptual bracketing or catharsis demanded by his ethnographic ambitions:

"In order to be able to transpose social theory into the position of external observer so that it is able to appear as an ethnology in relation to its own culture, one must make methodological efforts which artificially distance it from the models of thought and conceptions of reality familiar to it."¹⁵⁴

In relation to an ethnographic analysis of the cultural horizons of modernity as Foucault sees them, such an analysis "must assume the form of a systematic exclusion of all other

¹⁵⁴ Honneth, The Critique of Power, p.146.

forms of thought shaped by the philosophy of the subject."¹⁵⁵ The result of such conceptual bracketing in this case, however, means that archaeological analysis must not only forego reference to the philosophy of the subject, but "forbids as a whole an interpretive access to social reality."¹⁵⁶ Thus, Foucault's initial attempt at artificially distancing himself from his own familiar cultural worldview is methodologically driven to "attempt to comprehend the specific culture as an actually nonintentional, anonymous rule-governed social event."¹⁵⁷

Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow raise a similar objection with regard to the problem of causality in Foucault's analysis of discursive formations and epistemic change. Attributing the latter's archaeological ambitions to a certain "structuralist over-reaction to hermeneutics," they go on to argue that while it purports to identify the ruling epistemic structures of western thought since the Renaissance, archaeology utterly fails to explain the very epistemic discontinuities and changes it emphasizes so strongly¹⁵⁸. According to Foucault, as we know, the history of western knowledge is marked by ruptures and discontinuities which are produced at the deep, unconscious level of the episteme. During his most archaeological phase, Foucault all but excludes the role played by non-discursive factors in bringing about epistemological as well as epistemic change. On numerous occasions he entertains the notion that the epistemic level of knowledge is subject to completely autonomous rules of discursive formation and change which dictate and determine the relative stability and instability of systems of thought, although

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.146.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.147.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.147.

¹⁵⁸ Dreyfus, Hubert, and James Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Second Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, pp.44-100.

he eventually retreated from this view. Nonetheless, archaeology renders a static account of the history of knowledge which identifies striking epistemic similarities and discontinuities amongst various fields of knowledge but fails to offer a satisfactory explanation for why change comes about. The Order of Things, for example, offers little more than a few scattered references to vague discursive "events" at the roots of epistemic change¹⁵⁹. Foucault was aware of the limited explanatory potential of archaeology with respect to the epistemic changes and discontinuities it describes, and leaves the door open to other explanatory factors, but ultimately seems to have left the problem of causality to another day:

"It is not always easy to determine what has caused a specific change in a science. [...] for the role of instruments, techniques, institutions, events, ideologies, and interests is very much in evidence; but one does not know how an articulation so complex and so diverse in composition actually operates. It seemed to me that it would not be prudent for the moment to force a solution I felt, I admit, incapable of offering [...] In this work, then, I left the problem of causes to one side; choosing instead to confine myself to describing the transformations themselves, thinking that this would be an indispensable step if, one day, a theory of scientific change and epistemological causality was to be constructed."¹⁶⁰

In The Archaeology of Knowledge Foucault attempts to render archaeology in more dynamic terms by downplaying chronological boundaries between periods of epistemic stability and intervals of rupture in favour of a portrayal of discursive formations as continuously subject to transformation and as possessing only a relative stability. At the same time, backing down from some of the more contentious formulations regarding the determinacy and autonomy of discourse, he concedes that discursive change is brought about by a host of factors including the non-discursive:

"We must not imagine that rupture is a sort of great drift that carries with it all discursive formations at once: rupture is not an undifferentiated interval [...] between two manifest

¹⁵⁹ Foucault, OT, pp.217, 238, 250.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.xiii, 50-51.

phases. [...] The idea of a single break suddenly, at a given moment, dividing all discursive formations, interrupting them in accordance with the same rules - such an idea cannot be sustained. The contemporaneity of several transformations does not mean their exact chronological coincidence [...] Natural History, General Grammar, and the Analysis of Wealth were constituted in similar ways, and all three in the seventeenth century; but the system of formation of the Analysis of Wealth was linked with a great many conditions and non-discursive practices (the circulation of goods, monetary manipulations and their effects, the system of protecting trade and manufactures, fluctuations in the quantity of metal coined)..."¹⁶¹

Anticipating his abrupt turn to a genealogical analysis of the strategic conditions of possibility for knowledge, statements such as these have been interpreted as a retreat from some of the more extreme formulations of archaeology elsewhere in Foucault's work and, in some cases, have been thought by many, including Dreyfus and Rabinow, to signal his outright abandonment of the method on account of what they claim are its "interpretive deficits," although there is disagreement over whether this constituted a complete disavowal or simply a change of direction on his part¹⁶². In any event, it appears that, as an effort to displace or decentre the metaphysical subject from analyses of the history of knowledge, archaeology is insufficient on its own and is salvageable only by being situated among other explanatory factors which render the continuities and ruptures described by the former intelligible.

Finally, Foucault's archaeological reading of Western thought is vulnerable to a number of substantive criticisms as well. Gary Gutting and Gerard Lebrun have each offered telling criticisms of the archaeological characterization and periodization of Western knowledge provided by the analysis contained in The Order of Things.

According to Gutting, Foucault's characterization of the whole of Western thought since the nineteenth century as bound by the figure of Man and the analytic of finitude fails to

¹⁶¹ Foucault, AK, 175.

¹⁶² For an alternative perspective, in which genealogy is seen as simply a supplement to archaeology, see Gutting, Gary, Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp.270-272.

acknowledge the existence of significant and influential schools of thought whose reducibility to it is highly debatable. Gutting mentions, in particular, the omission of any mention of the Anglo-American analytic tradition as only one example¹⁶³. According to Foucault's periodization of Western thought and his attribution of determinacy to the epistemic analytic of finitude in relation to all of modern thought, the appearance of a non-humanistic tradition like analytic philosophy ought to be, strictly speaking, impossible. A similar problem has also been indicated by Lebrun in relation to Foucault's criticism of figures like Husserl and Sartre. One of Foucault's criticisms, recall, was that while both thinkers appeared to rest content with the finitude of the subject of thought, each ends up reviving the themes and pretensions of the Cartesian *cogito*. While this is a valid, oft-made accusation with respect to both thinkers, it poses a problem for his overall periodization of thought. If, as Foucault claims, phenomenology and existentialism are really epistemic throwbacks to the epoch of Cartesian *representation*, then they represent "obsolete" forms of thought which mysteriously lag behind the times and fly in the face of, their own anthropological epistemic configuration¹⁶⁴. If Foucault's characterizations of Husserl and Sartre are correct then, by implication, the chronological boundaries separating one episteme from the next must overlap considerably, and the determining power of the configuration after which each period is named must be somewhat weaker than Foucault originally suggests. Foucault attempted to address a number of these shortcomings of his periodization and explanation of the configuration of Western thought in his next work, The Archaeology of Knowledge. However, he soon

¹⁶³ Ibid., p.222.

¹⁶⁴ Lebrun, Gerard, "Notes on phenomenology in *Les Mots et les Choses*," in Armstrong, Timothy, trans., Michel Foucault: Philosopher, New York: Routledge, 1992, p.32.

set aside his methodological preoccupations with archaeology, as we know, in order to pursue genealogical analyses of knowledge, not least as a result of the increasing methodological difficulties encountered with archaeology.

Whether interpreted as a substitute or supplement for archaeological analysis, Foucault's turn to genealogical analyses of the strategic conditions of possibility for knowledge has generally been regarded as a necessary move in order to overcome the explanatory deficits of the former. However welcome, though, genealogy has been met with compelling criticisms as well. Criticisms have focused on the nature of the relation between knowledge and power in Foucault's works, which we examined in the previous chapter, and on the methodological problem of self-referentiality stemming from it. According to Habermas and Taylor, in particular, genealogical suspicions of the strategic roots of knowledge and truth must, for the sake of internal consistency, be extended to the claims and truth-status of genealogy itself, with, they argue, fatal implications for the truth-claims and intelligibility of genealogy as an account of knowledge and truth. According to Habermas, Foucault only appears to extricate himself from methodological difficulties "by not thinking genealogically when it comes to his *own* genealogical historiography"¹⁶⁵. When the assumptions of genealogical analysis are applied consistently to knowledge and truth, including the truth claims of genealogy itself, then it proves to constitute a self-referential methodological dead end. "[I]f it is correct," Habermas claims,

"it must destroy the foundations of the research inspired by it as well. But if the truth claims that Foucault himself raises for his genealogy of knowledge were in fact illusory and amounted to no more than the effects that this theory is capable of releasing within the circle of its adherents, then the entire undertaking of a critical unmasking of the human sciences would

¹⁶⁵ Habermas, Jürgen, "Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," p.269.

lose its point."¹⁶⁶

Similarly, Taylor argues that genealogical unmasking of the relation between power and knowledge rests on a monolithic conflation of power and truth which is incoherent. In so far as genealogy purports to unmask the truth about truth itself, to enlighten the Enlightenment about itself, it remains tethered to the terrain of truth:

"The idea of a manufactured or imposed 'truth' inescapably slips the word into inverted commas, and opens up the space of a truth-outside-quotes, the kind of truth, for instance, which the sentences unmasking power manifest, or which the sentences expounding the general theory of regime relativity themselves manifest (a paradox)."¹⁶⁷

Genealogy is self-devouring, since its own truth-claims can, like any other, be unmasked as rooted in strategic relations of power rendering them, therefore, untrue. According to Taylor:

"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, [...] 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 incoherently."¹⁶⁸

All told, this genre of methodological critique of Foucault's work charges that the denial of scientific validity claims implicit or explicit in archaeology and genealogy has return effects upon the validity claims of these methods themselves, as well as the empirical investigations inspired by them, with the result that they are refuted by their own internal logic.

A number of points could be made in Foucault's defense, however. Firstly, Foucault was well aware that both genealogy and his own excavations of various

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p.279.

¹⁶⁷ Taylor, Charles, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in Taylor, Charles, Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, p.178.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., pp.176-177.

"subjugated knowledges" were themselves susceptible to genealogical analysis. He went so far as to invite a genealogy of the genealogist. Furthermore, as Foucault and many defenders have argued, critics like Habermas and Taylor tend to misconstrue genealogy in particular as denying all validity claims on behalf of knowledge while claiming, simultaneously, to reveal the truth about truth as the mask of power. In other words, as a form of truth claim about truth, genealogy claims an objectivity in principle denied to virtually all other forms of knowledge¹⁶⁹. As we have already seen in Chapter Two, however, Foucault does not necessarily deny the validity or truth value of certain forms of knowledge. His question is, rather, that of the discursive and strategic conditions of emergence for such knowledge, one which explicitly acknowledges its methodological bracketing of the question of validity. Furthermore, in these criticisms Taylor and Habermas misrepresent the nature of genealogical critique by translating it into a truth claim in the first place. If genealogy were a claim to truth, one which purports to tell the truth about truth, then it might be said that it advances on the basis of formulations it seeks itself to overcome. The genealogical truth about truth, that it is inextricably linked to power, must apply to the truth of genealogy as an account of truth. Foucault often responded to this charge by arguing that genealogy is not a truth claim as such, and that it constitutes a radically different form of the critique of knowledge from that to which Taylor and Habermas subscribe. Taylor and Habermas mistakenly transform genealogy into a truth claim because they cannot see critique itself as anything other than a practice carried out in the name of revealing some hidden, more profound truth. "A hermeneutics

¹⁶⁹ Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," p.275.

of unveiling," the latter contends, "always still connects a promise with its critique."¹⁷⁰ Truth, on this view, is inscribed in the very "grammar of critique". It is only by translating genealogy into this form of critique, however, that Taylor and Habermas can make the charge of incoherence stick. Foucault was more than well aware of the dangers of presenting genealogical critique in the form of a truth claim. Instead, he offered genealogy as a practice oriented to "eventalizing" the truth which, he hoped, would serve to undermine and weaken the very urge or will-to-truth which imposes itself on the world. Archaeology and genealogy, thus, represent critique not as the key to the hidden depth of things but, rather, as tools for eventalizing the truth in order to "loosen things up a bit". What genealogy does, he claims, "is to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter, hierarchize and order them in the name of some true knowledge". Genealogies are not calls for "a more careful or exact form of science" but, rather, "anti-sciences" concerned "not to deny knowledge" or oppose its contents but to oppose "the effects of the centralizing powers which are linked to the institution and the functioning of an organized scientific discourse within a society such as ours."¹⁷¹ Genealogy by no means pretends to offer an exhaustive, totalized revelation of the hidden truth of power and knowledge. On the other hand, neither does it offer merely a fictionalized account of reality that is equivalent to other discourses of modernity such as the humanist one. While he eschews resort to an objective, context-independent conception of truth, Foucault retains confidence that certain reliable, albeit provisional

¹⁷⁰ Habermas, Jürgen, "The Critique of Reason as an Unmasking of the Human Sciences," in Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, p.241.

¹⁷¹ Foucault, Michel, "Two Lectures," in PK, pp.83-84.

and always incomplete, accounts can be given of the "intelligibility" or, rather, "plethora of intelligibilities" underlying events and ruptures in knowledge and practice¹⁷². But casting light on these intelligibilities is not so much intended as an accumulation of a knowledge which will have the final word on the nature and character of modern power as it is designed to have disruptive effects upon those knowledges and practices by which it is currently maintained.

The key to genealogical analysis and critique is its orientation to revealing the conditions of emergence of various unities, concepts, and categories. Instead of gainsaying knowledge and truth, the emphasis is on constituting each as "events" in the field of knowledge. What genealogy unmasks is not the truth of things as their primordial origin (*Ursprung*) but as their line of descent (*Herkunft*). This form of critique takes inspiration not only from Nietzsche but Kant, as well, from whom Foucault derives a negative formulation of enlightenment as *Ausgang*, as an exit or way out of the immaturity according to which we accept the limits imposed by what, in the present, we currently think, say, and do. For Foucault, we remain immature to the extent that we accept as necessary, universal, and obligatory in what we think, say, and do that which can be shown, in fact, to be not as necessary as all that, and as profoundly contingent and arbitrary. Critique of this kind, which Foucault called a "historical ontology of ourselves"¹⁷³ is oriented not to telling us what we are but, rather, to revealing the conditions under which we have become what we are, or have come say what we say we are, in order to keep open a space for becoming something other than what we are. "The

¹⁷² Foucault, "Questions of Method," interview in Baynes, Kenneth, et al, eds., After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, pp.105-106.

¹⁷³ Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?", in EST, p316.

critical ontology of ourselves," Foucault insisted, "must be considered not [...] as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos [...] in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them."¹⁷⁴ Genealogical critique is paradoxical and incoherent only if it constitutes the kind of critique, one which reveals hidden truth, into which Taylor and Habermas translate it. It is clear from Foucault's own writings and formulations that he rejected this form of critique and strove to give shape to a new one, which we shall examine in Chapter Six.

Finally, none of this is to suggest that truth is of no interest to Foucault. Rather, insofar as his analysis of modern power reveals the extent to which it relies, for its maintenance and spread, upon the production of discourses of truth and the effects of power engendered by them, no analysis of modern society can afford to ignore the truth, or a given society's "regime of truth"¹⁷⁵. Having said that, the truth Foucault privileges in political analysis and critique is to be understood as "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, circulation, and operation of statements," which "is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which it induces and which extend it."¹⁷⁶ The role played by the critic in relation to truth, therefore, is about "the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true"; in other words, it is not so much a battle on behalf of the truth as it is "a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.319.

¹⁷⁵ Foucault, Michel, "Truth and Power," interview in FL, p.133.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.133.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.132.

Underlying the status and role played by truth and the mechanisms by which it is produced and circulated are certain intelligibilities and rationalities. But this means that the only form of analysis which it makes any sense to apply to regimes of truth is that of a *strategic* one oriented to exposing the "truth of power and the power of true discourses". In any event, against critics like Taylor who accuse him of discarding the concern for truth, Foucault responds: "I believe too much in the truth not to suppose that there are different truths and different ways of saying it."¹⁷⁸ Indeed, in a final course given at the College de France in 1984, Foucault lectured on the ancient practice of *parrhesia*, the art of telling difficult truths to others and to oneself. In these lectures Foucault distinguished four modalities of truth-telling - those of the "prophet," the "sage," the "teacher-technician," and the "parrhesiast" - identifying his own approach to the truth with the last of these¹⁷⁹. In his lectures Foucault emphasizes the seriousness and the ethical nature and consequences of this practice of truth-telling both for those who received it and for the one doing the telling. In choosing to tell such difficult genealogical truths about the subject of consciousness and the ignoble origins of the impetus behind so much of our knowledge, truths clearly unpalatable to figures like Taylor and Habermas, Foucault joins the *parrhesiast*, for whom the art of truth-telling is an ethical practice fraught with risk. The question of whether or not it makes any sense to engage in critique of this sort in the absence of some stronger concept of a context-independent truth criterion of some kind will be postponed to Chapter Six, where I discuss Foucault's anti-humanist conception of critique in greater detail.

¹⁷⁸ Foucault, Michel, "An Aesthetics of Existence," interview in FL, p.314.

¹⁷⁹ Foucault's lectures on *parrhesia* are discussed by Thomas Flynn in his article, "Foucault as Parrhesiast: his last course at the College de France," in Barnauer, James, and David Rasmussen, eds., The Final Foucault, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988, pp.102-118.

Chapter Four

Myths of Humanization: **Foucault's Unmasking of the Human Sciences**

"From the sixteenth century on it has always been considered that the development of the forms and contents of knowledge was one of the greatest guarantees of the liberation of humanity. It is a postulate of our Western civilization that has acquired a universal character, accepted more or less by everyone. It is a fact, however - I was not the first to ascertain this - that the formation of the great systems of knowledge has also had effects and functions of subjection and rule."

Michel Foucault, "The Discourse on Power"

"[I]f [the human sciences] have been able to be formed and to produce so many profound changes in the episteme, it is because they have been conveyed by a specific and new modality of power: a certain policy of the body, a certain way of rendering the group of men docile and useful. This policy required the involvement of definite relations of knowledge in relations of power; it called for a technique of overlapping subjection and objectification [...] The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible. Knowable man [...] is the object-effect of this analytical investment, of this domination-observation."

Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish

One historic continuity across the tradition of humanism has been the view that the relationship between power, truth, and knowledge is essentially one of suppression or blockage and, conversely, that truth and knowledge surface in the wake of power's retreat. As a result, humanism credits the production of truth and knowledge with inherently emancipatory interests and effects. The traditional humanist opposition between power and knowledge is evident in the classical humanist project of unleashing

the liberating truths of natural science in order to emancipate humanity from the thrall of nature and superstition, in the liberal humanist equation of the moral and political doctrines of Enlightenment individualism with the universal emancipation of humanity, and in the human sciences and philosophical anthropology of the nineteenth century which hoped "to make this knowledge (*connaissance*) of man exist so that man could be liberated by it from his alienations."¹ The methodological assumptions of Foucault's genealogy, as well as the results of his genealogical histories of the human sciences, in particular, challenge this traditional humanist perception of the relationship between power, truth, and knowledge. Indeed, his exploration of the strategic nature of the conditions of possibility and emergence of the human sciences, discussed in the previous chapter, do double duty in this regard, debunking not only the continuist and subject-centred analysis of knowledge contained in humanist metatheory, but the "myth of humanization"² and emancipation attached to it as well. This chapter explores Foucault's treatment of the relationship between power and knowledge by throwing into relief the entwinement of knowledge production with relations of power and domination as it manifests itself in the history, institutions, practices, and figures of authority within the human sciences. Foucault's histories of psychiatry, medicine, criminology, sociology, and sexology attack the various myths of humanization and emancipation propagated by traditional histories of science.

¹ Foucault, Michel, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," interview in, Foucault, Michel, Foucault Live: Interviews 1966 - 1984, trans. Sylvere Lotringer, New York: Semiotext(e), 1989, p.36. Hereinafter cited as FL.

² I am indebted to Jon Simons' work on Foucault for this expression. See: Simons, Jon, Foucault and the Political, New York: Routledge, 1995, pp.46-49.

Foucault's debunking of the myth of humanization associated with the birth of the human sciences begins, typically, with an unmasking of the real genealogical conditions of emergence for new fields of human inquiry like mental illness, criminality, and sexuality, which we examined extensively in the previous chapter. At stake now is not so much the rationalist, continuist, and subject-centred humanist account of knowledge as the humane, emancipatory, and heroic self-image of the scientific professions. Far from being "discovered" as a result of the patient, disinterested and rational pursuit of scientific inquiry, such fields and "objectivities" emerged only after new sensitivities, prejudices, and configurations of state, socio-economic, and professional interests put certain groups and populations at the disposal of physicians and scientists, creating the conditions under which science *could be there* in the midst of the insane, the sick, the undisciplined, and the sexually non-conforming. Only when, for example, a new sensitivity to the "insane" emerged in the Houses of Confinement, largely on the part of the other inhabitants, were the mad separated from other forms of unreason, turned over to the "care" of physicians and placed in exclusively "mental" institutions, which made the emergence and spread of psychiatry as a specialized field within medicine possible. Criminology, meanwhile, only became possible with the emergence of the prison as the primary form of legal punishment in the nineteenth century, in which large populations of offenders were gathered under one roof and subjected to isolation and continuous surveillance creating laboratory-like conditions for new fields of knowledge like "criminal anthropology". Scientific interest in sexuality, finally, appears when the Malthusian state of the nineteenth century linked the sexual conduct of the individual to the health and welfare of the social body as a "population" to be managed and optimized.

In this chapter, however, I examine Foucault's further claim that the entwinement of knowledge production and power goes beyond the question of the strategic conditions of possibility out of which knowledge emerges. Knowledge production itself, particularly as embodied in the institutions, practices, and individual practitioners of the human sciences, constitutes a power in its own right. Knowledge production in Western societies, Foucault argues, is not simply an armature of the interests of power in relation to which it is otherwise innocent. It *is* a power. Of course it serves the interests of dominant social forces, but it also relies on methods and techniques imbued with power, and achieves effects of power on its objects even as it produces truth. It is not only, or even primarily, at the level of its content that one finds the "political investment" of knowledge, but at the level of the practices by which it is constituted, the uses to which it is put, new power relations to which it gives rise, and its conditions of possibility as well.

In his analysis of the various methods of knowledge constitution adopted by the human sciences, Foucault finds that they entailed a host of impositions, seizures, violences, and cruelties rather than new-found sensitivity or respect for the dignity and humanity of those subject to them. In order for the scientific "gaze" to accumulate knowledge of its human subjects, constraints and conditions were imposed upon them which were often coercive, violent, and cruel. Nineteenth-century psychiatry discovered the insane intermingled with other inhabitants of the Houses of Confinement, only to "free" them into the asylum where they were more completely confined. In the asylum, the psychiatrist created an environment in which patients lived in constant fear of the authoritarian presence of the psychiatrist and endured the anguish of living under his continuous, hierarchical, and juridical gaze. The reorganization of the medical clinic, according to which impoverished patients were isolated, silenced, experimented upon,

and subjected to one-way observation, was carried out with regard to the accumulation of knowledge for the medical profession and the treatment of the wealthy, rather than with the dignity or health of the typically impoverished patient in mind. Finally, the violence of knowledge production in the human sciences is dramatized by the panoptic institution of the prison. The very practices and techniques conducive to the production and accumulation of knowledge about their inhabitants - detention, isolation, one-way observation, and interrogation and examination - constituted the very form of their punishment as well.

Knowledge accumulated within the human sciences, furthermore, was more often than not used for various corrective and "normalizing" purposes. Detailed knowledge of individual cases in the prison, for example, was used to modulate corrective treatment and punishments to suit the nature of the offender, while the accumulated weight of such cases produced aggregate statistical norms against which deviancy could be measured. Detailed biographical information-gathering enabled by disciplinary institutions like the hospital, the school, and the prison of the nineteenth century also gave state officials a window onto the social body at large and provided a rough barometer of public health, hygiene, morality, and order.

Finally, nineteenth-century practitioners of the human sciences were themselves far from the disinterested, objective, curious, and rational investigators idealized in traditional history of science. More than merely naive bearers of the "positive unconscious" of the scientific gaze, Foucault portrays psychiatrists, physicians, criminologists, sociologists, and analysts as authoritarian masters of those in their "care", whom they often treated arbitrarily, cruelly, and indifferently. In this respect, Foucault drew particular attention to several historical victims of the human sciences - Jouy,

Barbin, and Riviere - who, at the hands of various expert agents of knowledge, suffered a variety of injustices, including maltreatment, neglect, coercion, confinement, and even death. Thus, while new limits were being traced around the juridical power of the state, the practitioners of the human sciences carried on the political traditions of absolutism and arbitrariness at what Foucault called the "extremities of power," that is, within extra-legal disciplinary institutions such as schools, asylums, workhouses, hospitals, and prisons.

These constitute the key ingredients of Foucault's debunking of the humanistic "myth of humanization". This mythology of the ethico-political significance of the human sciences holds that the subject of scientific consciousness constitutes a progressive and humane agent in the perception and treatment of the marginal and the deviant, and that the substance of the human sciences constitutes the achievement of thought's greater adequacy and sensitivity to the reality of the human condition and its afflictions. Genealogical analysis unmask these ethico-political pretensions, revealing that, in terms of their emergence, methods, and the interests and actions of scientific practitioners, the human sciences are deeply implicated in violence, coercion, and relations of domination in relation to their objects.

i) Knowledge, Power, and Compulsory Visibility

Madness and Civilization constitutes Foucault's first salvo against the "myth of humanization" propagated by the human sciences. Foucault's history of the scientific perception and treatment of the insane debunks the traditional mythology of psychiatry as having "liberated" them from misunderstanding and "humanized" their treatment. In its conditions of emergence, therapeutic practices, and techniques of knowledge

production Foucault identifies a complex nexus of sensibilities, prejudices, social interests, and professional motives unrelated to emancipatory or humane considerations on behalf of the insane. According to what Foucault considers its central mythology, psychiatry's recognition of the "humanity" and misfortune of the "mentally ill" delivered them from the darkness and chains of the Houses of Confinement into the "light" of science and benevolent, humane treatment and cure in the asylum³. In discovering madness in its specificity as a "mental illness" afflicting humanity, psychiatry claimed to restore to the insane their rightful dignity as human beings. But as saw in the previous chapter, no such scientific sensitivity to the specificity and tragic dignity of madness was responsible for the separation of the insane from other prisoners in the Houses of Confinement. Denunciations of the "inhumanity" of mixing the insane with other inhabitants of the Houses were issued on behalf of the *other* prisoners, in fact, who were constantly exposed to the insane. "[C]onsciousness of madness," writes Foucault:

"[...] did not evolve in the context of a humanitarian movement that gradually related it more closely to the madman's human reality, [...] nor did it evolve under the pressure of a scientific need that made it more attentive, more faithful to what madness might have to say for itself. [...] No medical advance, no humanitarian approach was responsible for the fact that the mad were gradually isolated, [...] this perception was the result of the confined themselves..."⁴

Humane sensitivity, then, was on behalf of others in the Houses of Confinement, whose protests succeeded in having the insane removed and placed under the supervision and control of physicians. Thus, the emergence of the whole medical sub-discipline of psychiatry has as its condition of possibility not the discovery of some previously hidden and misunderstood affliction by a sensitive and heroic medical profession, but the

³ Foucault, Michel, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Vintage, 1973, pp.241-243. Hereinafter cited as MC.

⁴ Ibid., p.224.

eviction of the insane from the Houses of Confinement and the need for some form of authority to be constituted in order to identify and supervise them. Psychiatry emerges because this task was thrust upon the medical profession.

Furthermore, even if psychiatry discovered the abusive mixture of the insane with vagrants, debtors, and criminals in the Houses of Confinement, it only confined them more thoroughly under its own authority. The political critique of confinement in the eighteenth century functioned, "[n]ot," Foucault claims, "in the direction of a liberation of the mad; nor can we say that it permitted a more philanthropic or a greater medical attention to the insane. On the contrary, it linked madness more firmly than ever to confinement [...]"⁵. As Foucault's analysis of the asylum shows, the insane were "liberated" by being placed into psychiatric institutions in which they were subjected to arbitrary authority of and treatment by physicians and psychiatrists. Deliverance from the Houses of Confinement, he argues,

"has a paradoxical meaning. The dungeon, the chains, the continual spectacle, the sarcasms were, to the sufferer in his delirium, the very element of his liberty [...] he could not be dislodged from his immediate truth. [...] The chains that fell, the indifference and silence of all those around him confined him in the limited use of an empty liberty. [...] His torment was his glory; his deliverance must humiliate him."⁶

Foucault's ethico-political analysis and critique of psychiatry identifies it with new forms of domination and cruelty more complete than any previous perceptions and treatments. "The absence of constraint in the nineteenth century asylum," he claims, "is not unreason liberated, but madness long since mastered."⁷ "Henceforth," Foucault continues, the

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.227.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.261.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.251-252.

mental patient is "more genuinely confined than he could have been in a dungeon and chains, a prisoner of nothing but himself..."⁸

Psychiatry is not the armature of an exercise of power in relation to which it is essentially innocent. As Foucault also shows in detail, it entails techniques and practices of knowledge production which rest upon power relations between the scientific observer and the subject under observation, and have effects of power upon the subject in their very operation. Indeed, the very means used for the collection of scientific knowledge of the insane had the effect of altering the behaviour of patients in what were, to the profession, felicitous ways. Foucault describes psychiatry's attempts to inculcate subjective responsibility and conscience into patients through the construction of a "punishing universality", or "universe of judgement" and fear, in which they were subjected to constant surveillance, beratement and correction. Foucault stresses the degree to which psychiatric methods, therapeutic practices, and scientific knowledge production relied on often gratuitous exertions of domination and arbitrary authority, threats and actual use of violence, and the production of fear. "Madness," he writes:

"escaped from the arbitrary only in order to enter a kind of endless trial for which the asylum furnished simultaneously police, magistrates, and torturers; a trial whereby any transgression in life [...] becomes a social crime, observed, condemned, and punished [...]"⁹

Some techniques and methods adopted by psychiatry, such as the "rotary machine", were fear-inspiring, and often employed for strictly punitive purposes serving no therapeutic function whatsoever¹⁰. Treatment also involved moral beratement and the erecting of a "universe of judgement" all around the patient and his every action, such that each

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.261.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.269.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.166-181, 266.

patient was subjected to the moral authority of the psychiatrist and to the voices of conscience and responsibility which these methods were intended to internalize¹¹. Thus, where psychiatry sees itself as having liberated the insane, Foucault sees that they have in fact been more generally and thoroughly confined by a kind of "gigantic moral imprisonment"¹². Foucault offers us a scathing debunking of the self-image of psychiatry as representing a liberatory, progressive and humane scientific development. The celebrated recognition of the "humanity" of the insane and of their affliction with "mental illness" was accompanied by their subjection to the authority, surveillance, coercion, and arbitrary punishment inflicted upon them by psychiatric practitioners. Psychiatric knowledge did not appear, then, because arbitrary power, moral prejudice, or mythological belief were eclipsed by a more rational and objective approach. Rather, psychiatry as both a field and practice of knowledge has depended upon and fostered relations and effects of power ever since madness was released into the hands of science.

Furthermore, the nature of psychiatry as exercising a kind of power is also revealed by the social function it performed *outside* the asylum. According to Foucault, nineteenth-century psychiatry eagerly assumed responsibility for practicing a kind of "social hygiene," intervening in an increasing number of aspects of the life of society, including criminal justice, sexuality, education, and social and domestic life, to identify, classify, and, where it deemed necessary, confine, for the purposes of treatment as well as the protection of society, those "dangerous individuals" who threatened the social

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.247, 261.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.278.

order with the contagion of "mental illness," "delinquency," and "perversion"¹³. Psychiatry provided the discursive basis upon which the growth of the use of *lettres de cachet* occurred in nineteenth-century France, according to which family members, neighbours, physicians, and police could, upon presentation of a certificate, confine to an institution relatives, neighbours, patients, and paupers on the basis of unusual behaviour¹⁴. Psychiatric research rapidly proliferated and disseminated the number of objects, behaviours, and conditions which came under the purview of psychiatric expertise, including necrophilia, kleptomania, exhibitionism, and hysteria¹⁵. As a result, a whole host of forms of behaviour and experience previously recognized on the registers of morality or legality were medicalized and psychiatrized, which had the effect both of delivering into the hands of psychiatry a growing number of patients and increasing the role and influence of psychiatry in the regulation of society as a whole.

With his discussion of the techniques of psychiatric knowledge production around mental illness - imprisonment, isolation, one way observation and surveillance of subjects - Foucault begins a lifelong exploration of the entwinement of knowledge and power. Psychiatric knowledge was never innocent with regards to power, since its very emergence and existence were based on the fact that physicians "could be there", that is, that physicians were given exclusive control over the identification, mobility and treatment of the insane, whom they held confined in what amounted to medicine's own

¹³ Foucault, Michel, "The Dangerous Individual," in Foucault, Michel, Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Donald Bouchard, ed., New York: Routledge, 1988, pp.125-139. Hereinafter cited as MF.

¹⁴ Foucault, Michel, "Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison," in MF, p.187.

¹⁵ Foucault, "The Dangerous Individual," p.141.

private dominion. By its very existence, then, as a body of knowledge emanating from the asylum, psychiatry bears the stamp of an historic seizure and imprisonment.

The Birth of the Clinic takes medical perceptions of disease as its principal object of interest. Much of the close attention paid to the social conditions, prejudices, and techniques of psychiatric knowledge production in Madness and Civilization gives way to distinctively archaeological concerns regarding the conditions of possibility for one form of medical perception or another at the level of reigning "structures of visibility" and "discursive formations". Nonetheless, the theme of knowledge's entwinement in relations of power and background practices of an economic and strategic nature is present as well

Foucault's discussions of medical perception, discourse, knowledge, and the practices of the medical profession itself, in relation to its objects are charged with images of political domination, strategic overcoming, and military invasion. The Birth of the Clinic examines the emergence of increasingly ocularcentric perceptions of disease adopted in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, in which disease and patient are subjected to non-reciprocal, one-sided observation and description by the medical profession. The silent "gaze" of the physician replaces the dialogue between physician and patient and the hermeneutical reading of the signs of disease which surface in the exchange, which were so central to eighteenth-century perception. In the clinic, the "unimpeded empire of the gaze"¹⁶ perpetrates a kind of "violence" upon¹⁷ and

¹⁶ Foucault, Michel, The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Tavistock, 1973, p.39. Hereinafter cited as BC.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.8.

"dominates"¹⁸ the objects which come under its purview. The scientific "gaze" silently scrutinizes, observes, classifies, totalizes, and exercises a kind of "sovereignty"¹⁹ over the experience of illness which constitutes a veritable "seizure of being". While disease itself suffers the figurative violence of its reduction, totalization, and exhaustive one-way description in medical discourse, the diseased were subjected to practices and methods of knowledge production which are, at best, non-reciprocal and asymmetrical, and, at worst, exploitative and coercive.

Along with his critique of the "gaze," Foucault's description of the re-emergence of the clinic in nineteenth-century France, of its organization and operation, and of the place of the medical profession within it dramatizes the role played by power relations in the constitution of knowledge. The clinic was the institution in which the "gaze" was operationalized, allowed to operate over a field of isolated, silently observed patients, and in which medical knowledge of Man was accumulated in direct proportion to asymmetries of social power. The revived clinic consisted of a hospital for the poor, endowed by the wealthy, which was organized as a teaching hospital for the profession and structured so as to meet the needs of clinical perception. The reintroduction of the clinic, Foucault also shows, served many interests. It served state interests as a barometer of public health, and served as the new institutional locus of medical education, which was in disarray as a result of Revolutionary deregulation of the profession. It also served the professional interests of physicians, who were given exclusive control over patients for the accumulation of medical knowledge and the conduct of medical experiments.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.89.

Finally, the clinic served the interests of wealthy benefactors, who could expect to receive safe, proven methods of treatment carried out first on clinical patients, who came overwhelmingly from the impoverished classes. The clinical experience of illness, then, depended upon certain socio-economic and institutional developments as its very conditions of possibility:

"For clinical experience to become possible as a form of knowledge, a reorganization of the hospital field, a new definition of the status of the patient in society, and the establishment of a certain relationship between public assistance and medical experience, between help and knowledge, became necessary; the patient had to be enveloped in a collective, homogeneous space."²⁰

Medicine's pursuit of scientific knowledge of Man in his illness and health, the interests of the profession, and those of the wealthy in new medical treatments all coalesced to revive the clinic. Thus, nineteenth-century medical knowledge was produced on the backs of the poor, and based on an implicit contract involving impoverished patients, ambitious physicians, and wealthy benefactors:

"These, then, were the terms of the contract by which rich and poor participated in the organization of clinical experience. In a regime of economic freedom, the hospital had found a way of interesting the rich; the clinic constitutes the progressive reversal of the other contractual part; it is the *interest* paid by the poor on the capital that the rich have consented to invest in the hospital; an interest that must be understood in its heavy surcharge, since it is a compensation that is of the order of *objective interest* for science and of *vital interest* for the rich. The hospital becomes viable for private initiative from the moment that sickness, which had come to seek a cure, was turned into spectacle. Helping ended up paying, thanks to the virtues of the clinical gaze."²¹

Nineteenth-century medical knowledge emerged in the empirical and positivistic way it did as a result of these investments in the clinic and its peculiar organization. Scientific medicine in nineteenth-century France adopted the methods of knowledge production it

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.196.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.85. Emphasis in original.

did - the isolation and empirical observation of the patient/object - because social conditions, inequality *inter alia*, meant physicians *could be there* in the clinic, in the midst of a population of desperate, impoverished patients who, without the means for private care, *had to be there*.

Similarly, Foucault was far from indifferent to the clinical gaze's organization of and effects upon patients and bodies²². The clinicalization of medicine, along with poverty, compelled the majority of the sick who could not afford the personal attendance of a physician to seek treatment in the hospitals. There they were subjected to practices of isolation, examination and display which have the effect as much, if not more, of accumulating scientific knowledge and therapeutic experience as of actual cure and comfort. "But to look in order to know," Foucault asks, "to show in order to teach, is not this a tacit form of violence, all the more abusive for its silence, upon a sick body that demands to be comforted, not displayed? Can pain be a spectacle?"²³ Patients, Foucault shows, were displayed, isolated, confined, observed, exploited, experimented upon, and made into a spectacle for science in the re-emerging teaching hospital or clinic. To which the organizers of clinical experience at the time respond:

"Since disease can be cured only if others intervene with their knowledge, their resources, their pity, since a patient can be cured only in society, it is just that the illnesses of some should be transformed into the experience of others; and that pain should be enabled to manifest itself [...]"²⁴

²² need discussion and references for ethical crit of conditions imposed in the clinic

²³ *Ibid.*, p.84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.84.

In Foucault's next major work to explore the relationship between the human sciences and power, Discipline and Punish, he offers a genealogical debunking and unmasking of humanistic interpretations of nineteenth-century penal reform, prisons, and the birth of the sciences of criminology and penology. The conditions of emergence for the prison, as well as the human sciences of criminology and penology, turn out to have little to do with "humane" concerns and sensitivities on behalf of the victims of pre-nineteenth-century corporal punishment and arbitrary confinement. Furthermore, Foucault's work on the prison and other disciplinary institutions as mechanisms for the production of both totalizing and individualizing forms of knowledge reveals the coercion and violence intrinsic to methods and techniques of knowledge-constitution such as hierarchical observation and examination, and the authoritarian powers increasingly vested in the figure of the expert in the human sciences over increasing populations of individuals both within and outside of institutions. Thus, Discipline and Punish unmasks the myth of humanization surrounding the development, practices, and practitioners associated with the birth of criminology and penology, as well as the human sciences as a whole.

Discipline and Punish offers, firstly, an interpretation of the events leading up to and during the period of French penal reform in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. One of its main targets is the dominant and self-congratulatory history of penology and criminology in which the latter are portrayed as responsible for the abandonment of corporal punishment in favour of incarceration and the humanization of penal practice. Foucault's work debunks the view which attributes this development to the recognition of the humanity and corrigibility of offenders by penal reformers and prison advocates and their distaste for the "inhuman" and "barbaric" practices of corporal

punishment, torture, and public execution informed by the humanitarian sensitivities of modern criminology and penology. Foucault argues that neither the penal reform movement, the replacement of corporal punishment by the prison, nor the emergence of criminology as a specialized branch of knowledge can be understood in such sanguine terms, and portrays them as effects of a movement to establish a more *efficient* and *certain* system for the punishment of offences - rather than a lessening or humanization thereof - as well as to extend the reach of power deeper into the social body.

Foucault argues that penal reform in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century France was pressed by two movements having little if anything to do with sensitivity to the "humanity" of offenders or discomfort with the severity of corporal punishment. To the extent that nineteenth-century punishment became more "lenient" and less corporal in nature, it did so as a matter of *policy* and as a result of a shift in the object of penal concern from the body to the soul of the offender, as discussed in the previous chapter. Penal reforms, he argues, had their impetus in a growing awareness of the risks and inefficiencies of the premodern, "monarchical" system of punishment. The ritual of public torture, designed to terrorize the population into submission through periodic but massive and visceral displays of the power of the Sovereign, was vulnerable to backfire and reversal into popular uprising, especially in cases where there was sympathy for the condemned. As events, public executions often took on a carnival atmosphere of the rejection and reversal of authority and contempt for the law, the police, and the Crown²⁵. As a matter of risk avoidance and policy, then, rather than humanitarianism, public execution and torture were abandoned in France by the late eighteenth century.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.63.

Indeed, Foucault argues, what little penal discussion there was of the humanity of "man" in relation to judicial torture and punishment concerned its affront to the humanity of the authority that punished, and not to that of its victims. The Man that constituted the new limit on power was nothing more than what the "reasonable man" could tolerate observing and participating in. "[T]he body, the imagination, pain, the heart to be respected," Foucault writes, "are not, in effect, those of the criminal that is to be punished, but those of the men, who, having subscribed to the pact, have the right of exercising against him the power of assembly."²⁶ While the resort to penal reform and the spread of penitentiary techniques may have had its origins in a number of factors, the discovery of some hidden and essential humanity on the part of offenders was *not* among them. Indeed, the criminal Man who was said to constitute the new limit on punishment emerged only *after* the prison had become the new norm in punishment. Rather than the rationale lying behind the prison, the new unity of "criminal Man" was its "object-effect".

As we saw in Chapter Three, Foucault traces the drive for a more efficient, effective, and certain system of punishment to underlying economic changes occurring in late-eighteenth-century France. The impetus for reform had its origins, Foucault argues, in the emergence of the new bourgeois economy and growing fears of the "criminality of fraud" over that of "blood"²⁷. The interest of penal reformers was in making punishment more effective and "generalized" in order to reduce incidences of fraud and petty theft. A new system for the punishment of offences, especially those against property, was

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.91-92.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.75-77.

called for. A decreased use of violence against the body was accompanied by a general increase in surveillance and a heightened intolerance of petty crime - less violence, but more *policing* in general²⁸. Reformers objected not to the violence of public torture but to its *irregularity* and *inefficiency* within a legal system that punished spectacularly but intermittently, sometimes too harshly, and at times not at all. Thus, "the criticism of the reformers was directed not so much at the cruelty of those in authority, as at a bad economy of power."²⁹ The new mercantilist, bourgeois economy could not tolerate such a "bad economy of power" in the penal system. Penal reformers, then, sought means of ensuring not less but *generalized* punishment which would punish *better* and more effectively in the face of widespread petty illegality. "The economic changes of the eighteenth century," Foucault argues elsewhere, "made it necessary to ensure the circulation of effects of power through progressively finer channels, gaining access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions."³⁰ The new penal system they recommended would replace violence with *vigilance* and the spectacle of torture with the ubiquity of police and surveillance³¹. Thus, penal reform sought:

"to make the punishment and repression of illegalities a regular function, coextensive with society; to punish with attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body."³²

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.76-78.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.79.

³⁰ Foucault, Michel, "The Eye of Power," interview in PK, pp.151-152.

³¹ Foucault, Michel, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Vintage, 1979, p.96. Hereinafter cited as DP.

³² *Ibid.*, p.82.

What the abandonment of torture marked, then, was not the lessening and humanization of punishment but the replacement of a system of "expenditure and excess" with "an economy of continuity and permanence" in the power to punish³³. The ritual of public torture was condemned by reformers, then, not because of its insensitivity to the humanity of the victim, but because of its failure to address forms of behaviour noxious to the new mercantilist economic system:

"What was emerging no doubt was not so much a respect for the humanity of the condemned [...] as a tendency towards a more finely tuned justice, towards a closer penal mapping of the social body."³⁴

As events would have it, the penal reform movement was rapidly eclipsed by the rising influence of prison advocates at the turn of the century. By 1810, incarceration had replaced corporal punishment as the essential form of punishment in France. While the traditional history of penology attributes the rise of the prison to the influence of progressive models of the penitentiary formulated in the premodern era, Foucault argues that these were not decisive for the realization of the new mode of punishment based on the prison. Rather, in the prison agenda were combined concerns about the effectiveness and efficiency of punishment, which it shared with reformers, and a growing awareness of and expertise in the use of techniques for the manipulation and training of bodies and "souls". Behind the prison's "colonization of the penalty" lay increasing interest in and successes with a series of institutional arrangements of space and visibility, and practices and techniques aimed at the minute control, manipulation and transformation of the body, habits, and inclinations of the individual. Experiments with architecture and

³³ *Ibid.*, p.87.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.77-78.

design, relations of visibility and invisibility, physical regimens, time-tables, and forms of communication and discourse within such institutions as monasteries, religious schools, military barracks, reformatories, and workshops during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had given rise to a considerable body of knowledge and practices which Foucault calls the *disciplines*. Whereas the reformers advocated the use of the offender in a kind of "punitive theatre" involving a series of penalty-representations - chain-gangs, pillories, and the like - designed to have effects upon the social body who observed them³⁵, advocates of the prison saw punishment as a technique for the manipulation and transformation of the offender himself. For the prison advocate, the object of reform was the body and soul of the offender, which would be subject to the *corrective* effects of hierarchical, time-tables, regimens, and constraints in order to restore the "obedient subject"³⁶.

"The body and the soul, as principles of behaviour, form the element that is now proposed for punitive intervention. Rather than an art of representations, this punitive intervention must rest on a studied manipulation of the individual [...] what one is trying to restore in this technique of correction is not so much the juridical subject, [...] but the obedient subject, the individual subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him."³⁷

Whatever the object or technique, however, the general objective of penal reformers and prison advocates was the same - a more effective, efficient and continuous system of punishment within the broader system of social control. As with the reform movement, the impetus for the prison model came not from its leniency or humanity relative to torture but, rather, from its perceived "corrective" potential and utility to the project of

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.104-114.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.128.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.128-129.

repressing "popular illegalities". What has been portrayed as an increased leniency and lessening of punishment, Foucault argues, was no more than a certain "displacement of its point of application"³⁸. Discipline and Punish contrasts premodern public torture and execution with the seemingly more benign surveillance, time-table, and work regimen of modern incarceration. While a certain "slackening of the hold on the body"³⁹ is observable, Foucault argues that it has been "attributed too readily and too emphatically to a process of 'humanization',..."⁴⁰. The abandonment of corporal punishment in favour of incarceration did not entail a lessening of punishment per se. This development, Foucault writes:

"has been regarded in an overall way as a quantitative phenomenon: less cruelty, less pain, more kindness, more respect, more 'humanity'. In fact, these changes are accompanied by a displacement in the very object of the punitive operation. Is there a diminution of intensity? Perhaps."⁴¹

Finally, as we saw in Chapter Three, the emergence of the prison as the primary form of punishment in the nineteenth century also has roots in certain technical imperatives stemming from the kind of knowledge of offenders required from the shift in penal concern from the body to the soul of the offender. The form of the prison was recognized as providing the ideal spatial conditions affording the kind of individualizing knowledge of the offender necessary to achieve corrective effects on his "soul".

Along with his debunking of penal reform and the birth of the prison as originating out of the "humane" concerns of the human sciences, Foucault also unmaskes the real conditions of emergence, practices, and effects of the sciences of criminology

³⁸ Ibid., pp.11-23.

³⁹ Ibid., p.10.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.7.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.16.

and penology to which the prison gave birth. As we saw in the previous chapter, the birth of criminology and penology has as its strategic condition of possibility the rise of disciplinary concerns with respect to order in a rapidly evolving mercantile and industrializing economy, which the previous monarchical system of punishment was increasingly ill-equipped to ensure. Their appearance was linked more fundamentally with a desire to design a system of more effective and efficient punishment, rather than humanitarian concerns over the barbarism of corporal punishment. In discursive terms, as we saw, the emergence of criminology and penology was based on a shift in ideas regarding the object deemed in need of punishment, from the body of the juridical subject who committed an illegal act to the soul of the offender in which resides inherent and dangerous tendencies. Penal practice required reorientation toward the objective of correction, rehabilitation, and cure in order to restore the obedient subject, as opposed to the simple "expiation of evil-doing" or exacting of the monarch's revenge. This desire within penal practice to achieve corrective effects on the soul, inclinations, and habits of offenders, in order to eliminate even the thought of wrong-doing, produces the demand for highly individualized, biographical forms of knowledge of offenders, and gives rise to the prison and to the science of criminology for which it serves as the architectural and technical basis.

Equally telling for Foucault's evaluation of the political investment of criminology and penology is the identity of the practices and methods of knowledge production with the means of disciplinary punishment and correction in the prison. The same techniques which produce knowledge of the individual "case" in the prison - isolation and hierarchical, one-sided observation - constitute the central forms of punishment imposed upon the incarcerated. "The prison," Foucault writes:

"the place where the penalty is carried out, is also the place of observation of punished individuals. This takes two forms: surveillance, of course, but also knowledge of each inmate, of his behaviour, his deeper states of mind, his gradual improvement, the prisons must be conceived as places for the formation of clinical knowledge about convicts: [...] The overall aim was to make the prison a place for the constitution of a body of knowledge that would regulate the exercise of penitentiary practice [...] it was to extract unceasingly from the inmate a body of knowledge that will make it possible to transform the penal measure into a penitentiary operation[...]"⁴²

The power relations between warder and convict, which underlie and support the exercise of nineteenth-century punishment, are duplicated in the relation between scientific subjects and objects in the pursuit of criminology and penology. "...[O]ne sees," Foucault writes,

"that the power relation that underlies the exercise of punishment begins to be duplicated by an object relation in which are caught up not only the crime as a fact to be established according to common norms, but the criminal as an individual to be known according to specific criteria. One also sees that this object relation is not superimposed, from the outside, on the punitive practice, as would be a prohibition laid on the fury of the public execution by the limits of the sensibility, or as would be a rational or 'scientific' interrogation as to what this man that one is punishing really is. The processes of objectification originate in the very tactics of power and of the arrangement of its exercise."⁴³

This relation is no more clear than in the central disciplinary technique of hierarchical observation. Techniques of spatial hierarchy and visibility are central to both disciplinary punishment and the pursuit of knowledge in the human sciences and, indeed, the relation between the two is highly symbiotic. The disciplinary apparatus adopts spatial arrangements and techniques of visibility and invisibility which constitute means of coercion, punishment, and correction. These same techniques of hierarchical, one-sided observation are used in criminology to produce knowledge which is simultaneously useful to the assessment of individual cases, the accumulation of statistical averages and

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.249-251.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.101-102.

rates of deviancy, as well as the modulation of the punitive and corrective measures to suit the case. "The exercise of discipline," Foucault writes,

"proposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those upon whom they are applied clearly visible."⁴⁴

For Foucault, then, the techniques of punishment in the disciplinary institution are indistinguishable from those of knowledge production. Hierarchical, one-sided observation is imbued with non-reciprocal power relations. In the various observatories of conduct established in disciplinary institutions: "...all power would be exercised solely through exact observation; each gaze would form a part of the overall functioning of power [...] a power that acts by means of general visibility..."⁴⁵. This one-sided observation, facilitated by a certain kind of architecture and spatial distribution was designed: "to render visible those who are inside it; [...] to transform individuals; to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them."⁴⁶ The mode of confinement, the imposition of punishment, and the "correction" of the offender are identical with the conditions for and operation of the observing gaze of the human sciences.

Moreover, the very activity of scientific inquiry within the technological system of discipline has *effects* of power on the subjects under observation which were felicitous for social control. Foucault describes the transformative, fear-producing effects of visibility upon the convict in the following manner:

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.170-171.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.171.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.172.

"...the principle of the dungeon is reversed; daylight and the overseer's gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a sort of protection. [...] There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself."⁴⁷

The production and accumulation of criminological and penological knowledge in the human sciences proceeded in disciplinary institutions by means which were as productive of penalty effects - pain, fear, submission - as they were of knowledge. In other words, for Foucault, criminology and penology were coextensive with, indeed part of, the techniques of punishment adopted in place of torture and public execution. Criminology and penology constituted practices of punishment and knowledge constitution simultaneously.

The strategic political investment of the human sciences also inflected both the substantive nature of the knowledge produced by them, and the uses to which it was dedicated, of course. Criminological and penological knowledge took two forms: a highly individuated knowledge of the 'case'; and a comparative and statistical knowledge of the norms, regularities, and irregularities of human disposition and conduct. Both forms are implicated in the more certain exercise of power and domination over the offender, as opposed to the humanization of their treatment. The modulation of the penalty to suit the reform of the individual convict required a new knowledge of the individual "case". The object of this new interest was the character of the individual, his biography, disposition and potential for reform. "Psychiatric expertise...criminal anthropology...criminology," Foucault writes, "by solemnly inscribing offences in the field of objects susceptible of scientific knowledge, [...] provide the mechanisms of legal

⁴⁷ Foucault, "The Eye of Power", pp.147, 155.

punishment with a justifiable hold not only on offences, but on individuals; not only on what they do, but also on what they are, will be, may be."⁴⁸ Thus, criminology provides power with surfaces or the holds on which to latch. But this process of modulating penalties and corrective techniques according to knowledge of the offender was double-edged, of course; the notion of attenuating circumstances was already in circulation in France by 1832⁴⁹. Psychiatric and criminological expertise were called upon to determine "the part that the liberty of the offender had played in the act," but were also called upon to determine the "prescription for what might be called his 'medico-legal' treatment."⁵⁰ Since punishment must prevent a repetition of the offense, "it must take into account the profound nature of the criminal himself,"⁵¹ and be modulated by referring "to the defendant himself, to his nature, to his way of life and his attitude of mind."⁵² Each "case", therefore, constitutes "at one and the same time an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power."⁵³ It was the criminologist who produced this case knowledge of the offender, knowledge which was inflected by the imperatives of order and discipline from the outset. This same knowledge was also used to develop aggregate statistics on populations of offenders, which served as the basis for refining the general classifications, categories, averages and norms on the basis of which each individual was to be judged⁵⁴. At the same time, it also served as an index for the forms and rates of deviancy on the part of the population as a whole, which could be used to

⁴⁸ Foucault, DP, p.18.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.20.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.22.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.98.

⁵² Ibid., p.99.

⁵³ Ibid., p.191.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.190.

justify other practices of power, including greater police surveillance of the society as a whole. Thus, the corrective *use* of knowledge produced by the disciplinary institution to modulate or customize punishments, regimens, and penalties, so as to alter the conduct or habits of the inhabitant constitutes a further level of the political investment of criminology and penology.

Ironically, it was very early on acknowledged, claims Foucault, that the prison failed in its "corrective" mission and tended to increase recidivism, to virtually *make* criminals out of first-time offenders. Its very tendency to *produce* "delinquents," habitual offenders circulating continuously in and out of incarceration, was rapidly recognized for a disciplinary utility of a broader kind. Once outside prison, "delinquents" could be used as informants to maintain state surveillance and policing of the criminal and non-criminal populations alike⁵⁵. Meanwhile, criminology and penology were served by their continued access to a captive field of objects through which to accumulate and produce knowledge. By producing a growing body of knowledge about the nature and incidence of "delinquents" among the population they also reinforced the perception that the prison and the police were essential to protect society from this social danger. The prison *made* criminals which proved useful to the state⁵⁶, while the human sciences *fabricated* the "delinquent"⁵⁷, that is, produced the strategic unity of "delinquency" which served to justify the spread of policing and disciplinary power deeper into the social body⁵⁸. "Delinquency," he writes,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.277-285.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.265-268.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.251-255.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.271-285.

"with the secret agents that it procures, but also by the generalized policing it authorizes, constitutes a means of perpetual surveillance of the population: an apparatus that makes it possible to supervise, through the delinquents themselves, the whole social field. Delinquency functions as a political observatory. In their turn, the statisticians and sociologists have made use of it, long after the police"⁵⁹

In other words, even as the prison failed in its corrective mission, its success as a mechanism for the production of knowledge of "delinquency" ensured its utility to the spread of power.

Now, beyond the question of the birth of the prison and the emergence of criminology and penology, Discipline and Punish also unmask, as we saw previously, the seepage and spread of disciplinary techniques from the prison to a host of other institutions and practical contexts in eighteenth and nineteenth-century society, including hospitals, schools, factories, and poor-houses⁶⁰. For the emerging disciplinary form of power in the nineteenth century, Foucault claims, the problem of governing came to seem increasingly in terms of cultivating "norms" of conduct and capacity, as opposed to simply enforcing obedience to the law⁶¹. Replacing the problem of disorder was that of abnormality or pathology, which threatened the disciplinary objectives of optimizing the forces of the state as well as ensuring order. We will take up this argument in considerably more detail in the following chapter, in which we discuss his overall characterization of political modernity. With regard to his critique of the myth of humanization, Foucault attributes to the other human sciences, including economics and sociology, similar disciplinary conditions of possibility and methods to those of criminology. The correction and normalization of society called for new and exhaustive

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.281.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.138.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.177-184.

forms of knowledge, like that produced in the prison, offering a simultaneously totalizing overview of society and individualizing snapshots of its members - *omnes* and *singulatim*. As a result, Foucault argues, the lessons of the prison, as an institution capable of producing normalizing effects of power and statistically useful knowledge simultaneously, were gradually incorporated into other institutions. Disciplinary techniques long in existence prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries became so widespread across institutions as to constitute a whole disciplinary generalization. This introduction of disciplinary techniques of observation and subjection into increasing areas of human activity always had the effect of producing new knowledge. Thus, if objects of knowledge like "the poor," "the unemployed," "the truant," or the "irresponsible parent," came into increasingly sharp focus in the nineteenth century, they did so as an effect of the new disciplinary form of power. As we shall see, Foucault ends up characterizing modern society as a kind of "carceral archipelago" in which modern individuals are caught up and transformed in socially useful ways by a network of prison-like institutions: schools, factories, and asylums. According to Foucault, it is this spread of disciplinary techniques to more and more areas of human activity which serves as the strategic condition of possibility for the birth of the human sciences. "Slowly, in the course of the classical age," Foucault writes,

"we see the construction of those 'observatories' of human multiplicity [...] Side by side with the major technology of the telescope, the lens and the light beam [...] there were the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen; using techniques of subjection and methods of exploitation, an obscure area of light and the visible was secretly preparing a new knowledge of man."⁶²

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp170-1. Emphasis added.

Every extension of disciplinary techniques into new areas of human activity and conduct called for the production of knowledge. Hence, not only criminology, but the human sciences in general are seen by Foucault as deeply invested in a political rationale having little to do with humane or emancipatory interests.

"These sciences, which have so delighted our 'humanity' for over a century, have their technical matrix in petty, malicious minutiae of the disciplines and their investigations. These investigations are perhaps to psychology, psychiatry, pedagogy, criminology, and so many other strange sciences, what the terrible power of investigation was to the calm knowledge of the animals, the plants and the earth."⁶³

The human sciences did not emerge only out of the prison, but their emergence and operation were intrinsically bound up with disciplinary imperatives of order and techniques and institutions of constraint, confinement and subjection.

According to Foucault, all of the human sciences are touched by the punitive mechanism, not only in their conditions of emergence, but in their daily practice, ongoing research operations, methodological refinement, and extension into new domains of human behaviour. Detention, partition, isolation, and hierarchical observation of the individual, key spatial and strategic conditions and methods of knowledge production, were among the major punitive techniques of the prison, and also the methods of social control adopted within a host of productive, pedagogical, military and religious institutions as well⁶⁴. The subject of the human sciences, such as the pupil, the pauper, the patient, or the madman, who is subjected to spatial arrangements of isolation and observation rendering them optimally visible and knowable to the observer, is simultaneously the object of a punitive operation. The prison, then, constituted only

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.226.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.143-155.

the most overt case of a growing number of nineteenth-century institutions in which the new techniques of knowledge production for the human sciences dovetailed with those of punishment, subjection and domination.

"[...] the child, the patient, the madman, the prisoner, were to become, with increasing ease in the eighteenth century and according to a curve which is that of the mechanisms of discipline, the object of descriptions and biographical accounts. This turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of heroization; it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection [...] a certain political function [...]"⁶⁵

All of the human sciences, not only criminology and penology, are tainted with the violence and constraint inherent in the techniques of knowledge constitution on which they rely.

Foucault reprises a number of these themes related to the myth of humanization in his last major work to address the operation of the human sciences, The History of Sexuality. While the investment of the human sciences in the exercise of power remains central, attention moves away from the enclosed institutions of discipline to focus on widespread practices of confession, especially those related to the new strategic unity of "sexuality". As we know, Foucault identifies the emergence of "sexuality" as an object of knowledge with the emerging nineteenth-century political rationality of what he now calls "biopolitics." The object of sexuality was produced out of the increasing connection drawn in the nineteenth century between the sexual conduct of individuals and the overall health and welfare of the social body as a "population". As this population was increasingly seen as imperiled by overcrowding, promiscuity, and disease, particularly among the working class, the "sexuality" of its members became an object of increasing

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.192.

scientific concern and intervention. In other words, rather than the discovery of some deep truth of human experience previously hidden from view by prejudice, modesty, or prudishness, sexuality emerged as the discursive armature or *dispositif* of a new strategic interest on the part of the state in managing the life of society as a population with a unique *biological* reality.

Now, The History of Sexuality lacks the kind of detailed portrayal of the operation of the human sciences supplied in Discipline and Punish. Nonetheless, Foucault leaves little doubt as to the nature of the new science of sexuality as a manifestation of power which emerged at the time. Confessional practices with respect to sexuality, originating out of Christian monasticism, were adopted within a host of settings by the medical and psychiatric professions. Such practices are portrayed by Foucault as inherently coercive. He speaks of an increasingly widespread "incitement to discourse" about sex imposed on parents and children⁶⁶, in particular, and records numerous episodes of coercive scientific intervention. Relations of power are inherent in the practice of confession itself by which this discursification of sex is carried out as well. Confession, Foucault asserts, always "unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence [...] of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile"⁶⁷ Furthermore, the very act of confession constitutes a technique of power which achieves effects on those who confess at the same time as it produces truth. Confession as a form of truth-telling

⁶⁶ Foucault, Michel, The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage, 1980, pp.17-35. Hereinafter cited as HS.

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.61-62.

and knowledge production is one in which "the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him"⁶⁸. In biopolitical society, confession of one's secret desires, perverse fantasies, and suppressed traumas serves to responsabilize one in relation to them and all their dangers. This, in the practice of confession, the power of true discourses takes effect not only in the one who receives it, but "in the one from whom it is wrested."⁶⁹

Meanwhile, the proliferation of discourse presided over by the various agents of confession in the human sciences has the effect of giving birth to and consolidating a host of scientific unities within the field of sexuality - the "hysterical," frigid woman, the "masturbating child," and the "perverse" adult - as we saw in Chapter Three. These new strategic unities are constituted as social dangers requiring state and scientific vigilance and intervention. The science of sexuality serves to "implant" and "strew" the social body with a host of sexual disorders and dangerous perversions in relation to the Malthusian ideal of the responsible, married couple⁷⁰. Thus, as we saw in the work on criminology, the new branch of knowledge concerned with sexual conduct and desire furnishes new pretexts and holds for the spread of "biopower" deeper into the social body. The nature and significance of the new biopolitical exercise of power is the subject of closer examination in Chapter Five, so we need not explore it in great detail here. For the purposes of examining his critique of the myth of humanization associated with the human sciences, Foucault's history of sexuality carries on the work of unmasking a

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.62.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.62.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.36-49.

distinct political investment at the level of their conditions of possibility, methods, and uses.

ii) Knowledge and Cruelty: the Cases of Jouy, Barbin, and Riviere

Finally, no discussion of Foucault's demythologization of the human sciences would be complete without drawing attention to a number of historical cases in which Foucault unmasks the humane and emancipatory pretensions of the human sciences by revealing the extent and nature of the power and authority which practitioners were free to exercise over those they observed, supervised, and "treated". Foucault describes these practitioners as enjoying virtually autonomous authority and coercive power over individuals inhabiting disciplinary institutions. In the disciplinary institution it was the "experts in normality"⁷¹ - the psychiatrist, physician, criminologist, and pedagogue - who not only observed but, as Foucault points out, also judged and punished. So the human sciences are not only implicated in the insidious, disciplinary, and biopolitical manipulation of individuals, but are seen as exercising a more mundanely arbitrary and coercive authority over individuals in their care as well. Institutional, scientific experts, whom he refers to as "technicians of behaviour: engineers of conduct, orthopaedists of individuality," are unmistakably authoritarian figures in Foucault's view. Disciplinary institutions were administered by "technicians of indiscipline"⁷², experts in the human sciences, who worked autonomously and arbitrarily compared to the restraints placed upon those working in the judicial system outside. In the case of the criminal, the

⁷¹ Foucault, DP, p.228.

⁷² Ibid., p.296.

modern juridical process guaranteed rights to the offender up to the point of conviction, after which it ceded total autonomy to the penal institution and its experts for the evaluation, treatment and reform of the individual. "Those who administer detention," in the disciplinary institution, so the thinking of the time went:

"must therefore have an indispensable autonomy, when it comes to the question of individualizing and varying the application of the penalty: supervisors, a prison governor, a chaplain or an instructor are more capable of exercising this corrective function than those who hold the penal power. It is their judgement (understood as observation, diagnosis, characterization, information, differential classification) and not a verdict in the form of an attribution of guilt, that must serve as a support for this internal modulation of the penalty..."⁷³

"All this 'arbitrariness'," Foucault writes,

"which, in the old penal system, enabled the judges to modulate the penalty and the princes to ignore it if they so wished, all this arbitrariness, which the modern codes have withdrawn from the judicial power, has been gradually reconstituted on the side of the power that administers and supervises punishment. It is the sovereignty of knowledge possessed by the warder [...]."⁷⁴

The conditions Foucault describes in other disciplinary institutions make clear that the "sovereignty of knowledge" exercised over inhabitants of the asylum, the clinic, the school, the barracks, and the workshop was similarly arbitrary and excessive. In other words, nineteenth-century human scientists in general are identified by Foucault as the chief repositories and beneficiaries of a displacement and relocation *within* rather than eradication *of* arbitrary power from modern society.

The continued operation of arbitrary power "on the underside of the law" is compellingly documented and revealed in the cases of such figures as Jouy, Barbin, and Riviere, to whom Foucault attributes signal importance. In The History of Sexuality Foucault recounts the story of Jouy, a nineteenth-century "village-idiot" caught

⁷³ Ibid., p.246.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.247.

exchanging caresses with young girls and who was confined for life to a mental hospital as a result. Herculine Barbin, a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite who, until her indeterminate physiognomy was called to the attention of medical authorities, lived a life of "happy limbo" within the protective walls of a convent, was the main figure in a collection edited by Foucault, containing her memoir as well as medical documents surrounding the case. Finally, there is Pierre Riviere, a French peasant who, in 1835, murdered his mother, sister, and brother, and produced a bizarrely engaging memoir of the crime, which Foucault had published along with a dossier of archival material on the case and a series of accompanying essays. For sexual acts long treated as an "inconsequential [...] everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality," Jouy was turned over to medical authorities by the judicial system. The former pronounced its judgement and subjected him to lifetime detention in the kind of summary, arbitrary fashion which a judicial approach could no longer accept. Handed over to medical and psychiatric authorities, Jouy was made an object of:

"...a medical intervention, and careful examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration. The thing to note is that they went so far as to measure the brainpan, study the facial bone structure, and inspect for possible signs of degenerescence the anatomy of this personage who up to that moment had been an integral part of village life; that they made talk; that they questioned him concerning his thoughts, inclinations, habits, sensations, and opinions. And then, acquitting him of any crime, they decided finally to make him into a pure object of medicine and knowledge - an object to be shut away till the end of his life in the hospital at Mareville, but also one to be made known to the world of learning through a detailed analysis."⁷⁵

Meanwhile, the case of the hermaphrodite, Barbin, whose memoir Foucault published along with medical documentation of the case, illustrates the coerciveness of the interventions, questions, and impositions which accompanied nineteenth-century

⁷⁵ Foucault, HS, pp.31-32.

scientific interest in "sex" and "sexuality," as well as the new power and authority over individuals and groups granted to the human sciences. Once the medical establishment became aware of her ambiguous physiognomy she was forced to undergo intrusive, humiliating and painful physical examinations, the outcome of which was the medical judgement that Barbin's true sex was male and that she ought to take up the rights and responsibilities of a member of that sex. Attempting to do so, after two decades of convent life, Barbin was tormented by loneliness and depression, and eventually committed suicide within a few years. Foucault leaves little doubt that he finds the insistence with which the human sciences pursue the true nature of individual subjects misguided and cruel. "Do we *truly* need a *true* sex?", he asks:

"With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, modern Western societies have answered in the affirmative. They have obstinately brought into play this question of a "true sex" in an order of things where one might have imagined that all that counted was the reality of the body and the intensity of its pleasures."⁷⁶

Born of indeterminate sex, Barbin was seized by the apparatus of the human sciences bent on the identification of her true sex as well as her classification among the "perversions" and anomalies of nature. Cases such as "his" demanded a "normalizing" response by modern, classificatory medical science, and a "normalized" resolution indicated by Barbin's assumption of "his" medico-legal male identity.

Finally, the human sciences wielded the same authority over Pierre Riviere, with similarly consequences. Foucault reveals through archival documents a course of events in which the intervention of scientific authorities did not necessarily mitigate the severity

⁷⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Introduction," in Foucault, Michel, ed., Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite, New York: Pantheon, 1980, pp.vii. Hereinafter cited as HB.

of Riviere's treatment. Indeed, according to one of Foucault's collaborators, they prolonged his agony by successfully petitioning the courts to commute Riviere's sentence from death to life imprisonment, on psychiatric grounds, in spite of his own express wishes. "The 'petition'," writes Castels,

"achieved its purpose, since the jury's verdict was erased by a commutation of the penalty, secured through a petition for reprieve based on medical considerations. It was only a semi-victory, however. Pierre Riviere was, as we know, to hang himself in his cell five years later. The doctors' intervention wrested him from the hands of the executioner, but not from the prison administration."⁷⁷

Only in the "lonely and livid death which Pierre Riviere was to give himself in the solitude of the cell" was Riviere able to achieve a conclusion to his agony, one "of which a clumsy psychiatry had tried to cheat him."⁷⁸ Only by taking his own life was Riviere able to bring to an end the years of torment prolonged and made worse by the "garrulous machinery" of the human sciences as they struggled among themselves and with the legal and penal systems for the right to authoritatively determine and assign to him his rightful share of reason, guilt, and responsibility⁷⁹.

Rather than a sign of the humanization of the treatment of criminals, the intervention of medicinal and psychiatric experts into Riviere's case had far more to do with an "expansionist policy" to assert authority over the whole area of social deviance and thus make room for these new professions in which to practice⁸⁰. "The fact," Castel writes,

⁷⁷ Castels, Robert, "The Doctors and Judges," in Foucault, Michel, ed., I, Pierre Riviere, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother...: A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century, trans. Frank Jellinek, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975, p.266. Hereinafter cited as IPR.

⁷⁸ Peter, Jean-Pierre, and Jeanne Favret, "The Animal, The Madman, and Death," in Ibid., pp.197-198.

⁷⁹ Moulin, Patricia, "Extenuating Circumstances," in Ibid., pp.216-217.

⁸⁰ Castels, "The Doctors and Judges," pp.266.

"that the law and medicine each tried to appropriate Riviere's act to itself raises in the first place a problem of nomenclature with regard to two kernels of knowledge, guilt and madness. Behind this theoretical issue is concealed, too, a competition between actors defending their position in the division of social labour: To what type of specialist is he to be entrusted and what will be his 'career'; is it to depend on verdict or diagnosis? But, in the third place, we may observe in the unanimity of the emergent psychiatry the attempt to gain a space for its intervention [...] for the future of mental medicine to deploy in."⁸¹

"Mental medicine," he continues,

"had to demonstrate that it was able to take its rightful place beside the law by advancing into the breach of hard cases [...] Seven of the most eminent medical authorities were not mustering in 1835 for just any murderer whom they had never even seen. They were staging a demonstration of power."⁸²

Finally, if expansionist ambitions to gain exclusive rights to govern over certain populations were not enough to indict psychiatrists, they are shown to harbour a plan for the control and prevention of deviance in which they could exercise authority over individuals even in the absence of deviant acts. "The same persons," he finds,

"who mustered on behalf of Riviere were already committed to a far more ambitious enterprise. The law of 1838 was being prepared with the active assistance of the leading figures in psychiatry. [...] Committal by judicial warrant made provision for speedy confinement, as effective and peremptory as penal restraint, but with the additional advantage that it could be applied before a punishable offense had been committed..."⁸³

At the same time, then, as monarchical arbitrariness in the legal system was in retreat, the human sciences were beginning to assert authority over an increasing number of populations in society. It is the arbitrariness and excessiveness with which the human sciences asserted and exercised their power, as demonstrated by the cases of Jouy, Barbin, and Riviere, to which Foucault draws attention. The overall effect of the growth of the human sciences with respect to modern power has been to intensify and strengthen it, rather than to limit or mitigate it. Increasingly, in matters of "deviance" the limitations

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.252.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.266. Emphasis added.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.268.

placed on the judicial system were more than made up for by the swiftness and excessiveness with which power could be exercised by practitioners of the human sciences who were busily establishing a system of authority, incarceration, and punishment parallel to the penal one. For all the limits and leniencies of the law, Castel concludes, "deviants" such as Jouy, Barbin, and Riviere were now threatened with not one, but, two sanctions: "the machinery of criminal justice, with the shadow of the guillotine hanging over it, and medical isolation, with the shadow of the asylum."⁸⁴ The power exercised by human scientists in the disciplinary and biopolitical society was characterized by an arbitrariness and excess which political modernity was said to have abandoned. The arbitrary authority which human scientists would continue to exercise on the "underside of the law" in modern society is a key feature of the unmasking of the political Enlightenment's "dark side" which Foucault also effects in his work, and which we shall examine in more detail in the following chapter. Once again, the political investment of the human sciences, as Foucault would have it, goes well beyond the level of ideology and substance, to include not only their conditions of emergence, methods, and uses, but the very political relations and status their practitioners enjoy in relation to their objects and the punitive and normalizing function they carry out within the disciplinary system of power which was gradually solidifying its grip on modern society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

With this brand of critique of the human sciences, Foucault attempts to undermine a number of humanist faiths. Foucault's analysis of the human sciences as

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.269.

having emerged out of, and as continuing to serve, the modern disciplinary and biopolitical forms of power in modern society gives the lie to traditional humanist history of science, which portrays them as having emerged out of the rational, disinterested, and heroic struggle of scientific consciousness against ideology and arbitrary power, and as having resulted in the more humane and sensitive treatment of marginalized groups and individuals. It rejects out of hand all pretense on the part of the empirical and human sciences to humane and disinterested curiosity in relation to their objects, and to innocence with respect to power and its exercise over them. By focusing so much attention, however, on forms of knowledge and practice from the nineteenth century, one wonders if Foucault has not, once again, chosen a relatively easy target. Who, today, would challenge the claim that the concepts, categories, and methods of the nineteenth-century psychiatrist, physician, or criminologist were crude, clumsy, and shot through with moral prejudice, ideological blindspots, and professional interests? On this score, it would appear that Foucault occupies crowded and well-trodden territory. But Foucault claims this and more. If he were only claiming that the knowledge of the nineteenth-century human sciences was tainted by assorted strategic interests and cultural prejudices, his analysis of knowledge would be left on the terrain of humanist histories of disenchantment, which imply that knowledge can be purified of such investments and that, on the whole, our current knowledge offers a far less ideological and mythological set of concepts and categories more attuned to existence. It is this very terrain which Foucault wishes to challenge, however. By bracketing the question of objectivity, as we have seen, and by throwing into relief the political and cultural investment of the human sciences in the recent past, Foucault hopes to raise doubts about our own fields and practices of knowledge. Foucault's work exhorts us to consider the disconcerting

proposition that there remain embedded in our contemporary systems and practices of knowledge in the human and social sciences hidden biases and gratuitous cruelty. Thus, he seems to place in jeopardy faith in the possibility of a progressive and emancipatory practice of the science of humankind, a faith maintained as strongly by the inheritors of the critical tradition in humanist thought and practice as by its more traditional counterparts. The conviction that there rests a certain emancipatory interest embedded in the sciences of humankind and society remains strong, in spite of their well-established record of abuses. From either perspective, it would appear that Foucault has, again, neglected to observe the distinction between the "context of discovery" and the "context of justification" in regards to knowledge in the human sciences. On this view, what Foucault seems to be saying is that in so far as certain objects of knowledge, for example "public health" or "the unemployed," emerge out of contexts laden with relations of power and inequality, we ought to set aside altogether questions of the validity or objectivity of such knowledge, and that we should refrain from attempts to deploy it with the expectation that we might produce emancipatory effects or improvements in the lives of individuals. Again, however, while a selective reading of his works might support such an interpretation, it is only partially correct.

The power-laden contexts within which knowledge emerges and is used does not, as we have seen, suggest that Foucault refuses to recognize obvious facts within the fields of, say, psychiatry or public health. Foucault is well aware of the reality of what he calls "madness proper," alluding to the existence of individuals clearly wired up differently, apart from the more socially-contrived categories of "unreasonableness" applied to the idle, the poor, and the unemployed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nor does he deny grounds for institutionalizing them, granting this may well

be for their own protection. However, all such facts are still "cultural fact[s] in the broadest sense of the term, which is to say at once political, economic, and social."⁸⁵ This embeddedness in no way touches upon or throws into question the existence of the phenomena captured by such categories. What it does signal for Foucault, however, is the absolute requirement for vigilance with respect to the deployment of such concepts and categories within the context of social relations and the functioning of institutional and therapeutic practices. With regard, for example, to the Brazilian case mentioned in Chapter Two, Foucault argued that:

"The problem is to know how one may obtain therapeutic results, which it would be pitiful to deny, without the setting up of a type of medical power, and a type of authoritarian relationship to the body, and a type of authoritarianism - a *system of obedience*, in the end, because that is what it is about, characteristic of our relationship to the doctor and to medicine today."⁸⁶

Moreover, Foucault does not deny that certain benefits have been accrued, or certain forms of suffering alleviated, by the extension and deployment of the human and social sciences⁸⁷. In the field of social policy, for example, he readily acknowledged improvements made in the lives of groups and individuals, such as the elderly:

"Of course, old people's homes in Nanterre and Ivry do have a sordid image. But the fact that they have caused a scandal is indicative of a new sensibility, itself bound up with a new situation. [...] Today, old people receive pensions on which they can live, and one finds in all the cities of France 'clubs for senior citizens' [...] Even if a number of individuals remain marginalized, the condition of old people has improved a great deal in the last few decades. This is why we are so sensitive - and a good thing, too - to what is still happening in some institutions."⁸⁸

Nonetheless, Foucault's conviction that the pursuit of the sciences of Man is inherently dangerous is left unshaken. While it is always possible for social theory to emerge

⁸⁵ Foucault, Michel, "Social Security," interview in MF, p.175.

⁸⁶ Foucault, "Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison," pp.195-196. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁷ Foucault, Michel, "An Aesthetics of Existence," in FL, p.312.

⁸⁸ Foucault, "Social Security," p.176.

independently of power, the social and human sciences will always be practiced and deployed within practical contexts from which relations of power will never be eradicated. The purpose of his histories of the human sciences, then, is to dramatize the dangers and injuries of the past so that we remain vigilant with respect to their occurrence in the present.

With regard to the forms of humanism we identified as the main targets of Foucault's work, his ethical-political critique of the human sciences seems to touch on all three. In Foucault's analysis, all the major claims of humanism seem to converge in them: the classical humanist faith in the heroic disinterestedness of the subject of scientific consciousness; the juridical humanist portrayal of political modernity as the era of Man's decisive deliverance from arbitrary power and authority via the enshrinement of universal legal rights and freedoms for the individual; and the critical humanist faith in the centrality of knowledge and the sciences of Man to the emancipation of humankind. The conditions of possibility for the human sciences, as well as methods, uses, and the authority exercised in their name by scientists of behaviour, all serve to undermine the naive, classical account of the metaphysical subject of scientific consciousness and its role in the discovery and production of knowledge. Moreover, Foucault's emphasis on the fact that the human sciences are intertwined with power to this very day casts suspicion on critical humanist hopes for a critical and emancipatory practice of the social sciences. The human sciences are by nature inextricably linked to contexts of discovery and deployment which will never be free of relations of power among individuals, groups, institutions, and states. Finally, Foucault's exposes of the arbitrary power exercised by the scientists of behaviour in a host of institutional contexts in the nineteenth and, to a lesser extent, twentieth centuries, belies the empirical account of

political modernity offered up by juridical humanism. With the human sciences, monarchical arbitrariness was simply displaced, relocated, and reconstituted within institutions composing a kind of "discipline-blockade" of the disorderly, the abnormal, and the pathological in order to defend society. All of these acts of seizure, detention, and punishment, moreover, constituted not mere abuses or the perversion of an otherwise humane practice, but, rather, the very conditions of possibility and supports for the liberal régime of rights and freedoms. With the spread of disciplinary institutions and the growth of disciplinary and panoptic sites within society as a whole, that is with the emergence of the social order as a "discipline-mechanism" itself, Foucault's critique of juridical humanism goes even farther. The empirical account of political modernity as an era of increasing freedom is belied not only by isolated institutional sites of abuse at the "extremities of power" beyond the law, but by the growing presence of panoptic and disciplinary practices and agents throughout the social body itself. With this account of political modernity, which is the focus of the following chapter, Foucault calls into question the adequacy of the very terms of political analysis at the centre of the juridical model of humanism. In an increasingly disciplinary, panoptic, and biopolitical society managed via the regulation and management of bodies and conduct relative to norms, as opposed to the simple enforcement of the law, traditional terms of political analysis such as rights, autonomy, sovereignty, legitimacy, and contract become, if not meaningless, certainly inadequate to describe or address the functioning of modern power and its hold on the modern subject.

Chapter Five

Myths of Emancipation: Foucault's Critique of Modern Society

"Historically, the process by which the bourgeoisie became in the course of the eighteenth century the politically dominant class was masked by the establishment of an explicit, coded, and formally egalitarian juridical framework [...] But the development and generalization of disciplinary mechanisms constituted the other, dark side of these processes. The general juridical form that guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle was supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines. [...] the disciplines provide, at the base, a guarantee of the submission of forces and bodies. The real corporeal disciplines constituted the foundation of the formal, juridical liberties. [...] The Enlightenment, which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines."

Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish

By the early 1970s, in addition to adopting an explicitly genealogical approach to knowledge, Foucault's interests shifted significantly: from an analysis of knowledge in which the role played by non-discursive factors was secondary, to an analysis of practices, such as penal detention and confession, in which knowledge and discourse are deeply implicated in the functioning of a whole new "disciplinary" form of power definitive of modernity. As we have seen in previous chapters, Foucault's genealogical works both renewed and continued his longstanding challenge to the epistemological naivete of classical humanism, as well as what he saw as the more extravagant claims of Marxist-humanists like Sartre on behalf of universal history. With the rise of the question of power, practices, and the strategic nature of knowledge and discourse in modern society, the metatheoretical preoccupations of his archaeological works also begin to give way to an ethico-political critique of humanist modernity which challenged not only the liberal juridical form of humanism but the Hegelian and Freudian-Marxist critical

humanism of his radical contemporaries. The portrayal of modern society developed by Foucault over the course of the 1970s and early-1980s, as largely domesticated by the operation of insidious mechanisms of "discipline," "normalization," "panoptic" surveillance, "biopolitics," and "governmentality," and as peopled by disciplined, normalized, and responsabilized individuals who participate in and acquiesce to their own subjection, mounts a direct challenge to the empirical adequacy of both the liberal as well as Marxist-humanist account of the achievements of bourgeois political modernity, as well as the adequacy of the very conceptual and analytical frameworks each brings to bear upon them. More than that, Foucault's analysis and critique of the nature of modern power implicates the production of humanistic knowledge itself in the maintenance of social control, casting suspicion on the presumed benevolence of the very question of Man and the motives and practices supporting the objectification of ourselves.

Foucault's analysis of modern power undermines the liberal celebration of bourgeois constitutionalism and its empirical account of political modernity as having brought state power to heel on behalf of universal, abstract Man, and as having achieved the emancipation of the individual after centuries of bondage to arbitrary power, tradition, and superstition. According to Foucault, this standard liberal humanist account of the bourgeois struggle for formal legal rights and freedoms on behalf of property obscures other historical tendencies and aspects of modernity and the liberal tradition of statecraft too often ignored, especially what Foucault variously refers to as *raison d'etat*, the *Polizeiwissenschaften*, "the disciplines," "normalization," "biopower," and "governmentality". Foucault returns to the classical literature of statecraft from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, as well as to the history of practices

and institutions like the prison, in order to show that the triumph of mercantilism, industrialization, and constitutional government was made possible by the simultaneous proliferation and daily functioning of a host of mechanisms, practices, and relations, often operating at the level of the body, designed to promote certain norms, rules, and habits of everyday conduct conducive to the liberal social order, and to identify, interdict, and correct instances of non-conformity and sources of disorder. According to Foucault, such policing of everyday conduct was not of a strictly negative or repressive nature but, rather, was oriented towards optimizing the forces of the state as a whole by engaging in a form of social orthopaedics or taxidermy, whereby certain habits, capacities, and forces of the individual were enabled and enhanced while others, such as nomadism or vagrancy militating against the usefulness of the individual, were suppressed¹. Against the popular juridical juxtaposition of the limited state and the autonomous individual, Foucault's work helps bring to light the degree to which the liberal social order was made to function by a complex network of mechanisms for the minute, capillary, and corporeal regulation of individual conduct. Market society developed not only because the liberal state was constrained from interfering in certain ways, but also because, in many respects seldom appreciated, it also intervened quite actively in others. Such measures for ensuring the optimal conduct of the individual and the "well-being" of the population, along with those for suppressing sources of social

¹ Foucault discusses the political rationale of "police" in the following writings: Discipline and Punish, New York: Vintage, 1979, pp.213-217; "Politics and Reason," in Foucault, Michel, Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Lawrence Kritzman, ed., New York: Routledge, 1988, pp.57-85; "The Political Technology of Individuals," in Martin, Luther, et al, eds., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, pp.145-162; and "Governmentality," in Burchell, Graham, et al, eds., The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp.87-104.

disorder and pathology, have continued to this very day, Foucault argues, operating "on the underside of the law," and constitute one of, if not the most important, modes of the operation of power in modern society. We have already examined this phenomenon of "police" to a limited extent in previous chapters insofar as it formed the strategic conditions of possibility for the emergence of the human sciences. In this chapter I examine its implications for the analyses of modern society offered up by both the juridical and critical humanists. Here, inevitably, our attention will focus on Foucault's two most relevant texts, Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality.

Foucault argues that the celebration of the achievements of liberal modernity on behalf of the emancipated and autonomous individual subject of formal rights and freedoms is deeply problematic. The formal emancipation of the individual rested on her continued subjection to a host of subtle mechanisms and relations which ensured that her behaviour was tailored to the needs of the social order. In fact, he suggests, the very origins of the individual experience of selfhood are rooted in mechanisms and practices of power which have *produced* the modern experience of selfhood or subjectivity. Not only, then, is the juridical account of the nature of modern society and individuality empirically invalid, its very conceptual framework is inadequate to the task of analyzing the increasingly disciplinary and capillary forms assumed by modern power. The terms of political discourse and analysis adopted by liberal juridical humanism, such as autonomy, sovereignty, legitimacy, contract, and right are, in a society increasingly regulated by norms, experts, and minute mechanisms to ensure order, health, and "welfare," operating at the level of the corporeal and the quotidian, simply insufficient to address or meaningfully constrain the functioning of power on the individual. As a result, Foucault calls for a new awareness of the "political technology of the body," of "the

microphysics of power" in modern society, and calls for further genealogical studies of modern "governmentality".

Now, Foucault's analysis of modern power has implications for the critical humanism of his Marxist and Freudian contemporaries as well. While correctly identifying the distorted and obfuscatory nature of the liberal humanist portrayal of political modernity, drawing attention to the rule of economic power over the lives of formally free juridical individuals, Foucault argued that the postwar Marxist orthodoxy, in France at least, was also empirically and conceptually deficient. While most of his analyses of the origins of knowledge, institutions, and practices from Madness and Civilization to The History of Sexuality acknowledge the role played by class and economic interests, Foucault argues that Marxist preoccupations with the economic and with the seizure of state power by the proletariat neglect the capillary and corporeal nature of the functioning of modern power no less than liberal humanists. In terms of its conception of power as monolithically held by the state and capital, and as exercised in strictly negative, repressive ways, Foucault argued, Marxist-humanism had yet to "cut off the head of the King"². Such a "monarchical" conception of power fails to account sufficiently both for the *productive* nature of power as a force which enables and produces certain forms of life, and for the quotidian and corporeal functioning of power on the conduct of not only workers but families, students, children, soldiers, hospital patients, and the insane. The nature of modern power cannot be exhausted by class or economistic analyses. According to Foucault, then, while it represents an advance on the liberal celebration of bourgeois constitutionalism, Marxist-humanism not only neglects

² Foucault, Michel, The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction, New York: Vintage, 1980, p.89. Hereinafter cited as HS.

to analyse the nature of modern power in full but, in so far as its conceptual arsenal privileges economic relations, class struggle, state repression, and the exploitive relations between labour and capital, it cannot sufficiently account for or address the reality of power and its complex functioning.

Finally, in the first volume of his planned history of sexuality, Foucault pursues a line of argument which challenges the Freudian-Marxist synthesis advocated by other critical humanists, like Herbert Marcuse, as well. Such humanists, according to Foucault, privilege sexuality and its "surplus repression" as the source of human alienation, and call for the "liberation" of our "true" sexual selves. In so far as it unmasked the regulation of bodies, sex, and pleasure as an important aspect of modern domination, the Freudian-Marxist synthesis represented offered a compelling new narrative to place along side both the liberal and more orthodox Marxist depictions of modernity. However, Foucault argues, the "repressive hypothesis" and the very concept of ourselves as having one true sex are fraught with danger. The very means by which we are encouraged to "liberate" our true sexual selves - confession, self-examination, discourse, and expert intervention (psychoanalysis) - which Foucault dubs "the hermeneutics of the self," constitute the principal techniques through which the discursive unity of "sexuality" has been constructed and deployed, with all its normalizing effects on the body. Modern interiority and selfhood have been heavily colonized by sexuality as constitutive of our deepest, hidden truth; one of which we must speak truthfully, and for which we must take responsibility, in order to free ourselves of its etiological power to produce disease and other pathological reactions. The effect of this kind of discursification of sex and of ourselves is the production of new objectivities within the field of sex which offer up new surfaces and holds for power. In other words, the sexual liberationism espoused by

Reich and Marcuse actually plays into the hands of biopower. Thus, according to Foucault's analysis and critique of modern institutions and practices, and of the functioning of power in and through them, the liberal juridical and critical forms of humanism neither comprehend adequately the nature of modern power nor equip us with the analytical and critical tools sufficient to fully understand let alone resist it. Having said that, however, care must be taken that Foucault's accounts of modern power not be transformed into the *new* final, exhaustive description of social and political modernity substituting and superceding its humanist predecessors. Foucault presents his analytics of modern power not to establish its findings as the new truth but, rather, in order to produce critical and resistance-enabling effects in relation to the practices by which it is currently sustained.

i) Knowing and Governing

In the 1970's and early 1980's, much of Foucault's attention was focused on examining and calling attention to that *other* tradition of liberal statecraft which involved *positive* interventions in the life of society. Contrary to both the juridical and Marxist-humanist portrayals of the liberal state, which tended to emphasize its negative, limited, weak, or inactive character bound by the rights of juridical, propertied individuals, Foucault excavates a vast array of schemes, administrative policies, and real measures which entailed complex and various forms of state surveillance, vigilance, and intervention from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century designed to induce certain forms of conduct and behaviour. This work paralleled closely work being done at the same time by figures like Oestreich on the rise of Neo-Stoic theories and practices in

early modern states³. Foucault identifies and elucidates a number of political rationalities of control embodied not only in the practices and institutions of the early liberal state but in increasing numbers of private contexts as well, including work, family, schools, prisons, and asylums.

Traditions of liberal governance, Foucault claims, had their origins in the mid-sixteenth century theories of *raison d'etat* and the model of pastoral power exercised by the medieval Church. These theories were initially put into practice in the service of absolutism and mercantilism, but were later adapted to administrative sciences and real measures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which Foucault variously dubs "police," "discipline," "biopolitics," and "governmentality". While not to be conflated, these theories and practices of liberal governance have important similarities. Firstly, at issue in all these governmental strategies and measures was not so much the defence of the sovereign or the enforcement of laws as it was the objective of expanding, intensifying, and strengthening the state and all its "forces," which is not to deny the importance of the various juridical and constitutional developments of the time. Each of these strategies entailed a network of measures and practices through which the forces of the state - land use, public works, capital, productivity, labour, commerce, public health, and population - could be *optimized*. As the burgeoning literature on statecraft from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century recognized, the objectives of prosperity, well-being, and security for the society as a whole - which were likened to the goals of patriarchal household management or animal husbandry - required myriad forms of positive state

³ Colin Gordon remarks upon these parallels in his article, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," in Burchell, et al, eds., The Foucault Effect, pp.12-13. See also: Oestreich, Gerhard, Neo-Stoicism and the Early Modern State, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

action⁴. Secondly, the goal of such administrative practice was not so much obedience to the law as it was the maintenance of *order* via the cultivation of certain norms of conduct, patterns of behaviour, and regular habits in areas of life not heavily codified by law, such as work, family, and education. As the maintenance of order and regularity were increasingly viewed as the condition of prosperity, security, and the well-being of all, an important aspect of positive state action becomes the identification, classification, correction, punishment, and eradication of sources of disorder, irregularity, and pathology - such as nomadism, pauperism, promiscuity, lack of thrift, and poor hygiene and housing - within the social body. The state and all its mechanisms for securing order and prosperity must identify and interdict all those behaviours, habits, and forms of life and conduct which endanger them.

Administrative measures such as the cadastral mapping of society or the use of inspection agents to assess housing, health, hygiene, and public morality amongst the poor take as their object not the law and its transgression by offenders but, rather, norms and regularities of conduct and the relative proximity to or derivation from them on the part of individuals and groups. For this kind of "police" state, the "social enemy," so to speak, is less the law-breaker than the deviant, the abnormal, and the nonconforming. Faced with a variety of "dangerous individuals," including the delinquent and the insane, and with recalcitrant "irregular" forms of life like nomadism, pauperism, and promiscuity, the measurement and adjustment of the population in relation to norms of good conduct and behaviour - what Foucault calls *normalization* - became a regular and pervasive function in European societies by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁴ Foucault, "Governmentality," p.92.

While initially assumed by the state and its agents, this normalizing function was eventually devolved to a host of private and quasi-public institutions and settings, including schools, families, workplaces, asylums, and hospitals beyond the scope or reach of public law and juridical protection. Foucault refers variously to this phenomenon as a "disciplinary generalization," an expanding "carceral archipelago," and the "governmentalization of the state".

Furthermore, given the interest that the administrative branch of liberal statecraft takes in the non-judicial conduct of citizens, there is an intensification of interest in the individual as an ensemble of forces with implications for the overall well-being of the society as a whole. Rather than a juridical individual constituting the absolute, inviolable limit of state action, this individual constitutes a biological, economic, and social being endowed with forces, capacities, qualities, and habits more or less conducive to the maintenance of order and prosperity. As a result, administrative science takes an interest in the individual that is largely instrumental: how useful or dangerous is the individual to the state and its development?

Another important tactic of the modern governmental rationality of discipline and biopolitics is what we might term the "responsibilization" of the individual. In this case, various discursive and material mechanisms were deployed in order to cultivate and encourage various forms of *self*-government and *self*-surveillance on the part of individual's as a guarantee of order and security. By making individuals aware of the existence of various undisciplined habits and dangerous proclivities on their own part, or that of those around them, they are effectively made to become responsible for them; curtailing, suppressing, reporting them to the authorities, and so on. The "responsibilization" of the individual offers a an insurance policy against disorder

without the "heaviness," violence, and inefficiencies of more directly coercive and physical forms of control. As we shall see, Foucault's work examines numerous such "responsibilizing" mechanisms and tactics, including the circulation of strategic, discursive unities like the "masturbating child," which responsibilized parents in relation to their offspring, and other more direct forms of manipulation designed to modify behaviour and inculcate certain habits and forms of conduct on the part of the nineteenth-century working class, such as thrift, punctuality, settled living arrangements, and hygiene.

Finally, what all these forms of governmental rationality have in common is a voracious appetite for knowledge. Since the days of absolutism and mercantilism, and continuing to this day, the maintenance of liberal social order, prosperity and security calls for a certain highly detailed, cadastral mapping of society and its physical and human capital. In addition to its physical resources, the state requires a statistical mapping of the norms and regularities of the population and its conduct, health, wealth, and so forth, as well as a finely-tuned, highly individualized knowledge of each citizen in order to calculate the degree of risk or danger each poses to society - *omnes et singulatim*⁵. This called for mechanisms of surveillance and knowledge-constitution acting, "like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on alert [...]"⁶. "Throughout the eighteenth century," Foucault recounts,

⁵ Foucault, Michel, "*Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of Political Reason*," in The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Vol.2, Sterling McCurrin, ed., Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1979. Also published as: Foucault, Michel, "Politics and Reason," in MF, pp.57-85.

⁶ Foucault, DP, p.214.

"an immense police text increasingly covered society by means of a complex documenting organization [...] And, unlike methods of judicial [...] writing, what was registered in this way were forms of behaviour, attitudes, possibilities, suspicions - a permanent record of individuals' behaviour."⁷

As we have already seen in previous chapters, the rationality of police, order, and prosperity give rise to new branches of knowledge in the sciences of Man in his regularity and irregularity which are instrumental to the maintenance, security, and development of the liberal social order. The need for detailed knowledge of individual lives effects a striking reversal in the relations of visibility which obtain between governors and the governed. Prior to the emergence of this new rationale of governing, it was the sovereign that was best known, storied, and individualized in relation to the anonymous mass of subjects. Under liberal governance, it is the individual citizen, subject to "compulsory visibility" and around whom a whole "case history" must be constructed, who becomes individualized and legible for the state, while the latter takes on increasingly pervasive but less visible forms⁸. In states administered by such principles, individualization becomes directly proportional to the degree of marginality, abnormality, and deviance embodied in a life, and to the consequent degree of danger it poses to the social order. According to Foucault, the modern state's dependence on the turning of its citizens' lives into knowledge amounts to a veritable form of governing *by* the production of truth, that is, through the production of knowledge on the basis of techniques of surveillance and other means of extracting the truth of individuals. Such mechanisms of governing through the truth production must become, Foucault insists, analytically central to the study and critique of knowledge and power in modern society.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.214.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.187.

Insistence on the benevolence and emancipatory potential of the question Man, by which individuals are encouraged to produce and speak the truth of ourselves in myriad forms, must, therefore, be closely scrutinized

ii) Police

Let us now take a closer look at one classical theory of governmental rationality which attracted Foucault's attention- the eighteenth century science of "police" - as well as the means by which it was operationalized, *discipline*, in the social body of eighteenth and nineteenth-century France. What Foucault finds so striking about this political rationality and the disciplinary means by which it was implemented is the degree to which, as a form of the exercise of power in modern societies, it has been thoroughly neglected in both liberal juridical as well as Marxist-humanist accounts of modernity⁹. According to Foucault's research, the eighteenth century in particular witnessed an explosion of interest in the administrative science of statecraft eventually dubbed, "police". Associated with the writings of such figures as Botero, Von Justi, and Beccaria, the *Polizeiwissenschaften* gained wide credence at the time, leading to the establishment of numerous professional programmes in universities specializing in administration, and inspiring a host of political and administrative measures adopted by such enlightened political reformers as Frederick the Great, Joseph II, Catherine the Great, and Napoleon¹⁰. This new political rationality aimed to maintain social order while

⁹ Foucault gives a good deal of credit for this insight to one notable exception, Otto Kirchheimer's and George Rusche's Punishment and Social Structures, which appeared in English in 1939. See: *Ibid.*, pp.24-25.

¹⁰ Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals," p.158.

enhancing the productivity, prosperity, and forces of the state and its population through an extensive network of "police" mechanisms. As it was used at the time, the term "police" had much broader connotations than it does for us today. According to Foucault, the *Polizeiwissenschaften* took as their object not legality and illegality but, rather, order and disorder, security and risk, normality and abnormality, as these were manifest in the social body, taking the form of regularities, capacities, habits, and conduct, as well as irregularities, abnormalities, and dangers. Thus, the "police" sciences took as their object all those regularities, behaviours, capacities, and habits conducive to the order and well-being of the state, as well as those tending to weaken it¹¹. Mechanisms of "police" - statistics, surveillance, philanthropy, inspection, moral exhortation, *etc.* - were designed to encourage and reward the former while rooting out, correcting, and punishing the latter. This meant that, in the political and administrative reforms of enlightenment Europe, the "policing" of society included not only law-enforcement and public security in relation to *juridical* individuals, but supervision and management of a whole range of matters and activities bearing upon the well-being and good order of the state and its *population*¹². The objects of "police" attention and intervention, then, ranged from infant mortality, birth rates, epidemics, sexual habits, and housing for the poor and invalid, to public works, religious worship, commerce, education, and the mobility of labour, servants, and paupers¹³. Late eighteenth-century designs for "police" mechanisms called for:

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.151-157.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.159.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.154-156.

"an apparatus that must be coextensive with the entire social body and not only by the extreme limits that it embraces, but by the minuteness of the details it is concerned with. Police power must bear 'on everything' [...] it is the dust of events, actions, behaviour, opinions - 'everything that happens'; the police are concerned with those 'things of every moment', those 'unimportant things' [...]"¹⁴

In short, the "policing" of society entailed an increasingly microscopic and continuous surveillance, management, and control of the *quotidian* and the mundane aspects of the life of society and its inhabitants, not only through law-enforcement agents, but through physicians, employers, parents, philanthropic and religious organizations, educators, state inspectors, and social science experts. What was entailed, in short, was a rigorous, fine-tuned, and unceasing policing of *life* itself, which took as its object not the law and juridical subjects but society and its *population*, and also the *norm*, the individual, and the degree of his divergence from it. According to Foucault, developments in the Continental *Polizeiwissenschaften* were paralleled in England by the schemes and plans for social order and prosperity envisioned by social reformers like Jeremy Bentham. Bentham made the link between order and prosperity explicit; that is, that the state's security depended very directly on the relative freedom of its inhabitants from catastrophe's like famine, economic instability, epidemics. Hence, the task of maintaining the good order of the state extends beyond law enforcement to include managing risks by providing various forms of insurance¹⁵. According to Foucault, precisely this kind of governmental rationality of security, well-being, insurance, and risk management can be seen in twentieth-century and contemporary schemes and policies of "governmentality," including Keynesian counter-cyclical fiscal policy, the Beveridge

¹⁴ Foucault, DP, p.213.

¹⁵ Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," p.19.

Report, and the New Deal. In any event, understanding "real liberalism" requires going beyond the theories and analytical framework of juridical humanism, and beyond denouncing it as mere ideology, to examine in detail those positive and productive mechanisms of liberal statecraft in place since the early modern period.

Now, thus far we have said little about the measures and mechanisms by which this "police" rationality was operationalized and made to play upon the conduct, behaviour, and habits of the populations of liberal societies. The "police" mechanisms of greatest interest to Foucault, and for which his work has become notorious, were disciplinary institutions like prisons, asylums, hospitals, and schools, the emergence and proliferation of which was one of the major plots of Discipline and Punish. According to Foucault, the rationality of "police" generated a widespread interest in, experimentation with, and eventual adoption of a set of disciplinary practices in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which promised to ensure that the individual conduct of those subject to them - workers, children, students, soldiers, families, and the sick and insane - would be felicitous for the good order, prosperity, and well-being of society as a whole¹⁶. The demands of "police" were complex: there was a need for measures to stimulate the growth of productivity, commerce, industry, and urbanization, while at the same time such gains were threatened by numerous sources of disorder and risk. The mechanization and socialization of labour boosted productivity, but also increased the risk of widespread economic disruption as a result of sabotage, larceny, absenteeism, and collective action. As a result, the mechanization and socialization of production, which served to boost output, required complimentary measures to manage the risks of

¹⁶ Foucault, DP, pp.135-137.

socialized labour by fashioning a docile, orderly, disciplined labour force out of more or less recalcitrant material¹⁷. Similarly, while the clearing of the commons and subsequent rapid urbanization placed a pool of desperate labour at the disposal of industry, it also increased social and biological risks, including pauperization, transience, epidemics, promiscuity, orphanage, overcrowding, and petty crime, not to mention organization and communication among the poor. Therefore, the project of disciplining the population had to extend beyond the workplace to encompass the sphere of the family, sexuality, hygiene, housing, urban planning, education, and health care. According to Foucault, a host of normalizing and responsabilizing measures was inserted into the social body in order to suppress various forms of social and biological "contagion".

iii) Discipline and the Prison

The concept of "discipline" is central to the analysis of power and governance in modern society offered by Foucault in Discipline and Punish. Discipline refers not only to a certain modality of bodily constraint, control, and manipulation, which was in use in discrete settings well before the modern period, but to the adoption of this mode of power on such a widespread scale as to constitute a whole 'economy' or 'form of power' in its own right, which Foucault argues was pervasive by the nineteenth-century in France. The following features distinguished this new mode of power from those which preceded it: the economy, movement, and internal organization of the body which it took as its object; the microscopic and individual scale on which it focused; and its reliance

¹⁷ Foucault, Michel, "The Punitive Society," in Foucault, Michel, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954 - 1984, Volume I, James Rabinow, ed., trans. Robert Hurley and others, New York: The New Press, 1997, pp.33-34. Hereinafter cited as EST.

upon constant, uninterrupted coercion, constraint and supervision aimed at regularizing and internalizing rules of conduct as the modality by which power operated¹⁸. The "monarchical" form of power dominant up until the end of the eighteenth century sought to manipulate whole populations at once on a mass scale, operating by means of a signifiatory system of excess and spectacle, and operated only intermittently and irregularly¹⁹. Disciplinary power was distinctive in its infinitesimal, capillary-like and continuous operation.

Historically, as a mode of bodily constraint and manipulation, disciplinary techniques were introduced in Christian ascetic and monastic practices. Experimentation over time with these techniques in other contexts, particularly military and industrial ones, produced a wide array of new techniques and mechanisms which served to increase the *utility*, capacity, and efficiency of bodies while simultaneously securing and maintaining their *docility*. A whole series of techniques was developed, Foucault argues,

"[...] for distributing individuals, fixing them in space, classifying them, extracting from them the maximum in time and forces, training their bodies, coding their continuous behaviour, maintaining them in perfect visibility, forming around them an apparatus of observation, registration and recording, constituting on them a body of knowledge that is accumulated and centralized. The general form of an apparatus intended to render individuals docile and useful, by means of precise work on their bodies [...]"²⁰

Discipline operated on the basis of what Foucault calls a "micro-physics" of power in which techniques such as hierarchical observation, examination, time-tables and regimens, spatial arrangements like isolation, and various sorts of bodily *dressage* were imposed upon the inhabitants of one institution or another, thereby manipulating and

¹⁸ Foucault, DP, pp.136-137.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.78-79.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.231.

training their very bodies in order to maximize their utility while minimizing their risks. These methods "made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, [...] assured the constant subjection of its forces, and imposed upon them a relation of utility-docility."²¹ Foucault distinguishes modern discipline from the ascetic and monastic techniques of early Christianity in so far as the latter involved renunciation and mastery of the body, whereas the former is directed, "not only at the growth of its skills, nor at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely."²² "Thus," Foucault writes: "discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)."²³ The exercise of disciplinary power constitutes a virtual "political anatomy" of the body²⁴. It promised to optimize the force and capacities of pupils, workers, and soldiers, for example, without the political and strategic risks which accompanied their concentration in large numbers.

The disciplinary exercise of power over the conduct of individuals found its most concentrated and exhaustive form in the nineteenth-century prison. It was in the prison that the whole arsenal of disciplinary techniques were deployed against the individual and his conduct and character, including isolation, continuous one-way observation, strict regimens of activity, mandatory work, and non-reciprocal communication and examination. As the governmental rationale of "police" exercised growing influence in

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.137.

²² *Ibid.*, pp.137-8.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.138.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.193.

late-eighteenth century France, it is small wonder a virtual "colonization of the penalty" by the prison in the space of two decades, complete by 1810, was witnessed there²⁵. The adoption of the prison jibed smoothly with the political rationale of police. The history of the prison Foucault offers, in which its adoption is explained in terms of the deployment of disciplinary mechanisms to punish more certainly and efficiently, and to orthopaedically correct the soul of the offender, rather than as the triumph of a humane agenda aimed at restraining the law via the absolute limit of the body of the juridical subject, presents a clear challenge to the liberal humanist portrayal of both penal history and the putative limits placed on power in the nineteenth century *vis-a-vis* the individual.

Revealing and elaborating upon the origins of the prison in the political rationality of "police" and premodern practices of Christian monasticism accounts for much of the substance of Discipline and Punish. The impetus for penal reform had its origins, as we saw in Chapter Four, in the emergence of the new bourgeois economy and growing fears of the "criminality of fraud" over that of "blood"²⁶. The interest of penal reformers was in making punishment more effective and "generalized" in order to reduce incidences of fraud and petty theft. A new system for the punishment of offences, especially those against property, was called for. A decreased use of violence against the body was accompanied by a general increase in surveillance and a heightened intolerance of petty crime - less violence, but more *policing* in general²⁷. Reformers objected not to the violence of public torture but to its *irregularity* and *inefficiency* within a monarchical system of power that punished spectacularly but intermittently, sometimes too harshly,

²⁵ Ibid., pp.115-118.

²⁶ Ibid., pp.75-77.

²⁷ Ibid., pp.76-78.

and at times not at all. The monarchical system of punishment, in its irregularity and intermittency, afforded subjects an interstitial "space of tolerance"²⁸ or "zone of shade"²⁹ in which to engage in various "tolerated" and "necessary illegalities"³⁰. The new bourgeois economy could not tolerate such a "bad economy of power" in the penal system. Penal reformers, then, sought means of ensuring not less but *generalized* punishment which would punish *better* and more effectively in the face of widespread petty illegality. The penal reform movement, then, far from an effort to trace more juridical limits around the power to punish, was:

"...more certainly and more immediately [...] an effort to adjust the mechanisms of power that frame the everyday lives of individuals; an adaptation and a refinement of the machinery that assumes responsibility for and places under surveillance their everyday behaviour, their identity, their activity, their apparently unimportant gestures; another policy for that multiplicity of bodies and forces that constitutes a population."³¹

While initially disdained by reformers for its monarchical and despotic associations of the past, and its tendency to hide rather than make public and instructional use of convicts, imprisonment became the essential form of punishment in France by 1810. While the traditional history of penology attributes the rise of the prison to the influence of "progressive" models of the penitentiary formulated in the premodern era, Foucault argues that these were not decisive for the realization of the new mode of punishment based on the prison. Rather, in the prison agenda were combined concerns about the effectiveness and efficiency of punishment, which its advocates shared with other reformers, and a growing awareness of and expertise in the use of techniques for

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.177.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.82.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp.77-78.

the manipulation and training of bodies and "souls". Whereas the reformers advocated the use of the offender in a kind of "punitive theatre" involving a series of penalty-representations - chain-gangs, pillories, and the like - designed to have effects upon the rest of the social body³², advocates of the prison as punishment viewed it as a technique for the manipulation and transformation of the offender's conduct, habits, and inclinations. For the prison advocate, the object of reform was the body and soul of the offender, who would be subject to the *corrective* effects of continuous surveillance, time-tables, regimens, and constraints in order to restore the "obedient subject"³³. The prison constituted "an exhaustive disciplinary apparatus" which took responsibility for:

"[...] all aspects of the individual, his physical training, his aptitude for work, his everyday conduct, his moral attitude, his state of mind; the prison, much more than the school, the workshop or the army, [...] is 'omni-disciplinary'. Moreover, the prison has neither exterior nor gap; it cannot be interrupted, except when its task is totally completed; its action on the individual must be uninterrupted: an unceasing discipline. Lastly, it gives almost total power over the prisoners; it has its internal mechanisms of repression and punishment: a despotic discipline. It carries to their greatest intensity all the procedures to be found in the other disciplinary mechanisms. It must be the most powerful machinery for imposing a new form on the perverted individual; its mode of action is the constraint of a total education[...] This complete 'reformatory' lays down a recoding of existence very different from the mere juridical deprivation of liberty [...]"³⁴

Disciplinary incarceration relied upon a number of basic mechanisms - isolation, hierarchical observation, work, and modulation of the penalty to suit the individual - in order to achieve transformative effects. One of the most significant innovations in the technology of discipline was the strategic deployment of hierarchical, non-reciprocal, and continuous observation. Relations of visibility and invisibility, achieved by certain spatial, architectural, and design elements within various institutions and settings, it was

³² *Ibid.*, pp.104-114.

³³ *Ibid.*, p.128.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.236.

thought, could achieve transformative and corrective effects on the habits and conduct of those subject to them. Where the prison was concerned, these techniques of surveillance had the potential to be at their most exhaustive. According to Foucault,

"He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection."³⁵

The most powerful illustration of how relations of visibility/invisibility and hierarchical observation play upon the conduct and body of the individual is found in Foucault's description of Bentham's Panopticon. This blueprint for an exhaustive disciplinary institution outlined a building and spatial arrangements which facilitated the hierarchical and continual surveillance of individuals, ensuring their good conduct while contributing to the construction of knowledge of each as a 'case', and to the increase of knowledge in general. The Panopticon relies for its disciplinary effects on the conditions in which the individual finds herself: spatially separated and individualized, and rendered permanently visible. Subjection to hierarchical observation and continuous visibility is paramount to the achievement of disciplinary effects. "Hence," he writes,

"the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; [...] in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers."³⁶

The diabolical lesson of this "cruel, ingenious cage"³⁷ is that "it is not necessary to use force to constrain the convict to good behaviour, the madmen to calm, the worker to

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.202-203.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.201.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.205.

work, the schoolboy to application [...]”³⁸. Permanent visibility and an awareness that one may be observed at any time constrain more effectively than the dungeon and its chains. Assuming they are being observed, individuals *internalize* the panoptic operation, *subjecting themselves* to an interiorized discipline³⁹. The “eye of power” is rapidly internalized by the inmate and trained on his own conduct. “He who is subjected to a field of visibility,” Foucault writes,

“and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporal; and the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound and permanent are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided in advance.”⁴⁰

“We are talking,” says Foucault.

“about two things here: the gaze, and interiorization. [...] you have the system of surveillance, which [...] involves very little expense. There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that *he is his own overseer*, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself.”⁴¹

All of this is a peculiar effect of power produced by certain spatial arrangements and relations of visibility/invisibility imposed by the disciplinary apparatus. With regards to the origin of the prison, Foucault argues that given state and social interests in devising a more efficient, effective and certain system of punishment and social control, it is little wonder they gravitated towards the transformative and corrective advantages which *disciplinary* techniques seemed to offer.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.202.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.202-203.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.202-203.

⁴¹ Foucault, “The Eye of Power”, pp.154-55.

The birth of the prison and the abandonment of corporal punishment, then, have little to do with a new respect for the inviolable juridical subject, or with the "humane" sensitivities or emancipatory interests of a noble science which discovered the humanity and corrigibility of the criminal, as we saw in the last chapter. The attraction of the prison was not that it adjusted punishment to new, more humane or juridically less arbitrary standards, according to which detention alone could be justified as the legitimate and civilized form of punishment. The prison was not solely, if at all, established as an institution for the deprivation of liberty. Rather, in so far as it was adopted as part of a broader political rationality of "police," the prison took as its object and intent the "reform," correction, and transformation of individuals who, in relation to the maintenance of order and social well-being, represented a certain, potentially recalcitrant risk.

"One thing is clear: the prison was not at first a deprivation of liberty to which a technical function of correction was later added; it was from the outset a form of 'legal detention' entrusted with an additional corrective task, or an enterprise for reforming individuals that the deprivation of liberty allowed to function in the legal system. In short, penal imprisonment, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, covered both the deprivation of liberty and technical transformation of individuals."⁴²

The application of disciplinary techniques to the prison was not, then, a strictly negative operation but, rather, a *productive* one. The prison deprived inmates of their liberty, to be sure; however, where the individual convict was concerned, the intent and effect of disciplinary techniques in the prison were transformative and productive.

This peculiarly positive and productive function of the prison is one of the most noteworthy aspects of disciplinary power. The effects of discipline are as productive of

⁴² Foucault, DP, p.231.

certain habits, proclivities, and behaviours as they are repressive of others. This can be seen in the case of a particularly problematic, ubiquitous, and recalcitrant population, the presence of which became an increasing source of concern and alarm for liberal states by the end of the eighteenth century - the poor, the unemployed, and nomadic "masterless men" subsisting on the margins of towns and cities in rapidly industrializing and urbanizing Europe. Increasingly in the nineteenth century, incarceration and subjection to the disciplinary institution of the prison was viewed as a means of *fabricating* disciplined workers and citizens out of this disorderly population. The assortment of disciplinary mechanisms, including imprisonment, deployed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against the poor, the transient, and the unemployed was the focus of a course given by Foucault at the College de France in the early 1970s⁴³. Confinement, he found, was intended less to keep them detained than it was to keep them *moving*: to keep them out of the cities, to prevent free-roaming, to direct population flows in accordance with the needs of production and the labour market. Furthermore, his research showed:

"Confinement also intervenes at the level of individual conduct. It penalizes at an infrapenal level ways of living, types of discourse, political projects or intentions, sexual behaviours, rejections of authority, defiances of opinion, acts of violence, and so on. In short, it intervenes not so much on behalf of law as on behalf of order and regularity. The irregular, the unsettled, the dangerous, and the dishonourable are the object of confinement; whereas penalty punishes the infraction, it penalizes disorder."⁴⁴

This helps explain that "colonization of the penalty" by the prison in the first decades of the nineteenth century which seemed so startling. Foucault stresses that the operation, or threat, of prison has important productive effects upon the individual, rather than strictly

⁴³ Foucault's summary of the course has been published as, "The Punitive Society," in EST, pp.23-37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.30-31.

negative ones; it assists in the process and objective of *disciplinary subjectification* whereby individuals are fabricated into particular kinds of subjects or agents - responsible, punctual, reliable, obedient workers - conducive to the social order. Driven by the logic of "police" imperatives of order, utility, and the minimization of risks to society, and championed as the institutional perfection of disciplinary techniques productive of simultaneously useful and docile individuals, the prison became one of the most widespread mechanisms for the production and maintenance of order in the nineteenth century.

iv) Disciplinary Society

While ostensibly a history of the prison, there is a major sub-plot to Discipline and Punish with more serious implications for the juridical and Marxist-humanist accounts of political modernity. Foucault's analysis of prison discipline serves as a prelude to exposing a much more insidious and disturbing phenomenon: the generalization of disciplinary techniques to a host of other institutions and settings, including the family, the workplace, schools, hospitals, and mental asylums in the nineteenth century. Discipline and Punish describes the gradual extension of the disciplinary modality of power into increasing domains and institutions of life over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to form a virtual "disciplinary society". While a feature of the organization of power in isolated institutions for the marginalized from the seventeenth century onward, as a form of power generalized across society, discipline did not take hold until the end of the eighteenth⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.136.

Discipline and Punish posits not a sudden revolutionary transformation in the economy of power in modern society but, rather, a gradual infiltration, transfer, and seepage of the techniques of discipline into increasing numbers and varieties of settings. By the eighteenth century, disciplinary techniques were,

“...at work in secondary education [...], later in primary schools; they slowly invested the space of the hospital; and, in a few decades, they restructured the military organization. They sometimes circulated very rapidly from one point to another (between the army and the technical schools or secondary schools), sometimes slowly and discreetly (the insidious militarization of the large workshops). [...] This did not prevent them being totally inscribed in general and essential transformations [...]. These were always meticulous, often minute, techniques, but they had their importance: because they defined a certain mode of detailed political investment of the body, a ‘new micro-physics’ of power; and because, since the seventeenth century, they had constantly reached out to ever broader domains, as if they intended to cover the entire social body.”⁴⁶

Disciplinary techniques were already being employed in numerous institutional settings prior to the establishment of the prison and its colonization of the penalty⁴⁷. Foucault describes the Classical period’s use of what he calls the “discipline-blockade” against “dangerous” populations such as the insane and the idle poor, in which disciplinary techniques were confined to exclusionary institutions on the margins of society⁴⁸.

Discipline and Punish recounts the gradual replacement of this exclusion/blockade by a whole “discipline-mechanism” in which the disciplinary exhaustiveness of the prison was replicated in increasing numbers of other social, industrial, and administrative institutions, and within the social body itself as various instruments of “interstitial discipline”, including the police, eliminated more and more “zones of shade”. The prison was not the first disciplinary institution, but it constituted its most exhaustive realization

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.139.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.231.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.209.

and the model for a societal "discipline-mechanism" not qualitatively different from it: "a network of mechanisms that would be everywhere and always alert, running through society without interruption in space or in time."⁴⁹

In disciplinary societies informed by the political rationality of "police," a major social function becomes that of "normalizing" the inhabitants of society in order to optimize them in terms of utility to the state⁵⁰. Normalization entails the construction of a set of norms in relation to which the qualities, capacities, habits, and conduct of individuals can be identified, classified, judged, and adjusted. Societal normalization involves the construction of composite "normal" individuals - "good" workers, "responsible" parents, "diligent" students - as well as the measurement, judgement, and adjustment of individual lives in relation to them. What follows from the normalizing judgement of the agents of discipline - police, psychiatrists, warders, teachers, physicians, social workers, and philanthropists - is the individual's subjection to techniques and practices of correction and punishment in order to *normalize* them. With the spread of disciplinary techniques and objectives over increasing areas of social life, instances in which the inhabitants of European societies were subjected to coercive, normalizing gazes, judgements and corrective techniques in a host of "observatories of human multiplicity"⁵¹ rapidly increased. Indeed, Foucault describes modern society as an essentially *normalizing* one, haunted no longer by the *offense* so much as by the *abnormal*. "[R]eplacing the adversary of the sovereign," he writes, "the social enemy was transformed into a deviant, who brought with him the multiple danger of disorder, crime

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.209.

⁵⁰ Foucault, "The Political Technology of Individuals," p.152.

⁵¹ Foucault, DP, p.171.

and madness."⁵² So, while the judicial system was being subjected to new legal restraints, occasions and sites for normalization in modern society multiplied rapidly:

"[...] the activity of judging has increased precisely to the extent that the normalizing power has spread. Borne along by the omnipresence of the mechanisms of discipline, basing itself on all the carceral apparatuses, it has become one of the major functions of our society."⁵³

Two major targets for normalization in the nineteenth century, Foucault's research reveals, were the insane and the burgeoning industrial, urban working class. Foucault's work on the perception and treatment of the insane had always recognized the role played by psychiatry in the nineteenth century in the maintenance of social order. Foucault's descriptions of the psychiatric retreat and the asylum in Madness and Civilization, as establishing a "universe of judgement"⁵⁴ designed to internalize norms of conduct within the patient in the form of "conscience," anticipate the operation of "discipline," "panopticism," and "normalization" described in Discipline and Punish. In unmasking the so-called "liberation" of the insane into the "empty liberty" of subjective responsibility⁵⁵ he anticipates the the latter work's critique of the production of "docile bodies" and the modern "disciplinary individual". The image of the asylum patient constrained by "subjective responsibility" suggests the internalized, panoptic "eye of power" inculcated in the inhabitant of disciplinary institutions so that they become self-policing. In Foucault's description of the organization and effects of the asylum one could easily substitute for the madman the inmate, pupil, worker or soldier of the disciplinary, panoptic institution:

⁵² Ibid., pp.299-300.

⁵³ Ibid., p.304.

⁵⁴ Foucault, Michel, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Vintage, 1973, p.250. Hereinafter cited as MC.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp.246-7, 250, 260-261, 264-267.

"Everything was organized so that the madman would recognize himself in a world of judgment that enveloped him on all sides; he must know that he is watched, judged, and condemned; from transgression to punishment, the connection must be evident, as a guilt recognized by all: [...] This almost arithmetical obviousness of punishment, repeated as often as necessary, the recognition of transgression by its repression - all this must end in the internalization of the juridical instance, and the birth of remorse in the inmate's mind: it is only at this point that the judges agree to stop the punishment, certain that it will continue indefinitely in the inmate's conscience."⁵⁶

Many of Foucault's other writings on madness and psychiatry emphasized the privileged position occupied by the insane in the panoply of "dangerous individuals" and "contagion" threatening the order and well-being of society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the function of social hygiene and control which he argues was coeval with the emergence of psychiatry as a profession⁵⁷. The birth and growth of the psychiatric profession is attributable not only to the demands for a separation of the insane proper from other forms of unreason but to the "psychiatrization" of crime and disorder which took place in the nineteenth century, which was examined in the previous chapter.

"Irregular" means of subsistence and forms of life among workers and the poor were also a focus for disciplinary mechanisms. The target of discipline and normalization in the sphere of production, Foucault argues, becomes "the very body of the workers and the way in which it is applied to the apparatuses of production."⁵⁸ Disciplinary and normalizing mechanisms become central to fashioning a disciplined industrial "labour force" out of what was at times a recalcitrant population. According to Foucault:

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.267.

⁵⁷ Foucault, "The Dangerous Individual," pp.125-151; and Foucault, "Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison," pp.178-210.

⁵⁸ Foucault, "The Punitive Society," p.33.

"Inadequate wages, disqualification of labour by the machine, excessive labour hours, multiple regional or local crises, prohibition of associations, mechanisms of indebtedness - all this leads workers into behaviours such as absenteeism, breaking of the 'hiring contract', migration and 'irregular' living. The problem is then to attach workers firmly to the production apparatus, to settle them or move them to where it needs them to be, to subject them to its rhythm, to impose the constancy or regularity on them that it requires - in short, to constitute them as a labour force. Hence a set of laws creating new offences (the passbook order, the law concerning drinking establishments, the lottery prohibition); hence a whole series of measures that, without being absolutely binding, bring about a division between the good and bad worker, and seek to ensure a behavioural rectification (the savings bank, the encouragement of marriage, and later, the workers' housing projects; hence the appearance of organizations exercising control or pressure (philanthropic societies, rehabilitation associations); hence, finally, a whole worker moralization campaign. This campaign defines what it wants to exorcise as 'dissipation' and what it wants to establish as 'regularity': a working body that is concentrated, diligent, adjusted to the time of production, supplying exactly the force required."⁵⁹

Discipline and Punish furnishes us with at least one example of the kind of "dangerous individual" or form of life which the prison sought to transform. Foucault relates the case of Beasse, a homeless, streetwise vagabond and sometime street-vendor who, in 1840, was given a two-year reformatory sentence for reasons having as much to do with the irregularity and undisciplined nature of his form of existence as it did with any specific legal offense. The exchange between the judge and Beasse, recorded in contemporary sources of the time, captures the drama of a confrontation between the logic of police and a form of life for which it constituted a risk, danger, or form of contagion. Here Foucault quotes from the *Gazette des Tribunaux* for August 1840:

"The judge: One must sleep at home. - Beasse: Have I got a home? - You live in vagabondage. - I work to earn my living. - What is your station in life? - My station: to begin with, I'm thirty-six at least; I don't work for anybody. I've worked for myself for a long time now. I have my day station and my night station. In the day, for instance [...] I run after the stagecoaches when they arrive and carry luggage for the passengers, I turn cart-wheels on the avenue de Neuilly; at night there are shows; I open coach doors [...] I've plenty to do. - It would be better for you to be put in a good house as an apprentice and learn a trade. - Oh, a good house, an apprenticeship, it's too much trouble. [...] - Does not your father wish to reclaim you? - Haven't got no father [...] No mother neither, no parents, no friends, free and independent.' Hearing his

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.33-34.

sentence of two years in a reformatory, Beasse [...] remarked: Two years, that's never more than twenty-four months. Let's be off, then."⁶⁰

What is clear from the exchange is what the agent of police sees as dangerous in Beasse's form of life: a nomadic, stationless, masterless, and irresponsible indiscipline which resists the requirements and norms of fixity, orderliness, and legibility for workers conducive to the maintenance of society's good order and prosperity.

The insane and workers were not the only groups subject to disciplinary and normalizing adjustment, however. Similar mechanisms of oversight, supervision, and correction were increasingly imposed on students, children, parents, and soldiers as well, and in ways observable to this day. In modern society, Foucault insists,

"The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social worker'-judge - it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements."⁶¹

The spread, operation, and effect of disciplinary techniques lend to modern society an increasingly *prison-like* character, Foucault claims. As more and more areas of social life come under the control of normalizing institutions, or are subjected to the normalizing gaze of agents of interstitial discipline, like police and parole officers, physicians, psychiatrists, and social workers, modern society increasingly resembles the claustrophobic yet transparent confines of the prison, in which inhabitants, subjected at every turn to the "eye of power," internalize prescribed norms, habits, movements, and behaviours. "Is it surprising," Foucault asks, that, in modern disciplinary and

⁶⁰ Foucault, DP, pp.290-291.

⁶¹ Foucault, DP, p.304.

normalizing society, "prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?"⁶²

Curiously enough, the prison itself turns out to function as an integral part of the functioning of "interstitial discipline" outside the confines of its walls. Here Foucault makes a somewhat surprising admission. Historically, the prison failed to accomplish its transformative, corrective work on individuals. Prison advocates and administrators quickly recognized, Foucault points out, that the prison failed to turn large numbers of offenders into law-abiding citizens. Indeed, it was understood almost immediately, the prison virtually *made* convicts into lifelong criminals and "delinquents"⁶³. However, the tendency on the part of the prison and penal practice to succeed only in producing high rates of recidivism also served to extend the reach of disciplinary power deeper into the social body. Criminologists and penologists, he claims, constructed and propagated the identity of "the delinquent" - the recalcitrant offender in whom resides an incorrigible "kernel of danger" - from whom society must be protected. By fabricating the scientific unity and menacing presence of "delinquency," the human sciences instilled panic in the general public and furnished power with justifications for the extension of power deeper into the social body⁶⁴. By propagating this menace of "delinquency," criminology furnishes power with a new "surface" or handle upon which to latch: the daily conduct and activities of the general populace, out of which the dangerous delinquent threatens to emerge at any time⁶⁵. The strategic unity of delinquency secures the acceptability of an

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.228.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp.264-271.

⁶⁴ Not to mention the State's use of delinquents to carry out surveillance of the general population and perform illegalities of its own. See: *Ibid.*, 264-282.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.270-282.

increasing police presence in society. Crime and criminals, it turns out, proved "too useful" to the authorities for the dream of a society free of crime to hold their interest for long. "No crime," Foucault points out, "means no police. What makes the presence and control of the police tolerable for the population, if not fear of the criminal?"⁶⁶ Furthermore, by circulating the strategic unity of delinquency within the social body, among other social dangers like mental illness and sexual perversion, modern power succeeds in "responsibilizing" all of society, which stands vigilant guard against the eruption of irregularity from within. The infamous *lettre de cachet*, an order for the confinement of any individual on the grounds of suspicious behaviour, and which could be obtained by police, a physician, or a relative, proved a powerful mechanism of surveillance and discipline. The concept of the strategic unity, that is, discursive unities like "delinquency," which can be deployed within society to justify the spread of power and "responsibilize" its inhabitants with the task of keeping watch for signs of deviance, is one which Foucault expands upon in his later work on sexuality, as we shall see.

The character of the "discipline-mechanism" Foucault claims modern society has become is captured in the image of Bentham's "Panopticon", which he readily invokes in reference to political modernity. No image more memorably captures the subjection of the individual by modern disciplinary power with greater effect than that of the Panopticon. While he denied that modern society approached anything like Bentham's model in the hold it afforded on every facet of the individual's life, Foucault repeatedly stresses the former's disturbing, increasingly "panoptic" tendencies. The hierarchical, one-way and continuous observation of the occupant in each cell maintains a coercive

⁶⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Prison Talk," in PK, p.47.

relation of power between the subject and object of observation which is so insidious as to eventually become internalized within the "soul" of each occupant. Panoptic techniques developed in the prison and elsewhere, Foucault argues, were increasingly taken up and applied to the problems order which surfaced in the nineteenth century. After Bentham, the solution looked something like the following:

"All that is needed, [...] is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a school-boy. [...] The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. [...] Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap. [...] Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor [...] He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order. If the inmates are convicts, there is no danger of a plot [or] bad reciprocal influences; if they are patients, there is no danger of contagion; if they are madmen there is no risk of their committing violence upon one another; if they are school-children, there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time; if they are workers, there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions, none of those distractions that slow down the rate of work [...].⁶⁷

Now, the historical Panopticon serves Foucault only as the architectural figure, the actual existence or use of which is beside the point, of a certain "generalizable model" for the organization of power⁶⁸. What counts for Foucault is not whether it was ever actually implemented and perfected in reality but, rather, the inspiration it provided and the influence it exercised over a host of "panoptic" schemes and projects which were. The question, then, for Foucault is not whether modernity amounts to a discipline-mechanism achieving the level of perfection envisioned in Bentham's model but, rather, whether and to what degree there are "panoptic tendencies" within it which are effective, and

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.200-201.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.205.

increasing in their number and scope. While contemporary modernity may not yet resemble *the* Panopticon, Foucault portrays it as disturbingly "panoptic".

Foucault carries the prison analogy right through to the conclusion of Discipline and Punish, in which he likens political modernity to a giant "carceral archipelago"⁶⁹. While modern society may never reach the level of disciplinary perfection imagined in the Panopticon, it consists of confining, observing, and normalizing practices and institutions which differ from it in intensity only, interspersed with agents and apparatuses of "interstitial discipline" which, together, comprise an entire observing and "punishing universality". What daily activity, conduct, habits and behaviour have not been subsumed under the authority of the multiplying and expanding "carceral archipelago" of disciplinary institutions, are subjected to a host of normalizing gazes which scrutinize non-disciplinary spaces. As modern disciplinary society has developed, Foucault claims, the form and specificity of prison confinement disappear as "the carceral circles widen and the form of the prison slowly diminishes,"⁷⁰ because it is indistinguishable from the conditions and practices within a host of auxiliary institutions and apparatuses of discipline covering society. He goes on to enumerate some of the constituent institutions of the carceral continuum of the nineteenth century, on which our own is based to a great extent:

"...the institutions for abandoned or indigent children, the orphanages [...] the establishment for apprentices [...] still further away the factory-convents, [...] used some of the carceral methods: charitable societies, moral improvement associations, organizations that handed out assistance also practiced surveillance, workers' estates and lodging houses [...] We have seen that, in penal justice, the prison transformed the punitive procedure into a penitentiary

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.297.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.298.

technique; the carceral archipelago transported this technique from the penal institution to the entire social body."⁷¹

The whole "carceral network" constructed through the nineteenth century becomes, like the prison and the Panopticon in particular, a means for securing order and submission that is without exterior or gaps. We are no longer talking about the exceptional and intermittent use of disciplinary confinement on the margins but, rather, about a whole carceral society in relation to which, as in the Panopticon, "there is no outside"⁷². Furthermore, as this carceral society increasingly resembles a prison, so too, Foucault remarks, does it readily carry out on its inhabitants the work of the prison - namely, punishment. "But perhaps the most important effect of the carceral system," Foucault writes:

"is that it succeeds in making the power to punish natural and legitimate, in lowering at least the threshold of tolerance to penalty. It tends to efface what may be exorbitant in the exercise of punishment [...] By operating at every level of the social body and by mingling ceaselessly the act of rectifying and the right to punish the universality of the carceral lowers the level from which it becomes natural and acceptable to be punished."⁷³

Thus, with the extension of the carceral network throughout modern society, the experience and effects of prison-like discipline are felt by all members of society. In modern carceral society, Foucault claims:

"Prison continues, on those who are entrusted to it, a work begun elsewhere, which the whole of society pursues on each individual through innumerable mechanisms of discipline. By means of a carceral continuum, the authority that sentences infiltrates all those other authorities that supervise, transform, correct, improve. It might even be said that nothing really distinguishes them anymore [...] in its function, the power to punish is not essentially different from that of curing or educating."⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.298.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.301.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp.301-303.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.302-303.

v) The Disciplinary Individual

Finally, with the advent of a whole disciplinary society, the individual whose existence is subjected to a "recoding" and "total education" is no longer simply the inhabitant of a few institutions on the margins of society, but all of the inhabitants of modern society. The effect of a whole disciplinary generalization across modern society cannot but entail serious consequences for the individual in general. In arguing that the modern individual finds herself more and more the subject of institutional and interstitial discipline, Foucault paints a picture of modern subjectivity as increasingly disciplined and normalized. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault argues that the modern subject has been manufactured through techniques of discipline and normalization into a "docile body" for use by power, a far cry from the rational autonomy of the subject portrayed in humanistic myths of emancipation. The modern individual is a disciplinarily sanctioned, vetted, and "normalized" one, in whom all non-conforming qualities, capacities, habits and behaviours have been suppressed. Individuals in whom continue to reside abnormal attributes or capacities, or who persist in abnormal conduct, are subjected to exceptional incarceration and corrective technique as a matter of course, as we have already seen. Indeed, Foucault insists, normalizing societies such as ours have accepted the "punishability" of deviance as self-evident. So, while political modernity granted formal freedom to the autonomous, *juridical* individual, only normalized and disciplinary subjects inhabit and move about within it according to prescribed patterns and under the vigilant "eye of power". Meanwhile, another more recalcitrant population of "deviants" remains subject to the excesses of power and abuses of authority which flourish in the disciplinary institution.

Notice in his discussion and critique of the modern subject, however, that Foucault avoids arguments which portray in power only a negating, suppressing effect in relation to the subject. The effects of normalization and discipline on the individual are not primarily of a negative, repressive nature⁷⁵. Normalization and discipline constitute *productive* or positive functions which succeed in producing or fabricating a certain kind of subject, as opposed to repressing or negating something that is essential to it. "The individual", concedes Foucault,

"is no doubt the fictitious atom of an 'ideological' representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called discipline. We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', [...] in fact, power produces; it produces reality."⁷⁶

Under disciplinary power, "it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, or altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies."⁷⁷ The kind of individual or subject to which modernity has given rise is the "docile" or disciplined one. The successfully fabricated "docile" subject is one in whom certain capacities and powers may well have been increased or augmented, as in the productive worker, but in whom, to be sure, thoughts of and capacities for resistance have been neutralized. Far from the autonomous agent of free will and spontaneous activity who opposes and resists power, so storied by the juridical humanists, the modern subject is a product of power and relations of force.

⁷⁵ Foucault, DP, p.308.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.194.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 217.

By invoking conceptions and images of "normalization", the Panopticon, "panopticism" and, finally, the "carceral", Foucault leaves the unmistakable impression that he dismisses contemporary political modernity as a stifling, ossifying prison of humanity. The history of penal practice, the abandonment of physical torture and its replacement by the efficiency, certainty, regularity and "lightness" of the prison, constitutes a particularly symbolic episode in the birth, development, and solidification of our own modern disciplinary organization of power and civilization. Clearly, Foucault indulges in more than a little rhetorical overkill in these passages; part of a "rhetoric of disruption" as Bernstein calls it, in order to shock us into "listening to a different claim"⁷⁸. As we shall see below, Foucault retreated from the extremity of a number of these rhetorical figures in more sober reflections and writings.

vi) Biopolitics

In his last major work devoted to the genealogy of modern practices of power and knowledge, The History of Sexuality, Foucault continues to pursue many of the themes explored in his previous work, although with significant modifications and several new themes as well. The History of Sexuality retains Foucault's interest in analyzing political rationalities of social control which rely on the manipulation of conduct via mechanisms acting upon bodies and habits as opposed to juridical individuals. At the same time, with this new work Foucault begins to downplay the role played by technologies of domination, such as the disciplinary institution, which have as their purpose the

⁷⁸ Bernstein, Richard, "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophic *Ethos*," in Bernstein, Richard, The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992, p.153.

governing of others, and turns his attention to certain practices or "technologies of the self," such as the Christian confessional, by which individuals govern themselves. According to Foucault, modern practices of the self surrounding sexuality, in particular, must be incorporated into the analysis of the functioning of modern power along with those disciplinary mechanisms analyzed in his previous work. In addition to his critique of liberal and Marxist humanism, Foucault's work on sexuality and the technologies of the self raises objections to the Freudian-Marxist synthesis attempted by some of his other humanist contemporaries, as we shall see.

The History of Sexuality takes up the themes of "police" and the positive mechanisms of liberal statecraft which were the subject of Discipline and Punish, but with significant modifications. Focusing now on the nineteenth century, Foucault argues that, along with the problem of order and security associated with the concerns of "police," there emerged a growing awareness of society as a "population," in the biological sense, with specific regularities and pathologies with implications, for better or worse, for the overall prosperity, health, and well-being of all⁷⁹. Thus, along with the task of managing and securing the forces of the state against threats of disorder was added the imperative of protecting and optimizing the biological life of the population. "[T]he management of this population," Foucault writes:

"required, among other things, a health policy capable of diminishing infant mortality, preventing epidemics, and bringing down the rates of endemic diseases, of intervening in living conditions in order to alter them and impose standards on them (whether this involved nutrition, housing, or urban planning), and of ensuring adequate medical facilities and services."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Foucault, HS, p.142.

⁸⁰ Foucault, Michel, "Security, Territory, Population," in EST, p.71.

Foucault gives the name "biopolitics" to this new aspect of liberal governance, which "tends to treat the 'population' as a mass of living and coexisting beings who represent particular biological and pathological traits and who thus come under specific knowledge and technologies."⁸¹ Where the chief concern of "police" was the problem of order, "biopolitics" concerns itself with the administration and optimization of "life" conceived of in biological terms⁸². All those aspects of daily life which impact upon the health and biological security of the population - sexuality, birth rates, living arrangements, disease, hygiene, housing, and demographics - become targets of biopolitical concern and intervention as a result. Biopolitics may still be understood, however, in terms of the general theme of police, as a *medizinische Polizei* devoted to "the management of state forces"⁸³.

Sexuality, in particular, became a privileged target of biopolitical manipulation and control in the nineteenth century. Concerns about sexuality intensified in the nineteenth century, thanks in part to eighteenth-century medicine, as the sexual conduct of individuals was increasingly acknowledged as ramifying across a broad range of biopolitical interests, including population growth, disease and epidemics, public health and morality, marriage and family, and urban overcrowding⁸⁴. Foucault attributes the objectification of "sexuality" into a discursive and strategic unity referring to the sexual tendencies, conduct, and identity of individuals, to the biopolitical state's need for some mechanism or apparatus through which to manage and administer the life and health of

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.71.

⁸² Foucault, HS, pp.136-145.

⁸³ Foucault, "Security, Territory, Population," p.71.

⁸⁴ Foucault, HS, pp.146-147.

the population. Just as the strategic unity of "delinquency" was deployed to heighten popular vigilance around the problem of disorder, and to neutralize resistance to the spread of disciplinary forms of power, Foucault claims that the strategic unity of sexuality was "implanted" in the social body in order to increase popular awareness and vigilance around sexual conduct deviance⁸⁵. An explosion of interest in sex in the nineteenth century gave rise to a whole new field of scientific and medico-legal intervention into the lives of individuals and groups. These interventions took the form of injunctions to speak of one's sex, as well as mechanisms of surveillance and regulation designed to identify and correct "abnormal" behaviour, including promiscuity, incest, masturbation, and "perversion". Foucault places the human sciences, medicine and psychiatry in particular, at the centre of coercive mechanisms of "incitement" and "implantation" designed to produce discourse and knowledge regarding the sexual conduct of the population while achieving effects of power simultaneously⁸⁶. These sciences prompted and recorded an explosion of discourse about sex, on the basis of which new "objectivities" of sexuality were fabricated and strewn across the social field - the "Malthusian couple," the "onanistic child," the "frigid, hysterical" woman, and the homosexual "pervert"⁸⁷. Sensational cases, such as those of Jouy and Barbin, which we examined above, furnished fodder for the proliferation and implantation of sexual anomalies and perversions and the spread of moral panic, and justified the interventions of power, in the forms of police, educators, physicians, and philanthropic organizations into the sexual lives of everyone. The existence of such threats and perversions also has

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.36-49.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.17-49.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.44.

the effect of "responsibilizing" the rest of society in relation to them, of making neighbours responsible for observing and reporting any abnormal sexual behaviour on each other's part, of making parents responsible for the conduct of children, and so on. Thus, Foucault argues, the unity of sexuality must be seen as "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power [...] endowed with great instrumentality: [...] and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies."⁸⁸ The regularities and dangers in the sexual life of the population served as new justifications and surfaces for biopower, as new objectivities within the social body on which to latch hold.

The family became an important site for biopolitical intervention in the nineteenth century. Through the family, and a host of biopolitical mechanisms constructed around it, attempts were made both to the "normalize" sexual conduct and "responsibilize" individuals by making them more vigilant about the sexual conduct of others, as well as themselves. Among the range of biopolitical mechanisms targeting the family Foucault identified the following: medical authorities; the interrogation of pupils about the sexual conduct and sleeping arrangements of parents; efforts to promote marriage and suppress promiscuity among the working class; home visits and home inspections; and public campaigns promoting hygiene or warning of the dangers of masturbation launched by various religious institutions, philanthropic organizations, and moral improvement associations. Inspired by Foucault, Jacques Donzelot has pursued the disciplinary and responsibilizing effects of social policy and philanthropy which was

⁸⁸ Ibid., p.103.

focused on the family in nineteenth century France⁸⁹. Together, Foucault and Donzelot point to the nuclearization and sexualization of the family in the nineteenth century as strategic solutions to the problems of "police" and "biopolitics". In fact, the two form a kind of circuit. The sexualization of children, as well as campaigns promoting hygiene, nutrition, and the optimal development of children, served to responsabilize parents in ways felicitous for "police" concerns about order. Measures to promote marriage, discourage promiscuity, and encourage parental vigilance around the sexuality and development of children were intended to strengthen ties between workers and their families and offspring; "responsible" parents held steady employment in order to support their children, and spent more time seeing to their supervision, health, and development. The reconceptualization of the family as a "child-centred, educative unit," which served to responsabilize parents in relation to their children, thus became an important tool in the battle against "irregular" living, nomadism, and idleness discussed above⁹⁰. At the same time, the nuclearization and sexualization of the family and their subsequent responsabilizing pressures on parents produced effects on children felicitous for the health and well-being of the population as a whole.

The responsabilizing intent lying behind much nineteenth-century interest in sexuality can be seen in the case of campaigns against childhood masturbation, which were the subject of some of Foucault's research. He traces the biopolitical sexualization

⁸⁹ Donzelot, Jacques, The Policing of Families, New York: Pantheon, 1979. Similar work on the regulation of families in countries, including Mariana Valverde's study of the policing of families in turn-of-the-century English Canada, The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925, Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1991.

⁹⁰ The turning of the family into a "sexual hothouse" as a means to responsabilize parents is discussed in Minson, Jeffrey, Genealogies of Morals: Nietzsche, Foucault, Donzelot and the Eccentricity of Ethics, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985, pp.170, 187, 208.

of children to the heightened alarm surrounding the "onanist" in the eighteenth century. According to Foucault, the medicine of the time gave children's sexuality a "limitless etiological power" by placing it "at the origin of an indefinite series of physical disorders that may make their effects felt in all forms and at all stages of life."⁹¹ Alarm over the effects of childhood masturbation was soon transformed into a whole series of strategies and tactics focused on families and parents. The strategic unity of the "onanistic child" was rapidly proliferated in the nineteenth century and came to haunt parents, physicians, educators, clergy, and even architects and housing authorities, according to Foucault. In what amounted to a whole sexual saturation of children's bodies, an increasingly hysterical discourse on the latent moral, physical, and collective biopolitical dangers of childhood sexuality was produced by state, medical, scientific, and pedagogical authorities, as well religious and philanthropic organizations. This discourse was accompanied by a host of real practices and interventions. However, Foucault argues that the real targets of the sexualization of children were not the children themselves but, rather, their parents. The purpose behind this strategy was not so much to eradicate the behaviour as it was to provide a permanent prop for power; justification for permanent regulation and intervention at the level of the family⁹². By turning the family into a virtual "hothouse of sexuality"⁹³ parents must become vigilant and attentive as to the conduct, habits, and whereabouts of their offspring. Fulfillment of one's duties as a parent also calls for the abandonment of undisciplined, irregular living on one's own part. In the "abuse" that the "onanistic child" inflicts on himself and the danger he poses to the

⁹¹ Foucault, Michel, "The Abnormals," in EST, p.54.

⁹² Foucault, HS, p.42.

⁹³ Minson, Genealogies of Morals, p.183.

rest of society, "the parents are denounced as the real culprits: lack of supervision, neglect, and, above all, lack of interest in their children, their children's bodies, and their conduct..."⁹⁴. "The crusade against masturbation," then, "reflects the setting-up of the restricted family (parents, children) as a new knowledge-power apparatus," in which the child is made into "the primary and ceaseless object of the duties of the parent..."⁹⁵. What emerges out of the campaign against masturbation, then, is "a new parents-children relationship, [...] a new economy of intrafamilial relations: a solidification and intensification of father-mother-children relations,"⁹⁶ which serves to arrest both the solitary evil of masturbation as well as the social evils of neglect, lack of supervision, promiscuity, and "irregular living" on the part of parents. The relationship between the concerns of biopower and police are relatively transparent here. Note, as well, that the means by which this normalization/disciplining of childhood sex and parental conduct is achieved - the implantation of strategic unities constituted as social dangers, and various forms of surveillance and training - are similar to the technologies of domination discussed in Discipline and Punish. As indicated above, however, Foucault's analysis of the mechanisms of power in modern society also begins to embrace other practices, such as confession, which involve mechanisms of power by which individuals govern *themselves*, in addition to those by which they are governed by others.

⁹⁴ Foucault, "The Abnormals," p.54.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p.54.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.54.

vii) Technologies of the Self: Sexuality, Interiority, and Confession

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, Foucault's interest in the question of power had shifted from an emphasis upon disciplinary institutions and objectivizing techniques determining and bending the conduct of individuals and submitting them to certain ends, to an interest in the ways in which individuals govern themselves. This interest is evident in The History of Sexuality, and was the subject of his final two works, The Use of Pleasure⁹⁷ and The Care of the Self⁹⁸. In these latter works, Foucault narrows his focus to concentrate strictly on the question of the practices by which individuals govern themselves, or what he comes to call: "technologies of the self"⁹⁹. Such technologies, among which Foucault included the Stoic exercises of self-examination and daily journal-writing, "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves"¹⁰⁰. While, as we shall see in the following chapter, Foucault eventually comes to see a degree of critical and emancipatory potential in certain practices of the self, his analysis of the significance of these practices in the present work situates them within and subordinates them to the objectives of biopower.

The History of Sexuality devotes considerable attention to one practice of the self in particular, confession, which Foucault argues has become a widespread technology by

⁹⁷ Foucault, Michel, The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Pantheon, 1985. Hereinafter cited as UP.

⁹⁸ Foucault, Michel, The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Volume 3, TRans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage, 1986. Hereinafter cited as CS.

⁹⁹ Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," p.18.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.18.

which individuals govern themselves and are governed in modern society. Now, the practice of confession itself has roots in the medieval period, and was perfected in the Catholic confessional. The practice of confession has been, since this period, one of the most important techniques for the production of knowledge in the West. "We have become," for reasons having to do with, among other things, the relation between truth-telling and power, "a singularly confessing society."¹⁰¹ Today, Foucault writes, "The confession has spread its effects far and wide":

"It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself things it would be impossible to tell anyone else, [...] One confesses - or is forced to confess."¹⁰²

In addition to its role in the production of truth, however, Foucault also suggests that the confession has served as a mechanism for the production of a certain kind of experience of selfhood as well. The practice of confession encourages us to think of ourselves as a peculiar kind of self: one inhabited by a deep, hidden interiority which constitutes our truth, one which must be spoken about. But neither this practice, nor the conceptions of interiority or the deep truth of the self which it helps to produce, are natural or universal. "The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us"¹⁰³. Foucault resists the naturalization of the practice of confession, as well as the accompanying concept of the deep self, by offering what he calls "a political history of

¹⁰¹ Foucault, HS, p.59.

¹⁰² Ibid., p.59.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.60.

truth" which shows how they have both been produced as effects of power and continue to serve as its relays¹⁰⁴.

According to Foucault, two important developments took place relating to the practice of confession in the nineteenth century. Firstly, by this time, what it was individuals were increasingly required to confess was their sex. The History of Sexuality records a widespread coercive incitement and injunction to discourse and truth-telling about sex in the nineteenth century enjoined by physicians, psychiatrists, educators, and philanthropists. This was justified, as we know, by the deployment of the strategic unity of "sexuality" as a potential source of disorder and contagion "endowed with an inexhaustible and polymorphous causal power."¹⁰⁵ Now, as we know, knowledge production in the field of sexuality served the purpose of producing a statistical map of the social body in terms of its regularities and irregularities, which then served as a jumping off point for a host of biopolitical strategies and tactics. In addition, however, this deep self and this truth which one is compelled to confess is increasingly identified with one's "sexuality". In other words, confession in the nineteenth century encourages individuals to identify their deep selves, that space of profound interiority constituting their identity as individuals, with their sex - with the pleasures, habits, conduct, urges, secret fantasies, as well as traumas, associated with their "sexuality". Since the nineteenth century, he claims, modern societies have insisted that it is in the area of sex "that we must search for the most secret and profound truths about the individual, that it

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.60.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.65.

is there that we can best discover what he is and what determines him."¹⁰⁶ According to Foucault, however, the colonization of the confession and of the deep self by sexuality has served to tighten power's hold on us.

The imperative and practice of confession and the sexualization of the deep self are felicitous for the concerns of biopower. The insistence that, at the most profound depths of their being and identity, individuals are constituted by that cauldron of habits, desires, fantasies and pleasures which make up their sex, confronts individuals with a certain truth of themselves which they must both acknowledge and take responsibility for. One must examine and take responsibility for one's sex as a "danger" to oneself and the rest of society. Sex in the nineteenth century, we are reminded, was "deemed capable of entailing the most varied consequences throughout one's existence;"

"there was scarcely a malady or physical disturbance to which the nineteenth century did not impute at least some degree of sexual etiology. From the bad habits of children to the phthises of adults, the apoplexies of old people, nervous maladies, and the degenerations of the race, the medicine of that era wove an entire network of sexual causality to explain them. This may well appear fantastic to us, but the principle of sex as a 'cause of any and everything' was the theoretical underside of a confession that had to be thorough, meticulous, and constant and at the same time operate within a scientific type of practice. The limitless dangers that sex carried with it justified the exhaustive character of the inquisition to which it was subjected."¹⁰⁷

As a result, the danger of sex compels not only the supervision of others, as in the relations between parents and children, but of oneself. In the danger one's sex poses to the self, as well as to others, one must bring it under scrutiny, offer it up for expert examination, and impose on oneself whatever corrective measures are deemed necessary.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Introduction" in Foucault, Michel, ed., Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite, trans. Richard McDougall, New York: Pantheon, 1980, p.x. Hereinafter cited as HB.

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, HS, pp.65-66.

Furthermore, Foucault insists, the practice of confessing one's sex almost always takes place within the context of relations of power, in which one is both compelled to speak as well as made the object of an authoritative interpretation as to the nature of one's sexuality. The colonization of confession and interiority by sexuality gives birth to a certain "hermeneutic of the subject,"¹⁰⁸ according to which one confesses one's innermost sexual fantasies and desires for authoritative interpretation by physicians, psychiatrists, criminologists, teachers, parents, and so on. The "hermeneutic of the subject" always "unfolds within a power relationship, for one does not confess without the presence [...] of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile."¹⁰⁹ The case of figures like Jouy and Barbin provide only the most spectacular manifestations of a widespread, imperious incitement to discourse about sex which gradually spread through the social body of the nineteenth century, transmitted by the sexualization of the family cell, justified by the etiological power imputed to "sexuality," and carried out by a host of experts.

viii) The Repressive Hypothesis

One other significant discursive and practical development relating to the field of sex emerged in the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, as we saw, the modern individual was encouraged to think of herself as inhabited by a space of deep interiority

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, Michel, "The Hermeneutic of the Subject," in EST, p.93.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault, HS, p.61.

constituting her essential and inviolable identity, and that this identity was exhausted in her sexuality. Increasingly, however, in twentieth-century social and psychological theory this same deep, sexual self was portrayed as the object of a profound, damaging historical repression, the effects of which could not be reversed without engaging in forms of confession, self-examination, disclosure, and analysis which would constitute the liberation of that sexuality simultaneously. Owing to the imperatives of civilization, prudishness, 'reality', health, or capitalist production, we have been told, our sexuality has been repressed. As a result, the modern experience of sexuality is one not only of a profound interiority but of wounds inflicted by civilization upon that same deep self. Foucault dubs this experience of sexuality the "repressive hypothesis,"¹¹⁰ and argues that it has come to dominate the modern experience and understanding of sexuality, particularly on the part of the progressive Left. Along with the modern experience of sexuality as repressed by power, then, emerged the conviction that by speaking about it, by excavating our deep sexual truth against that which has repressed it, we can liberate our true sex; thereby liberating ourselves in the process. According to Foucault, however, the repressive hypothesis warrants scrutiny on a number of levels, not so much because he doubts that sex has been subject to various historical prohibitions but, rather, because, as a recent example of the discursification of sex, a process dating back to the eighteenth century and strategically tied to biopolitics in the nineteenth, its emancipatory credentials are subject to doubt. Now, consistent with the tactics he deployed in relation to other forms of knowledge, Foucault's analysis of the repressive hypothesis is not aimed at "showing it to be mistaken," but, rather, at explaining how it is that we have come to

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.10.

experience sexuality not only as our deepest truth but as a truth subject to a historical process of repression, and at tracing the effects of power achieved by such an experience as well as the various practices, forces, interests and will to truth which produced it.

Foucault's question is:

"Why do we say, with so much passion and so much resentment against our most recent past, against our present, and against ourselves, that we are repressed? By what spiral did we come to say that sex is repressed? [...] What paths have brought us to the point where we are 'at fault' with respect to our own sex? And how have we come to be a civilization so peculiar as to tell itself that, through an abuse of power which has not ended, it has long 'sinned' against sex?"¹¹¹

By posing the question of sexuality and its repression in this way Foucault seeks to put it "back within a general economy of discourses on sex in modern societies since the seventeenth century."¹¹² In other words, Foucault wonders whether not only discourses concerning the dangers of sex are implicated in the exercise of power, but those according to which our sexuality is repressed, along with the practices of confession and disclosure they enjoin.

Foucault subjects the repressive hypothesis to three kinds of doubt. The first is a historical one. "Is sexual repression," he asks, "truly an established fact?"¹¹³ Without challenging the historical fact of various forms of interdiction, denial, and blockage, such as the campaign against masturbation we examined above, Foucault wishes to bypass the repressive hypothesis by drawing attention to the ways in which tactics and discourses around modern sexuality have produced effects of "incitement and intensification"¹¹⁴. This leads to his second question: "Do the workings of power, and in particular those

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.11.

mechanisms that are brought into play in societies like ours, really belong primarily to the category of repression?"¹¹⁵ This is a methodological question regarding whether or not the modern experience of sexuality can be grasped strictly as one of repression. The same campaigns against masturbation mentioned above had the effect of saturating the bodies of children with a sexuality that became an overarching concern for parents, educators, physicians, and so on. Without denying that these campaigns supported certain interdictions, (although it also is doubtful that these were to much effect), Foucault suggests that they were intended less to prevent the proscribed behaviour than to responsibilize parents in relation to their offspring. The etiological power accorded to childhood sexuality had polymorphous and productive effects: the intensification of interest in and vigilance towards sex; the incitement of discourses on sex by parents, educators, physicians, psychiatrists, and state administrators; the production of greater knowledge of sex on the part of experts; and the multiplication of points of surveillance, "lines of penetration" and "surfaces of intervention" within the social body with respect to sexual conduct. This was only one aspect of a general historical trend toward the discursification of sex in the nineteenth century which belies the standard "Victorian" account of sexuality in the bourgeois period as that which was silenced and denied. While sex in the modern period may have been subject to certain blockages, the mechanisms of power/knowledge built up around sexuality have also *produced* a certain experience of sex as that which both defines us as individuals and as that within each of us which has been repressed. In other words, for Foucault, the experience of sexuality, even of a repressed sexuality, is something which has been produced; the experience of

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.10.

our sexuality as repressed is, therefore, not of an entirely negative order. Foucault's final doubt, and which I would like to dwell upon briefly, is this historico-political one:

"Did that critical discourse that addresses itself to repression come to act as a roadblock to a power mechanism that had operated unchallenged up to that point, or is it not in fact a part of the same historical network as the thing it denounces [...] by calling it repression?"¹¹⁶

Far from aiding the emancipation of the individual from the alienating effects of a repressed sexuality, Foucault wonders if the discursification of sex carried out under the banner of sexual liberationism is not part of the same circuit of power/knowledge as other biopolitical discourses around sexuality?

Foucault targeted his analysis of the discourse of repressed sexuality explicitly at what he took to be the sexual essentialism and liberationism of the Freudian-Marxist and Reichian analyses of sexual repression in vogue at the time. Foucault resisted the notion that if sex, as the putative inner-most essence of our being, is that which has been historically repressed by power, then by speaking about it voluminously we place ourselves in opposition to that power. "If sex is repressed," then, in the thinking of figures like Freud, Reich, and Marcuse:

"[...] the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom."¹¹⁷

Merely by speaking of our sex, divulging our deepest sexual urges, desires, fantasies and traumas to expert analysts, however, we have by no means escaped from the grip of biopower. As Foucault has already argued, the turning of sex into discourse is perfectly compatible with biopower, since it operates and spreads its effects as a result of the

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.6.

intensification and incitement of interest in and discourses about sex. But the affinities between the critical analysis of repression and the mechanisms of biopower do not stop here. Like the medical discourses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the psychoanalytic view assigns a profound etiological power to sexuality and its repression, tracing various individual and collective neuroses and psychoses to it. This same etiological power produces the idea that if a sex that is essentially hidden and repressed produces pathological responses, then procedures for expressing and bringing it to light must have the opposite effect of curing via the restoration of sexual truth. As a result, the discursification of repressed sexuality receives therapeutic sanction. Such therapeutic effects will be achieved, however, only if discourses of repressed sexuality are produced under conditions of supervision by experts trained to interpret them. All of these features of the Freudian-Marxist critical discourse of sexual repression, as Foucault understood it, shared striking similarities with discourses, practices of confession, and relations of truth-telling built up around sexuality amongst parents, children, educators, physicians, and psychiatrists in the nineteenth century.

While his relationship to psychoanalysis was always an ambivalent one, Foucault seeks in this work to throw into relief those points of contact between the critical discourse of repression and the biopolitical discursification of sex¹¹⁸. "In its historical emergence," Foucault claims, "psychoanalysis cannot be dissociated with the

¹¹⁸ On numerous occasions throughout the present work Foucault pays tribute both to developments within psychoanalytic theory which cast suspicion on the idea of sex as an essential, primordial energy or substance and to psychoanalysis's political credentials as having consistently resisted the Fascistic neuropsychiatry of degenerescence (Foucault, HS, p.150). In *Madness and Civilization*, he praises psychoanalytic practice for preserving dialogic relations with the insane where traditional psychiatry had imposed the imperious monologue of reason (Foucault, MC, pp.198, 277-278).

generalization of the deployment of sexuality [...]”¹¹⁹. Firstly, the centrality of the Oedipal drama to psychoanalytic theory dovetails neatly with prior medical discourses which had already made the family into a virtual hotbed of sexuality, guaranteeing a new round of intensification and incitement around sexual relations within the family, particularly incestuous acts and desires. While its technical procedures placed the confession of sexuality “outside family jurisdiction,” psychoanalysis’ guarantee that “one would find the parents-children relationship at the root of everyone’s sexuality” served to ensure that the family remained at the centre of the deployment of sexuality¹²⁰. At the same time, like that ascribed to masturbation by the medical profession, psychoanalysis attributed a pathogenic, etiological power to the intensity of the incest taboo and other forms of repression within the family. This ensured that the new etiological danger of sex - that of the pathological effects of its gratuitous repression - would form the support for a new round of vigilance, scrutiny, and intervention. Psychoanalysis furnished a host of new strategic unities, particularly abnormalities such as female “hysteria,” and elaborated new norms for sexual development from childhood to old age, all of which heightened awareness of sex and its dangers and justified widespread vigilance and intervention in relation to it. Finally, psychoanalysis entered the picture as a cure for pathological reactions to repression, a cure which relied on the discursification of repressed sexuality. Here we see psychoanalysis therapeutizing the discursification of sex just as eighteenth and early-nineteenth century medicine had done. Psychoanalysis presents itself as “a

¹¹⁹ Foucault, HS, p.129.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.113.

technique for relieving the effects of the [incest] taboo where its rigour makes it pathogenic." It gave itself, Foucault continues:

"the task of alleviating the effects of repression (for those who were in a position to resort to psychoanalysis) that this prohibition was capable of causing; it allowed individuals to express their incestuous desire in discourse."¹²¹

At the same time, the Oedipalization of the family encouraged authoritarian intervention into the lives of rural and working class families, among which incestuous practices were believed to be more common and widely tolerated. In other words, while the critical discourse of sexual repression may well have led to the relaxation of certain prohibitions in the twentieth century, the appearance of psychoanalysis itself can be situated within, rather than in opposition to, the history of the deployment of sexuality which began in the eighteenth century. "We have seen in fact that psychoanalysis plays several roles at once in this deployment:

"it is a mechanism for attaching sexuality to the system of alliance [family]; it assumes an adversary position with respect to the theory of degenerescence; [...] it functions as a differentiating factor in the general technology of sex. Around it the great requirement of confession that had taken form so long ago assumed the new meaning of an injunction to lift psychical repression."¹²²

It is against this background, now, that Foucault assesses the significance of the political critique of repression in the work of twentieth-century figures like Reich and Marcuse. Without denying the importance and impact of this repressive hypothesis which, by tying sexual repression to general mechanisms of domination and exploitation, pointed to the possibility for freeing oneself both of repression and domination, Foucault wonders whether the critical discourse on repression reflects, rather, a certain "tactical

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.129.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.130.

shift" in the deployment of sexuality as opposed to a discourse that is against or outside it. With respect to Reich's "historico-political critique of repression" between WWI and WWII, Foucault suggests that "the very possibility of its success was tied to the fact that it always unfolded within the deployment of sexuality". Furthermore, he continues:

"The fact that so many things were able to change in the sexual behaviour of Western societies without any of the promises or political conditions predicted by Reich being realized is sufficient proof that this whole sexual 'revolution,' this whole 'antirepressive' struggle, represented nothing more, but nothing less - and its importance is undeniable - than a tactical shift and reversal in the great deployment of sexuality."¹²³

The repressive hypothesis, then, while it may have achieved a certain loosening of prohibitions in the twentieth century, cannot serve as the basis for a critical perspective on the sexual technologies of modern power, or a practical movement to dismantle them, because it is in fact only their latest manifestation. As a result, he insisted to one interviewer:

"We are really going to have to rid ourselves of the 'Marcuseries' and 'Reichianisms' which encumber us and which would have us believe that of all things sexuality is the most obstinately 'repressed' [...] Since the Renaissance there is nothing that has been more studied, questioned, extorted, brought to light and into discourse, forced into confession, required to express itself and praised, finally, when it found the words. No civilization has chattered so much about sexuality as ours. And many people still believe that they are subverting it when they are only obeying this injunction to confess..."¹²⁴

Having said all that, Foucault's relationship to psychoanalysis and the repressive hypothesis was more ambivalent than the above comments suggest. His ambivalence is even more obvious when he discusses the relationship between the psychoanalytic deployment of sexuality and the production of pleasure. While, up to this point, Foucault has portrayed disciplinary and biopolitical techniques of knowledge-constitution and

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.131.

¹²⁴ Foucault, Michel, "Sorcery and Madness," interview in FL, p.108.

technologies of the self, such as confession, as powerful instruments of domination and control, he concedes that the processes of examination, incitement, and concealment, as well as relationships between, for example, analyst and analysand, have also opened up new possibilities for pleasure, indicating a seldom acknowledged ambivalence on his part in relation to modern sex. The deployment of sexuality gave rise to procedures and relations in which power and pleasure are inextricably linked. For the physician, the inspector, the parent, and the analyst there was the pleasure "that comes of exercising a power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light". While, for the child, the patient, the 'pervert,' the analysand, there was "the pleasure that kindles at having to evade this power, flee from it, fool it, or travesty it"¹²⁵. Thus, the deployment of sexuality produced the possibility for new pleasures: "pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing that truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of luring it out in the open"¹²⁶. Furthermore, the deployment of sexuality gave rise to relationships in which the question of sexuality, as well as the possibility for pleasure, was intensified; relations between parents and children, physicians and patients, analysts and analysands, students and teachers, and so on. In other words, while the generalization of discipline and the strategic deployment of delinquency he examined in Discipline and Punish are unredeemably tied to domination, we find in this discussion of the deployment of sexuality the first hints of a softening of his position on modernity, one which will become more explicit by the end of his life.

¹²⁵ Foucault, HS, p. 45.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.71.

What appears as the West's bloodless "scientia sexualis," Foucault concedes, also looks something like "the errant fragments of an erotic art that is secretly transmitted by confession and the science of sex"¹²⁷. But perhaps, he concludes, all these pleasures are but compensatory by-products of the sexual technology of power. In any event, what Foucault's discussion of the relationship between the practices of sexual confession and pleasure reveals is an important ambivalence on his part with respect both to psychoanalysis and the modern deployment of sexuality, as well as the beginnings of an ethico-political reappraisal of modern practices such as confession.

ix) Foucault's Critique of Liberal and Marxist Humanism

It will repay us at this point to revisit the question of humanism and to assess Foucault's work on modern practices of punishment and confession and the disciplinary and biopolitical governmental rationalities on which they are based. The main ethico-political thrust of Discipline and Punish, as we have seen, consists of a critique of modern subjectivity and political modernity as suffused with the effects of disciplinary power, and of the centrality of the human sciences to the production of these effects. Foucault debunks the putatively humane and emancipatory implications of the modern organization of power for the individual. His analysis of the history of punishment shows that, while less overtly corporeal and violent, the hold of disciplinary power on the individual is far more widespread, insidious, and effective than the exercise of monarchical power through public torture. He performs "a genealogy of the modern soul" in order to expose the modern subject as, in reality, a *product* or *fiction* of disciplinary

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.71.

and normalizing techniques to which the modern individual is subject within the home and family, as well as at school, work, religious and military institutions, hospitals, asylums, and so on. Far from the autonomous individual unencumbered by the weight of authority and arbitrary power, Foucault portrays the modern subject as a disciplined and "docile" one - a "disciplinary individual"¹²⁸ - that has been *produced* by a form of power which seeks to make individuals more useful while simultaneously rendering them less inconvenient in economic and political terms. The subject is the product of a certain kind of training and subjection from which modern society affords fewer and fewer interstitial means of escape or relief. As we have seen, Foucault locates the emergence and operation of the human sciences at the centre of this productive process which fabricates and trains individuals for power.

Foucault's unmasking of disciplinary power and his description of its operation in modern society belie the emancipatory self-image of political modernity as an age of increasing individual autonomy, social progress, and diminished political domination. Far from such a sanguine view, Foucault's description and analysis of modernity replaces emancipation and social progress with "normalization", "discipline", "panopticism", and the "carceral archipelago" as the dominant political conditions and tendencies in modern society. Foucault's historical analysis of the mechanisms of punishment at the cusp of the Classical and Modern periods in France contrasts images of eighteenth-century public torture with the nineteenth-century prison's "gentle way in punishment"¹²⁹, but ends with bleak descriptions of a modern "disciplinary society" and "carceral archipelago" in which

¹²⁸ Foucault, DP, p.189.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.104-131.

the majority of modern social institutions have become indistinguishable from the form of the prison¹³⁰. Its analysis of power rejects the traditional juxtaposition of premodern "barbarism" with the rational and humane organization of modern power. Foucault uses the organization of the modern penal system to show that violence, arbitrariness, and physical punishment persist in the modern organization of power in spite of its "leniencies" and, indeed, that power's grip on society and the individual may be more complete because of it. Far from consisting of the gradual, progressive loosening of restrictions on the liberty and autonomy of individuals, and of the disappearance of the reign of arbitrary or absolute forms of authority and power - as political modernity is portrayed in its liberal self-description - Foucault's analysis of the power to punish reveals that modernity, in addition to the acquisition by individuals of *formal* rights and liberties, has been characterized by the "insidious" spread of a new form of power - discipline - which has infected nearly every social institution, as it were, "on the underside of the law". Again, Foucault locates the human sciences at the apex of the institutions to which the functions of discipline and normalization are entrusted and from which the panoptic gaze emanates.

As suggested at the outset of the chapter, Foucault's contributions to the analysis of modern power and the genealogy of the modern subject posed direct challenges both to the liberal juridical form as well to the French Marxist form of humanism. His research into the positive, productive, and disciplinary mechanisms of liberal statecraft in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as his assessment of their effects on the nature of modern subjectivity, challenge both forms of humanism on empirical as well as

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.228, 297.

theoretical grounds. In so far as each neglects the specifically disciplinary, corporeal, and capillary nature of the functioning of modern power and its importance to the maintenance of both liberal legalism and economic domination, neither liberalism nor Marxism offer adequate empirical portrayals of the reality of modern power.

Consequently, as theoretical and analytical frameworks with which to understand the workings of modern power, they are similarly deficient. Neither the liberal emphasis on the concepts of sovereignty, the limited state, legitimacy, autonomy, and right, nor the Marxist stress on economic power, exploitation, or state power, are sufficient, analytically speaking, to grasp the complexity of how power functions in society today. Among other things, Discipline and Punish seeks to address the empirical deficits of the liberal juridical portrayal of modernity as an epoch of expanding liberty for the individual. "Historically," Foucault writes,

"the process by which the bourgeoisie became in the course of the eighteenth century the politically dominant class was masked by the establishment of an explicit, coded and formally egalitarian juridical framework, made possible by the organization of a parliamentary, representative regime. But the development and generalization of disciplinary mechanisms constituted the other, dark side of these processes. The general juridical form that guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle was supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines. And although, in a formal way, the representative regime makes it possible, directly or indirectly, with or without relays, for the will of all to form the fundamental authority of sovereignty, the disciplines provide, at base, a guarantee of the submission of forces and bodies. The real, corporeal disciplines constituted the foundation of the formal, juridical liberties. [...] The 'Enlightenment', which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines."¹³¹

In other words, Foucault argues, the political Enlightenment could well-afford to extend certain juridical rights and freedoms to individuals because the submission of individual bodies and forces was guaranteed by the mechanisms of discipline. Moreover, his point

¹³¹ Ibid., p.222.

is not that the disciplines operate in opposition to or contradict the spirit of liberal legalism; they are, he argues, its necessary supports. It is the juridical terms of bourgeois humanism and constitutionalism which make the disciplinary submission of bodies and forces bearable. "[W]e should not be deceived," Foucault writes:

"by all the Constitutions framed throughout the world since the French Revolution, the Codes written and revised, a whole continual and clamorous legislative activity: these were the forms that made an essentially normalizing power acceptable."¹³²

In this respect, Foucault joins with a host of other analysts of liberalism who find fault with boosterish celebrations of political modernity by juridical humanists as an epoch of expanding freedom, including Marx and Weber. Furthermore, his research into the disciplinary aspects of modern power join both historical as well as contemporary analysts who have emphasized the kinds of positive, constructive actions in which states engage in order to construct and support the liberal social order.

Foucault wants not only to set the empirical record straight, but to point out the analytical deficits of juridical humanism. Here he calls into question the analytical adequacy of the vocabulary of sovereignty, rights, autonomy, legitimacy and the whole liberal, *juridical* model of power. Today, Foucault insists,

"although the universal juridicism of modern society seems to fix limits on the exercise of power, its universally widespread panopticism enables it to operate, on the underside of the law, a machinery that is both immense and minute, which supports, reinforces, multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law. The minute disciplines, the panopticisms of every day may well be below the level of emergence of the great apparatuses and the great political struggles. But in the genealogy of modern society, they have been, with the class domination that traverses it, the political counterpart of the juridical norms according to which power was redistributed. [...] Taken one by one, most of these techniques have a long history behind them. [...] But it must be recognized that, compared with the [...] blast furnaces or the steam engine, panopticism has received little attention. It is regarded as not much more than a bizarre little utopia, a perverse dream, - rather as though

¹³² Foucault, HS, p.144.

Bentham had been the Fourier of a police society, [...] And yet this represented the abstract formula of a very real technology, [...]"¹³³

Now, Foucault's critique and analysis of modern disciplinary power is aimed as much at the empirical inadequacies and analytical deficiencies of Marxist-humanism as it is at those of its liberal counterpart. Against the Marxist-humanist tendency to privilege the economic aspects of the exercise of power, as well as the tendency to portray the state as inactive or merely a reflection of the interests of the economically dominant class, Foucault argues that where the analysis of power in contemporary society is concerned, "the problem lies rather in the steep rise in the use of these mechanisms of normalization and the wide-ranging powers which, through the proliferation of new disciplines, they bring with them."¹³⁴ Foucault does not so much wish to refute economic analyses of power as to make room for what he, among others, takes to be a significant aspect of the functioning of power with a specificity irreducible to the analytics of class.

Foucault's analysis of the deployment of sexuality as a strategic unity linked to insidious practices of normalization and responsabilization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries dovetailed neatly with the analysis of discipline. Each underscores that the juridical representation of power in modern society "is by no means adequate to describe the manner in which power was and is exercised"¹³⁵. Juridical humanist representations of power in terms of sovereignty, rights, contract, and law serve, in fact, to cover up the biopolitical "facts and procedures of power"¹³⁶. As a result, juridical

¹³³ Foucault, DP, pp.223-225.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.306.

¹³⁵ Foucault, HS, p.88.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.88.

accounts of political modernity are not only empirically invalid but conceptually and analytically flawed. The juridical theory of power and its exercise conceives it in terms of "right and violence, law and illegality, freedom and will, and especially the state and sovereignty," all problems characteristic of what Foucault calls the juridical or monarchical form of power. The problem with conceiving of power in these terms, Foucault argues, is that "while many of its forms have persisted to the present," modern European societies have "gradually been penetrated by quite new mechanisms of power," which, as his own research indicated, "took charge of men's existence, men as living bodies" in ways "irreducible to the representation of law."¹³⁷ Thus, the juridical humanist discourse on power is now "utterly incongruous" with and "incapable of encoding" the new disciplinary and biopolitical forms of powers, whose operation is ensured not "by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control,"¹³⁸ operating at the level of the quotidian and the corporeal¹³⁹. This new "non-sovereign power" is "impossible to describe in the terminology of the theory of sovereignty from which it differs so radically"¹⁴⁰. As a result, contemporary analysis of power "should not concern itself with the regulated and legitimate forms of power in their central locations [...]. On the contrary,

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.89.

¹³⁹ It warrants mentioning, however, that Foucault's criticisms of the predominantly liberal juridical humanist tradition do not entail a wholesale repudiation of liberal thought. Towards the end of his life, particularly in his writings and lectures on governmentality, Foucault expressed appreciation for the liberal tradition as having posed the question of *being governed too much*. He even acknowledged a certain affinity between his own questions about governmentality and those of twentieth-century neo-classical liberal thinkers, including the *Ordoliberalen* and the Chicago School. See, for example: Foucault, Michel, "The Birth of Biopolitics," in EST, pp.73-79.

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, Michel, "Two Lectures," in PK, p.105.

"it should be concerned with power at its extremities, in its ultimate destinations, with those points where it becomes capillary, that is, in its more regional and local forms and institutions. Its paramount concern, in fact, should be with the point where power surmounts the rules of right which organize and delimit it and extends itself beyond them [...] one should try to locate power at the extreme points of its exercise, where it is always less legal in character."¹⁴¹

The analytical deficits of the juridical discourse of power have not rendered it obsolete, however, as it continues to serve power by concealing its "actual procedures".

Much the same, according to Foucault, applies to the orthodoxies of his Marxist-humanist contemporaries like Sartre and Garaudy. While he recognized the historical importance of Marxism as a radical and critical form of humanism which showed that "real power escaped the rules of jurisprudence" and that "the legal system itself was merely a way of exerting violence [...] under cover of general law,"¹⁴² it too suffers certain empirical and analytical deficits. Since the nineteenth century, Foucault argues, Marxists have for the most part made the structures of both economic and state power their empirical, theoretical, and practical focus. However, while obviously important, by localizing power almost exclusively in the economic and the state, Marxists have failed to account for the mechanisms and practices of power which operate on the corporeal level, functioning "outside, below, and alongside the state apparatus, on a much more minute and everyday level."¹⁴³ In both Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality, for example, Foucault tries to show how techniques of corporal discipline in workplaces and mechanisms for the responsabilization of workers and parents aimed at stamping out "irregular living" and attaching them more securely to wage labour were necessary to manufacture an obedient labour force suited to the rhythms of an industrial

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp.96-97.

¹⁴² Foucault, HS, p.88.

¹⁴³ Foucault, Michel, "Body/Power," interview in PK, p.60.

economy. An emphasis on purely economic relations and forms of power will miss the fact that capitalist societies require a certain "mode of investment of the body" in order to function¹⁴⁴. Foucault notes that "while there are some very interesting things about the body in Marx's writings," Marxist discourse and practice has had a tendency to "occlude the question of the body"¹⁴⁵. "I wonder," he asks, "whether [...] it wouldn't be more materialist to study first the question of the body and the effects of power on it."¹⁴⁶

Similarly, the excessive statism Foucault detected in his Marxist contemporaries also tended to suppress the importance of these other mechanisms of power.

Paradoxically, Marxist tendencies to reduce the state to a certain number of functions like the development of productive forces or the reproduction of relations of production "invariably renders it absolutely essential as a target needing to be attacked and a privileged position needing to be occupied."¹⁴⁷ However, the state, Foucault argues, "is far from able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations" and relies for its operation on "a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so forth."¹⁴⁸

Finally, the relationship Foucault drew between mechanisms of power and those of knowledge production in the human sciences, and in institutions such as asylums, hospitals, prisons, and schools, constitutes another neglected aspect of the functioning of modern power. "[...] I believe," he remarked, "that political power also exercises itself

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.58.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.59. Nicos Poulantzas, for one, defends Marxist discourse on this point, arguing that Marxist research on the body was well under way prior to the appearance of Foucault's otherwise valuable work. See: Poulantzas, Nicos, State, Power, Socialism, trans. Patrick Camiller, London: Verso, 1980, p.146.

¹⁴⁶ Foucault, "Body/Power," p.58.

¹⁴⁷ Foucault, "Governmentality," p.103.

¹⁴⁸ Foucault, "Truth and Power," interview in PK, p.122.

through the mediation of a certain number of institutions which look as if they have nothing in common with the political , and as if they are independent of it, while they are not. One knows this in relation to the family;" Foucault continues, "and in a general way, all teaching systems [...] Institutions of knowledge, of foresight and care, such as medicine, also help to support the political power."¹⁴⁹ Responding to Marxist criticisms that, in stressing such minute mechanisms of power such as the examination or the confession, or in taking up the causes of marginalized figures like Jouy, Barbin, and Riviere, his works distract attention from putatively more general and essential problems, Foucault argued:

"what I take up *is* general [...] We live in a social universe in which the formation, circulation, and utilization of knowledge present a fundamental question. If the accumulation of capital has been an essential feature of our society, the accumulation of knowledge has not been any less so."¹⁵⁰

Foucault devoted much of his work both to uncovering detailed instances of this interplay between power and knowledge production, as we saw in the previous chapter, in hopes that in the field of political analysis "the rules of power and the powers of true discourses"¹⁵¹ might take on the generality currently granted to the economic and juridical.

Now, the prominence of the themes of ideology and consciousness demonstrate, as we know, that Marx and Marxists in general were far from ignorant of a certain relationship between knowledge and power. In the critique of ideology, however, were

¹⁴⁹ Foucault, Michel and Noam Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," interview in Davidson, Arnold, ed., Foucault and His Interlocutors, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, p.130.

¹⁵⁰ Foucault, Michel, "The Discourse on Power," interview in Foucault, Michel, Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito, New York: Semiotext(e), 1991, p.165. Hereinafter cited as RM.

¹⁵¹ Foucault, Michel, "Two Lectures," interview in PK, p.94.

contained a number of humanist assumptions which Foucault could not accept. The concept of ideology, he contends, "always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth," the unveiling of which would constitute the liberation of a liberating truth which, in its universality, would be detached from power¹⁵². *Ideologiekritik* rests on the view that such knowledge constitutes "the guarantee of liberation"¹⁵³. But "there is no point in dreaming of a time when knowledge will cease to depend on power;" Foucault insists, "this is just a way of reviving humanism in a utopian guise."¹⁵⁴ The post-revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat will, like the society it replaces, find itself incapable of operating without both the apparatus of the old state and a certain "economy of discourses of truth". In order, therefore, "to operate the state apparatuses which have been taken over but not destroyed, it will be necessary to have recourse to technicians and specialists," including those in the human sciences¹⁵⁵. The notorious use of psychiatry and the mental institution to crush political dissidents in the USSR was, for Foucault, a particularly chilling demonstration of this¹⁵⁶. Finally, as we have already seen in previous chapters, the Marxist concept of ideology harbours the humanist assumption that beneath it lies a final, universal liberating truth susceptible to being grasped by the consciousness of a "universal intellectual" like Sartre. Such a retrograde metatheoretical Cartesianism struck Foucault as philosophically untenable and, as reflected in a great deal of Marxist and

¹⁵² Foucault, Michel, "Truth and Power," p.118.

¹⁵³ Foucault, "The Discourse on Power," p.166.

¹⁵⁴ Foucault, Michel, "Prison Talk," interview in PK, p.52.

¹⁵⁵ Foucault, "Body/Power," p.60.

¹⁵⁶ See his comments in: Foucault, "Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison," pp.178-186.

Stalinist practice at the time, politically noxious¹⁵⁷. Genealogical criticism differs from Marxist humanist critique of ideology in this respect. The "intelligibilities" to which Foucault's genealogies give rise are intended less as truth-establishing closures than as tools of distanciation and resistance.

Having said that, Foucault's relationship to certain forms of Marxism need not be seen as so distant. While Foucault often tended to suppress the concurrence of many of his own views with those of Marxist theorists like Althusser or Poulantzas, his relationship to Marxism can also be characterized as one involving reciprocal influences and numerous overlapping assumptions and concerns. With respect to the brute facticity of class inequality, for example, Foucault asserts: "we now know with reasonable certainty who exploits others, who receives the profits, which people are involved," and while it may at times be difficult to ascertain who holds power exactly, "it is easy to see who lacks power"¹⁵⁸. Secondly, Foucault's own writings on Marx reflect a deep appreciation for the latter as, along with Nietzsche and Freud, one of the nineteenth century's masters of the "hermeneutics of suspicion," one which he put aside on only a few rare occasions such as in his discussion of the analytic of finitude in The Order of Things¹⁵⁹. Finally, an overemphasis on what separates Foucault from contemporary Marxism suppresses the affinities and reciprocal influences between them. For example,

¹⁵⁷ Comments germane to this issue can be found in several interviews contained in: Foucault, Remarks on Marx.

¹⁵⁸ Foucault, Michel, "Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation Between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze," in Foucault, Michel, Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice, Donald Bouchard, ed., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, p.213. Hereinafter cited as LCMP.

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Foucault, Michel, "Nietzsche, Freud, Marx," in Foucault, Michel, Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954 - 1984, Vol. 2, James Faubion, ed., New York: The New Press, 1998, pp.269-278.

while he chides Foucault for failing to acknowledge certain new developments within Marxist thought contemporaneous with his own insights on power, no less a figure than Nicos Poulantzas acknowledged the contribution which Foucault's work on modern power had made to enriching Marxist thought, and incorporated Foucault's insights into his own theory of state practices of individuation¹⁶⁰. And it would be foolish to ignore the contribution Foucault's work has made to new currents within contemporary Marxist and socialist thought along the lines of those recounted by figures like Laclau and Mouffe¹⁶¹.

Finally, in his analysis of the deployment of the "repressive hypothesis" as a disciplinary, individualizing, and normalizing discursive apparatus of modern power, Foucault draws parallels between the kind of depth hermeneutical approach to the question of Man adopted by critical humanists and the practices and the mechanisms and institutions of "knowledge, of foresight, and care" which lie at the heart of the modern governmental rationale of discipline and normalization. Here Foucault appears to cast in doubt the concept of a genuinely emancipatory approach to the human and the sciences. Since the nineteenth century, Foucault argues, the human sciences have been committed to the notion that the pursuit of knowledge with regard to human internal and social

¹⁶⁰ See, for example: Poulantzas, State, Power, Socialism, pp.63-75, 146-150.

¹⁶¹ There can be little doubt that, along with a host of other thinkers and historical events, Foucault's work has contributed to the breakup of what Laclau and Mouffe call the "Jacobin imaginary" of the traditional Left. Among the theoretical features of a new post-Marxist Left discourse are: the "unfixity" of social identities; the absence of a privileged agent or subject of history; and the permanent detotalization of the social. It is not difficult to see how Foucault's work is of a part of the developments which contributed to this rethinking of Marxism. Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, London: Verso, 1985, pp.7-88. This is not to ignore the fact that Laclau and Mouffe are at times unsatisfied with particular aspects of Foucault's work, archaeology in particular. See: Ibid., pp.105-107, 145-146, fn13.

nature will have emancipatory effects. The "repressive hypothesis" conforms to what Foucault elsewhere described as "the great eschatological myth of the 19th century" according to which European thought dreamt of how to "make this knowledge (*connaissance*) of man exist so that man could be liberated by it from his alienations, liberated from all the determinations of which he was not the master, so that he could, thanks to this knowledge of himself, become again or for the first time master of himself"¹⁶². Underlying this seemingly benevolent and emancipatory attention to the question of Man on the part of critical humanists and progressive social scientists, however, is the political rationality of "police" or "biopolitics". Foucault unmasks the discursification of Man as alienated or repressed as an armature of power and domination, supplying it with new holds and surfaces on which to latch.

Having elaborated in considerable detail Foucault's empirical and analytical critiques of liberal juridical as well as Marxist humanism, let us now examine some of the more common and influential criticisms which have been raised in response to it. According to many of his critics, Foucault's anti-humanist ethico-political critique of modernity is unjustifiably one-sided, politically dangerous and methodologically unintelligible. Jurgen Habermas, among others, insists that Foucault's normative critique of modernity is based on an empirically invalid portrayal of the nature of modern power¹⁶³. Other commentators, including Nancy Fraser and Charles Taylor, give some

¹⁶² Foucault, Michel, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," interview in FL, p.36.

¹⁶³ See, for example: Best, Steven and Douglas Kellner, Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations, New York: The Guilford Press, 1991, pp.68-73; Habermas, Jurgen, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," in Habermas, Jurgen, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1987, pp.286-291.

credit to Foucault for having revealed previously unacknowledged workings of power, but nonetheless join Habermas in faulting Foucault for underestimating the gains made in terms of individual autonomy and expressive possibility as a direct result of societal modernization¹⁶⁴. According to such views, Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary aspects of modernity is not only invalid as an empirical generalization regarding the condition of cultural modernity, but politically enervating and dangerous as well. In Habermas' words Foucault's critique of modernity underestimates the "elements of reason in cultural modernity," including "the universalist foundations of law and morality which have *also* been embodied (in no matter how distorted and imperfect a form) in the institutions of constitutional states, in the forms of democratic decision-making, and in individualistic patterns of identity formation"¹⁶⁵. According to Habermas, Foucault's portrayals of modern discipline and normalization constitute gross generalizations. He accuses Foucault of extrapolating from a few "impressive cases"¹⁶⁶ in France to the whole of western modernity, of "leveling down" all forms of individuation to effects of power, and of "filtering out" from his portrayal of modernity many significant gains in

¹⁶⁴ See: Nancy Fraser, Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp.17-34; Taylor, Charles, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in Taylor, Charles, Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp.152-184; and Taylor, Charles, "Foucault, Connolly, and Truth," Political Theory, Vol. 13, No. 3, August, 1985, pp.377-385.

¹⁶⁵ Habermas, Jurgen, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," New German Critique, No. 26, Spring/Summer, 1982, p.18. See also: Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," pp.286-293. Taylor similarly defends the achievements of modernity, though on somewhat different grounds, in the following works: Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," pp.180-184; and Taylor, Charles, "Inwardness and the Culture of Modernity," in Axel Honneth, et al, eds., Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Modernity, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992, pp.88-110; and Taylor, Charles, Sources of the Self, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, pp.456-493.

¹⁶⁶ Habermas, "Questions Concerning the Theory of Power," p.288.

terms of civil and democratic rights and "expressive possibilities"¹⁶⁷. According to Habermas, while illustrated with powerful, affecting examples, the thesis itself is "false in its generality"¹⁶⁸.

The suggestion by Foucault that the modern experience of selfhood as a space of deep interiority inhabited by personal aspirations and interests, strong sexual instincts, or some other depth-psychological truth, is little more than an effect of the deployment of sexuality and other practices of the self felicitous for power has also drawn its share of criticism. Habermas criticizes Foucault's putative tendency to reduce modern individuals to mere effects of power, thus extinguishing subjectivity altogether. From Foucault's perspective, Habermas insists, modern individuals cannot be perceived as anything other than "standardized products" that are "mechanically punched out" by some "discourse formation" and mechanisms of power guaranteeing automatic compliance¹⁶⁹. The result of Foucault's analyses of modern disciplinary techniques and the deployment of sexuality is an unwarranted "filtering out of all the aspects under which the eroticization and internalization of subjective nature also meant a gain in freedom and expressive possibilities."¹⁷⁰ Finally, he also worries that such portrayals of the relationship between power and subjectivity will induce political apathy and paralysis, since Foucault's theory of power allegedly removes both the internal springs and resources as well as the motives for subjects to resist power and domination¹⁷¹.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., pp.290-91.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.288.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p.293.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p.292.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., pp.283-284.

Charles Taylor defends the modern experience of interiority and selfhood against Foucault's critique of the subject as the product of a rich cultural inheritance from ideas and practices irreducible to the strategic demands of any one system of power in a given period. While well aware that our experience of atomistic identity and inwardness are contingent upon a constellation of understandings and background practices around ideas of personhood, nature, society, and the Good that are unique to the West¹⁷², Taylor still insists that the identity currently available to the modern Western self is more closely attuned to the way human beings are at their best than any previous or other experience. That the modern experience of selfhood and interiority is irreducible to political rationalities and disciplinary techniques rooted in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seems obvious, according to Taylor, from the chronology of the theory of the subject in Western thought. A long line of thinkers, from Augustine through Descartes to Locke and Montaigne, among others, has elaborated an increasingly "reflexive stance" by which subjects have succeeded in disengaging themselves from encoded habits, traditions, and beliefs by turning *inward* and engaging in various forms of self-objectification and exploration¹⁷³. This constellation of thought prepared at least some of the ground for the kinds of individuating knowledges and practices which grew up around the self and its interiority in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While the modern experience of self and identity was not acquired simply by "imbibing doctrines,"¹⁷⁴ neither is it reducible to the disciplinary form of power or the biopolitical hermeneutics of the psyche which, after all, appeared very late on the scene relative to the constellation of thought

¹⁷² Taylor, "Inwardness and the Culture of Modernity," pp.92-94.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp.99-104.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.101.

around the subject. Furthermore, according to Taylor, Foucault's genealogy of the modern subject, in which all forms of subjectivity are reduced to forms of power and techniques of subjectification amongst which it is impossible to make any evaluative distinctions, prevents him from making the kind of "fine-grained discernment of what has been gained,"¹⁷⁵ in the modern experience of the subject versus, say, the medieval one. According to Taylor, this leads Foucault to an evaluatively neutral and absurd position, one in which many aspects of political modernity such as universal manhood and, subsequently, female suffrage cannot be celebrated as a "relative gain in freedom."¹⁷⁶

Foucault has also been taken to task over his critique of the repressive hypothesis and its effects within the overall deployment of sexuality. Gad Horowitz has argued that Foucault's anti-humanist critique of sexual liberationism is based on a misunderstanding of the Freudian and Marcusean analysis of the erotic dimension of human experience and a kneejerk, radically anti-essentialist celebration of "bodies and pleasures" that is too "ambiguous and indeterminate" to assess in terms of its ability to support a new and viable non-disciplinary subjectivity. Firstly, Horowitz argues that Foucault's tendency to ascribe a form of sexual essentialism to the whole tradition of the analysis of repression is "based on a deep misunderstanding", particularly of Freud and Marcuse¹⁷⁷. Neither Freud nor Marcuse, he argues, take sexuality "to be a self-subsisting metaphysical or biological 'truth of being' of the human". "Only Reich and his followers," Horowitz

¹⁷⁵ Taylor, "Connolly, Foucault, and Truth," p.383.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.382.

¹⁷⁷ Horowitz, Gad, "The Foucaultian Impasse: No Sex, No Self, No Revolution," Political Theory, Vol. 15, No.1, 1987, p.61.

continues," believe in the power of sex. Freud himself and all his followers [...] have found beneath the actually existing sexual forms the generalized prediscursive prepersonal bodily pleasure potential of the it..."¹⁷⁸. Furthermore, for both Freud and Marcuse, repression itself is not seen as a strictly negative force imposed on a preexisting sexual subject, as Foucault's caricatured view of their work would have it. Each understands very well the productive role played by repression, which in the broadest Freudian sense simply refers to "the lengthy complex, social process by which the prepersonal child becomes a self," in the construction of the ego¹⁷⁹. In this respect, the Freudian theory of repression and identity formation parallels Foucault's argument that subjectivity is a construct of power. The analysis of repression turns, especially in Marcuse's work, into a critique of sexual repression only when the distinction is made between basic and surplus repression; that is, between repression that is "necessary for the construction of any kind of self whatsoever" and gratuitous, "terroristic" forms which produce "the kinds of self that are required in warlike hate cultures, in patriarchal class societies."¹⁸⁰ According to Horowitz, Foucault's radical anti-essentialism and reliance on no other distinction than that between power and resistance is unable to make such a necessary distinction. Granted, then, that for Freud there is a transhistorical, permanent, depth-psychological truth of human identity, such truth nonetheless does not reside in sexuality or its repression. Such a truth resides in the love needs of the child which arise out of the principle of Eros, the need to bond and attach, of which its sexuality is just one manifestation. We shall return to this point below. In terms of the critique of the sexual

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.71.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.72.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.72-73.

essentialism of the Freudian left, Foucault's work misunderstands the very tradition at which it is aimed. The only position to which Foucault's caricature of the repressive hypothesis can be rightly applied, Horowitz concludes, is the Reichian one.

The difficulties with Foucault's anti-humanist, hyperconstructionist anti-essentialism do not end with its flawed interpretation of the psychoanalytic tradition. Combined with his rallying cry around "bodies and pleasures," Foucault's excessively anti-essentialist stance against the deployment of sexuality simply cannot support a viable conception of the constructed self, let alone a healthy one. There is, Horowitz insists, a permanent, transhistorical, depth-psychological truth to the human condition - the love needs of the child - which is not the same as its sexuality. The transhistorical, trans-cultural truth of the love-needy child and its rootedness at the base of the development of the adult ego is suppressed by Foucault's "male antiessentialism". Infancy, Horowitz insists, is transhistorical. Not her sex but her need for love lies at the root of her self. "The child needs bodily contact and pleasure only as one essential aspect of love - the affirming attention, the affectionate recognition, the empathic support - of one or more parenting beings"¹⁸¹. Herein lies the putative danger of Foucault's anti-essentialist refusal of any depth-psychological truth of the self. Failure to recognize and provide for the love-needs of the child has productive effects as well - it induces terror. "Even deeper than the need for love is the terror that Freud found in the infant deprived of love"¹⁸². In the absence of love the child, and the child within the adult, will be miserable, terrorized, destructive, or numb. "Relativism," Horowitz insists, "stops at the

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.71-72.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p.71.

baby"¹⁸³. Liberation, therefore, is not simply the liberation of pleasure; it is liberation from the terror and anxiety which fill the space of love's absence. By refusing to accept the primacy of the love-needy self, or to make the basic distinction between necessary and gratuitous forms of repression, Horowitz argues, Foucault's radically antiessentialist, "anti-sexual liberation sexual liberationism" is unlikely to produce the kind of non-disciplinary, anxiety-free sex life or unterrorized form of subjectivity he hopes it will.

Foucault's anti-humanist critique of political modernity has been subject to further criticism regarding the status of the normative foundations for the very critique it appears to launch. Habermas and Taylor argue that, since it rests on no obvious or explicit standards of justification, Foucault's unmistakably ethico-political critique of modernity is arbitrary and inconsistent. According to this view, Foucault cannot coherently engage in an ethico-political critique of the costs of humanist modernity without making parasitical use of the very humanist terms of reference he rejects - freedom, repression, a hermeneutics of unveiling, and the promise of a liberating truth¹⁸⁴. Yet, the methodological assumptions of genealogical critique, according to which every normative framework is imbricated with relations of power, prevent Foucault from acknowledging let alone endorsing the normative underpinnings of his own attack on modernity. To do so would expose his own normative grounds to genealogical unmasking and reveal the arbitrariness of his critique. In the absence of any such principles of normative justification, however, Habermas and Taylor insist that ethico-political critique of any kind becomes unintelligible. On this view, the very act of

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.73.

¹⁸⁴ See: Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power," pp.284-285; and Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," pp.167-184.

engaging in critique entails standards of normative justification, without which it makes no sense to engage in criticism of any kind. Standards, they contend, are built into the very "grammar" of critique. According to Habermas, Foucault's genealogical critique of modernity is defeated by its own self-referential methodological assumptions.

Genealogy's reduction of all validity claims to bids for power impeaches the status of genealogy itself as a form of privileged insight into the modern condition and begs the question of the form of power and strategic interests whose maintenance *it* serves. If all forms of knowledge and discourse, genealogy included, are reducible to bids for power, then there no grounds for endorsing or privileging genealogy over any other approach to knowledge or form of power, other than arbitrary and decisionistic ones. And as we have already seen, Taylor finds Foucault's normative critique of modernity "ultimately incoherent," insofar as his own genealogical methodology unmasks all normative frameworks as assertions of power and will, including that on the basis of which he implicitly criticizes modernity. For other commentators, such as Nancy Fraser and Richard Bernstein, the problem with Foucault's critique of modernity is not that he jettisoned all possible standards on the basis of which to launch an intelligible critique but, rather, that it does not reveal explicitly what its own normative criteria are¹⁸⁵. The real target of Foucault's critique is not normativity per se, but the liberal humanist framework for the normative justification of modernity. The problem with Foucault's critique, as important as it is for its insights into the nature of modern power, is that it fails to provide or elaborate upon the standards for its own critique and denunciation of

¹⁸⁵ See: Fraser, Unruly Practices, pp.35-54; and Bernstein, Richard, "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophic *Ethos*," in Bernstein, Richard, The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity, Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1992, pp.142-171.

modernity. In failing to provide a justification for why we should abhor rather than embrace discipline and biopolitics, Foucault's ethico-political legacy remains insufficiently grounded and, ultimately, ambiguous.

Now, Habermas, among others, has also argued that while Foucault rejected explicit reference to any normative foundation, his work betrays hints of one nonetheless. Elaborating the normative underpinnings of his critique does not redeem it in their eyes, however, since they turn out to be politically suspect. Habermas explains the nature of Foucault's critique as the result of a certain *cryptonormative* "aesthetic modernist" sensibility which supplies the normative underpinnings for all of his work¹⁸⁶. According to Habermas, Foucault's anti-humanist, genealogical critique, which levels down or filters out all that is redeeming about societal modernization, is attributable to an affinity for "aesthetic modernist" gestures of total rejection inherited from Nietzsche's *Lebensphilosophie*¹⁸⁷. Habermas argues that Foucault's sensibilities cannot be openly acknowledged, however, for the sake of preserving the consistency of his genealogical critique of all normative schemes. Taking up Habermas' suspicions regarding Foucault's putative affinity for the sensibilities and passions of "aesthetic modernism," Richard Wolin extrapolates certain normative criteria for Foucault's anti-humanist critique of modernity putatively hidden in the latter's work. According to Wolin, Foucault's radical critique operates on the basis of an unacknowledged privileging of the vitalistic trope of "the other of reason," in which a host of vitalistic energies, qualities, and figures are

¹⁸⁶ Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power," pp.282-286.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.285-286.

celebrated as a kind of antipodean anti-modernist shock army¹⁸⁸. A number of other critics have made similar charges¹⁸⁹. According to this interpretation, Foucault's tendency to stress the costs of modernity to marginalized forms of life and experience embodied in figures like Jouy, Beasse, Barbin, and Riviere belies an implicit *valorization* of irrationality, unrestrained sexual gratification, and orgiastic violence as anti-modern models for non-disciplinary, non-normalizing forms of experience and action. In any case, Foucault's normative critique of modernity is cast as either methodologically incoherent, since it offers an ethico-political critique which is parasitical on the very concepts it rejects, or politically retrograde, since it is affiliated with the elitist, anti-social aestheticism of figures like Nietzsche and Bataille.

Some of the criticism of Foucault's work on the nature of political modernity is compelling, and Foucault conceded some of its shortcomings himself. Foucault's portrayals of modern disciplinary society in the 1970s, in particular, express an almost unequivocal rejection of its progressive and emancipatory credentials and offer a stinging indictment of the disciplinary and biopolitical mechanisms and relations of domination in modern liberal capitalist society. Foucault's resort to the architectural figure of the Panopticon furnished a claustrophobic and deeply disturbing image of modernity as a social and cultural formation in which the exercise and effect of disciplinary power have been perfected, in which all opportunities for resistance to or emancipation from power

¹⁸⁸ Wolin, Richard, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," in Wolin, Richard, The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, pp.170-193.

¹⁸⁹ See, for example: Drury, Shadia, Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp.132-133.

have been eliminated, and in which the individual's subjection and acquiescence to it have become automatic and guaranteed. Understandably, perhaps, staunch critics like Habermas have leapt upon his discussion of the Panopticon as evidence of an unjustifiably and dangerously one-sided view of modernity on Foucault's part. While later admitting to the relative one-sidedness of his focus on the disciplinary aspects of modern society¹⁹⁰, Foucault also responded, somewhat disingenuously, that he never in fact made any direct comparison between the Panopticon and modern society¹⁹¹. Foucault never retreated from his insistence that "panoptic procedures, as concrete forms of the exercise of power, have become extremely widespread"¹⁹². Later, perhaps driven by criticism, Foucault's view of contemporary modernity became considerably less totalized than that suggested by the image of the Panopticon. By the late 1970s his portrayals of modernity had become more ambivalent, such as we saw in the case of the deployment of sexuality, which introduced new opportunities for pleasure as well surfaces for the operation of power.

However, as all-encompassing interpretations of Foucault's oeuvre, many of these criticisms misconstrue the nature and scope of his criticism, and appear to engage in a certain "filtering out" of their own, in terms of their reading and interpretation of Foucault's writings and interviews as a whole. Foucault's ethico-political anti-humanism does not, first of all, constitute a wholesale rejection of modernity, in spite of the excesses of Discipline and Punish. The claim that Foucault rejected modernity as utterly unredeemable, that he reduced the modern subject to nothing but an effect of

¹⁹⁰ Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," p.19.

¹⁹¹ Foucault, Michel, "Clarifications on the Question of Power," in FL, pp.183-192.

¹⁹² Foucault, DP, p.249.

domination, and that he harboured nostalgic, anti-modernist longings for the pre-modern are based on gross caricatures of his work which collapse its rhetorical formulations into its substance. Foucault's writings and interviews, especially after Discipline and Punish, are filled with caution, nuance, and candid self-correction, particularly on the questions of the nature of modern power and the status of the modern subject. Without careful reading, however, it is easy to be misled. Foucault himself admitted that in his work in the 1970s his portrayals of disciplinary and biopolitical modernity were given to a certain overemphasis on the domination of the subject by various scientific, administrative, and strategic practices, and to a definite rhetorical excess. On numerous occasions he conceded that "perhaps I've insisted too much on the technology of domination and power"¹⁹³. This concession was also reflected in his final two works, The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, which turn away from the study of mechanisms for governing others toward the mechanisms by which individuals govern and give shape to themselves, suggesting that the modern subject was far from helpless or without means of resistance in the face of power. As to the excesses of his resort to figures such as the Panopticon, Foucault defended himself as belonging to the venerable Nietzschean tradition of rhetorical overstatement, the objective of which is not to get readers to accept one's own argument but, rather, to shock them into "listening to a different claim". Such rhetorical excesses and simplifications, he once argued, are sometimes necessary in order to "change the scenery"¹⁹⁴. Bernstein has characterized Foucault's strategic use of deliberate overstatement as a "rhetoric of disruption"¹⁹⁵. Furthermore, in remarks that

¹⁹³ Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," p.19.

¹⁹⁴ Foucault, Michel, "The End of the Monarchy of Sex," interview in FL, p.149.

¹⁹⁵ Bernstein, "Foucault: Critique as a Philosophic *Ethos*," p.153.

have received considerably less attention than his tendency toward hyperbole, Foucault acknowledged that recent social and political developments with respect to the body, relations between the sexes, and sexuality had been "profoundly beneficial"¹⁹⁶. On other occasions he agreed that the system of social security in France, for example, achieved improvements in the lives of its beneficiaries, and he maintained an active interest in its reform in spite of the connections his own work made between concepts of welfare and social security and the *Polizeiwissenschaften*¹⁹⁷. Foucault is partly to blame for this kind of misunderstanding since, in his written work in particular, his analyses of discipline, biopower, and governmentality seldom acknowledge that the many losses in freedom they entailed were offset by new freedoms. One could argue that the modern state's disciplinary and biopolitical concerns reflected attempts on its part, not necessarily successful ones mind you, to achieve a measure of freedom *from* certain things like disease, famine, economic turmoil, incest, and abuse for its citizens. Nonetheless, this should not lead us to trivialize the existence or effects of the mechanisms of power which he identifies, in the way that Habermas tends to. Far from extrapolating from a few "impressive cases," Foucault uncovered multiform examples of a certain kind of *governance*, or mechanisms for the normalization of individuals and forms of life in nineteenth century as well as contemporary modern societies which appear to be more prevalent than Habermas is prepared to admit. Foucault's work on what he came to call in his late work, "governmentality," or the intersection between technologies for governing others and those by which we govern ourselves, has inspired and opened up

¹⁹⁶ See, for example: Foucault, Michel, "An Aesthetics of Existence," interview in FL, p.312.

¹⁹⁷ Foucault discusses the social security regime in France in the interview, "Social Security," in MF, pp.159-177.

whole new areas of historical and social research, and revisited old ones with fresh insights¹⁹⁸.

Furthermore, the argument that Foucault extinguishes the subject, which is to found in the work of commentators like Habermas, Fraser, and Ferry and Renaut, stems from the misapprehension that Foucault's analysis of disciplinary subjectivity reduced the modern subject to nothing more than an effect of disciplinary techniques of power. As we know, Foucault's anti-subjectivism was aimed primarily at humanistic representations of the subject of classical scientific reason, the autonomous subject of juridical rights and freedoms, and the anthropological subject of phenomenology. While Foucault may well be guilty of at times hastily discounting the subject, it was clearly not his intention to reduce the subject to nothing. "We have to make distinctions," he insists:

"In the first place, I don't think there is actually a sovereign, founding subject, a universal form of the subject that one could find everywhere. [...] I think on the contrary that the subject is constituted through practices of subjection, or, in a more anonymous way, through practices of liberation, of freedom, as in Antiquity..."¹⁹⁹

Here Foucault clearly moderates his rhetoric on the subject and invites examination of the possibilities which still existed for individuals to exercise power over and give form to their own lives and identities, some of which might even serve as a basis for resisting disciplinary and normalizing pressures. However, even in Discipline and Punish Foucault did not utterly extinguish the subject. Here Foucault stressed that while the modern subject is the target of certain disciplinary operations, the disciplinary individual

¹⁹⁸ For a sample of recent research on "governmentality" see: Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991. In the Canadian case, Foucault's work has inspired at least one historical examination of the workings of biopolitics in late nineteenth-century English Canada: see Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada 1885-1925, Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1991.

¹⁹⁹ Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence," p.313.

remains "a *reality* fabricated by this specific technology of power"²⁰⁰. The fact that the individual is produced by power does not mean that the fabricated individual is *nothing*; rather, such individuals are part of the reality that power produces. Some readers of Discipline and Punish, and to a certain extent Foucault himself, tend to overemphasize the way in which the individual is enveloped and overwhelmed by the mechanisms of discipline in a kind of social taxidermy. The disciplinary individual is something more complex, however, than a standardized automaton punched out by the disciplinary machinery. The individual subjected to discipline is the object of mechanisms which suppress certain qualities and capacities, but not all, and of others which actually serve to increase and optimize certain ones. William Connolly has responded in Foucault's defense that what the disciplinary fabrication of agency suppresses is not the subject in her entire being but, rather, simply that within her which "resists agentification". "Subjectification," he explains, "an effect of power, subjugates recalcitrant material in an embodied self resistant to this form [of agency]"²⁰¹. Some kind of non-disciplinary remainder always persists. For example, as we saw above, that at which disciplinary techniques in the nineteenth century were aimed were the habits, dispositions, and forms of life which were "irregular," "nomadic," and "undisciplined". A disciplined labour force was created out of these techniques, among other measures to be sure. But this force was not *nothing*, and there was plenty left over of the individual which discipline left untouched provided it was irrelevant to or did not undermine his utility to power. John Ransom has recently elaborated on this point. According to his reading of

²⁰⁰ Foucault, DP, p.194.

²⁰¹ Connolly, William, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," Political Theory, Vol.13, No.3, August, 1985, p.371.

Foucault's analysis of disciplinary subjectivization, the subject is also composed of a certain number of "irreducibilities"²⁰² which are untouched by power and may even serve as grounds for resistance to it. For every type of subjectivization, there will be those aspects, qualities, or energies of the individual which will escape being constituted or determined by disciplinary power. Nowhere does Foucault suggest that it is possible "to shape the full range of possible human capacities according to a single use or even set of uses"²⁰³. The subject of discipline is constituted, but never exhaustively or "all the way down". "Rather," Ransom writes, "individuals are selectively fashioned in order to produce human material conducive to a particular social and political arrangement. Other elements [...] instincts, drives, and tensions do not disappear and can provide a basis for resisting"²⁰⁴. Secondly, subjectivizing power is reversible in its effects. The augmentation of certain capacities or the implantation of certain identities are subject to strategic reversal and unintended consequences. The socialization and mechanization of labour in the nineteenth century also increased the collective consciousness and capacity for economic disruption on the part of workers, and the implantation of the strategic unity of "homosexuality" has gradually been co-opted into a discursive rallying point for the recent gay politics of recognition²⁰⁵. All strategic unities, including those originally deployed to single out deviant identities for interdiction and exclusion are subject to what Foucault called the "tactical polyvalence of discourses"²⁰⁶ Ransom argues that

²⁰² Ransom, John, Foucault's Discipline: The Politics of Subjectivity, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.130.

²⁰³ Ibid., p.122.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.126.

²⁰⁵ Foucault, HS, p.101.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p.100.

Foucault maintained as one other "irreducibility" against the power of discipline the potential for thought itself, conceived simply as the ability to think in opposition to the way things are thought, said, and done in the present. Thus, Foucault's work retains room for an appreciation of the active, desiring, and thinking subject, even if none of these capacities are enjoyed under conditions of its own autonomous choosing. Finally, Foucault began to elaborate on a series of technologies of the self as practices of freedom very late in his life, work which was cut short by his premature death. In any event, contrary to the interpretations of Foucault's work by critics like Habermas or Ferry and Renault, the subject in Foucault's analysis of modernity, it is worth reiterating, is not discipline "all the way down".

Much of this also applies to Taylor's critique of Foucault's analysis of the disciplinary origins of the experience of selfhood. In fact, Foucault and Taylor are not as far apart as the latter makes out. Foucault does not reduce the subject to a mere epiphenomenon of disciplinary power in the nineteenth century. His "genealogy of the modern soul" traces the beginnings of what would become the modern disciplined and confessing subject back to early-Christian monastic ideas and practices. While referred to only fleetingly in Discipline and Punish²⁰⁷, Foucault's later work on the subject devotes considerable attention to ancient and early-Christian sources on the relationship between spiritual care of the self, confession, and subjectification²⁰⁸. As well, both the

²⁰⁷ Foucault, DP, pp.122-123.

²⁰⁸ See, for example, the final two volumes of Foucault's history of sexuality, The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, as well as numerous essays and interviews, including: "Self-Writing;" "The Battle for Chastity;" "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress;" and "The Ethics of Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom;" all of which appear in EST. On other occasions Foucault readily acknowledged the importance of figures such as Augustine, Pascal, and Leibniz to the development of the

theory and early practice of discipline predate the modern disciplinary experience of selfhood by centuries; the latter is marked both by early-Christian monastic practices as well as by both the theory and techniques of *Polizei* rooted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Foucault would agree, in other words, that the modern subject and experience of selfhood are irreducible to the demands of the nineteenth-century form of power. All of these complex lines of descent and penetration, including the nineteenth-century form of power, have coalesced to produce the modern experience of subjectivity. For his part, Taylor readily concedes that we have been "trained (and bullied)" into this experience not only through "imbibing doctrines but *much more* through all the disciplines that have been inseparable from our modern way of life, the disciplines of self-control in the economic, moral, and sexual fields."²⁰⁹ On the face of things, there seems little with regard to explaining the emergence of the modern self on which Foucault and Taylor disagree. Their disagreement appears to occur at the level of assessing and evaluating the achievements of this complex historical production of the modern subject. Taylor, as we know, argues that grounds exist for privileging the modern experience as closely attuned to what human beings can be when they are at their best. However, it is precisely at this evaluative level that Foucault disappoints. In analyzing only the conditions of emergence and the costs of modern subjectivity, Foucault not only abjures most evaluative assertions regarding the benefits of modernity but steadfastly refuses to endorse *any* "settled way of life" unambiguously²¹⁰. Western culture hardly

concepts of interiority and the deep self. See, for example: Foucault and Chomsky, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," pp.114-115.

²⁰⁹ Taylor, "Inwardness and the Culture of Modernity," p.101.

²¹⁰ Connolly, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," p.369.

needs Foucault in order to consolidate its sense that the modern experience of selfhood and identity constitutes one to be privileged and valorized. What it does need, however, is a further reflexive and critical awareness that our current way of doing and experiencing things is "far from filling all possible spaces," which is not to wax nostalgic for the days of feudalism or Ancient Greece. Keeping such an awareness of other possibilities alive, including those for a different experience of ourselves than that currently available, rests in part on asking the kinds of questions particular to Foucault's genealogical analysis: "How is it that the human subject took itself as the object of a possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And finally at what price?"²¹¹ Having said that, Foucault does not deprive us of all ability to make distinctions. He is not entirely neutral with respect to settled ways of existence. Foucault is still easily able to distinguish between those forms of life in which such questions are left open and the ones which tend to foreclose discussion of them. It is in the latter type of society that Foucault detects the real danger. We shall return to this problem of normative justifications for critique below in Chapter Six.

Finally, a number of comments can be made in response to Horowitz's critique of Foucault's anti-humanist hostility toward the repressive hypothesis. Firstly, Foucault's tendency to portray Marcuse as having an essentialist conception of sexuality and human nature appears to have little support among those closer to the latter's work. The work of the Frankfurt School, he maintained, "was noticeably impregnated with humanism of a Marxist type. That also explains," he continues,

"the particular articulation of the latter with certain Freudian concepts, in the relationship between alienation and repression, between 'liberation', disalienation, and the end of exploit-

²¹¹ Foucault, Michel, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," interview in MF, p.30.

ation. I'm convinced that given these premises, [they] cannot by any means admit that the problem is not to recover our 'lost' identity, to free our imprisoned nature, our deepest truth..."²¹²

Such an essentialist reading of Freud and Marcuse is not supported by Horowitz's interpretation, among others. Furthermore, Foucault's own discussions of Freud and the psychoanalytic tradition contain a degree of equivocation. At times he portrays psychoanalysis as an ally in his own struggle against the repressive hypothesis, which increasingly appears to be a strictly Reichian formula. "In point of fact," he writes, "the assertion that sex is not 'repressed' is not altogether new. Psychoanalysts," he continues,

"have been saying the same thing for some time. They have challenged the simple little machinery that comes to mind when one speaks of repression; the idea of a rebellious energy that must be throttled has appeared to them inadequate for deciphering the manner in which power and desire are joined to one another; they consider them to be linked in a more complex and primary way than through the interplay of a primitive, natural, and living energy welling up from below, and a higher order seeking to stand in its way; thus one should not think that desire is repressed, for the simple reason that the law is what constitutes both desire and the lack on which it is predicated."²¹³

The "simple little machinery" so disdained here by Foucault is no doubt Reich's. As a result of these equivocations, however, it is not entirely clear which traditions Foucault is really out to dismantle. Once it is admitted, as Horowitz suggests, that Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis only finds its mark in Reich, and that his own relationship to the psychoanalytic tradition is too ambiguous to allow him to reject it, then the actual implications of The History of Sexuality for the critical analysis of repression seem much less damaging. Compared to the effects of its empirical claims regarding the ubiquity of biopolitical surveillance and intervention for the juridical and Marxist humanist account

²¹² Foucault, "Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse: Who is a 'Negator of History'?", interview in *IRM*, pp.120-121.

²¹³ Foucault, *HS*, p.81.

of political modernity, The History of Sexuality makes a less convincing case against the psychoanalytic tradition.

Having said that, a closer look at other writings and remarks on psychiatry and psychology reveal that Foucault is less the radically anti-essentialist *hyperconstructionist* than Horowitz makes him out to be. Foucault often expressed a certain confidence in the analytical and therapeutic truth value of psychiatry and psychoanalysis²¹⁴. Denying such truth value or therapeutic results, he admitted, "would be pitiful"²¹⁵. In other words, setting aside some rhetorical excess, Foucault himself leaves room for the possibility of certain transhistorical irreducibilities in human psychology, including the love needs of the child²¹⁶. What Foucault really challenges is not so much the errors of depth psychology as its tendency to set up a type of power, and certain relationships to the body, to ourselves, and to the authorities; what Foucault worries turn all-too-easily into a whole "*system of obedience*"²¹⁷. Foucault demonstrates convincingly the various ways in which the nineteenth-century deployment of sexuality and the construction of the sexual self, as posing a danger both to oneself as well as others, gave rise to a host of mechanisms for observing and intervening in the lives of individuals, children, and families. Foucault's analysis of the deployment of sexuality and the strategic dangers of the psychiatric and psychoanalytic production of depth-psychological interiority and selfhood contain lessons that Horowitz and other defenders of psychoanalysis would do

²¹⁴ Foucault, Michel, "Psychiatric Power," in EST, p.47.

²¹⁵ Foucault, "Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison," p.195.

²¹⁶ Some other commentators have criticized Foucault for not being anti-essentialist *enough*. See, for example, Judith Butler's discussion of Foucault's own vestigial repressive hypothesis in relation to the case of Barbin in her book, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, New York: Routledge, 1990, pp.24, 29, 36, 72-74, 94.

²¹⁷ Foucault, "Confinement, Prison, Psychiatry," p.195. Emphasis in original.

well to heed. Without calling into question the truth value of Freud's or Horowitz's claims about the primacy of the love needs of the child, Foucault's analysis of the deployment of sexuality still offers lessons about the relationship between power and production of the deep self. Emphasis on the necessary ingredients for healthy, non-alienated sexual and psychological development - namely, the love needs of children - has the potential to dovetail with precisely the kinds of mechanisms of power Foucault analysed. Horowitz's position supports just the sort of intensification and solidification of the parent-child relation, and of the parental "responsibility" to see to the optimal development of their children, which Foucault observed in his research on campaigns against masturbation. None of this is to suggest that Foucault endorsed the neglect and abuse of children; rather, his point is to show that while new norms of responsible parenthood may be informed by good intentions, they are always susceptible to serving as props or supports for interventions by power. Historically, new norms for parenting and of "the interests of the child," while inspired by the best of intentions and no doubt warranted by shocking cases of abuse, have also seen children seized from families, made wards of the state, and turned over to caregivers and institutions under which further abuse has been far from rare. Perhaps the risk of such outcomes is outweighed by the benefits to most victimized children. After all, heightened awareness and public intolerance of practices such as incest, sexual abuse and assault, and sexual harassment have, at least we hope, led to a diminution in their frequency and to a corresponding increase in freedom *from* them on the part of those most vulnerable. All the same, it is not irresponsible of Foucault to point out that the very mechanisms by which various forms of sexual tyranny and abuse have been combatted have erected and unfolded within new systems of obedience themselves. In addition, recent New Right discourse on children, families, and marriage has

demonstrated Foucault's rule of "the tactical polyvalence of discourses". Today, social conservatives routinely refer to the developmental and love needs of the child in order to press for tighter divorce laws and preferential tax treatment for "the traditional family," and to resist measures favouring women's equal participation in the labour force and to fight against equal rights for gays and lesbians.

Finally, in response to suggestions by Habermas, Wolin, and Drury that Foucault secretly harbours a normative framework based on valorizations of the vitalistic "other of reason," a number of remarks are in order. Firstly, Foucault's work certainly supplies some fodder for this kind of suspicion. His works are filled with laments for energies, qualities, experiences, and figures suppressed or lost as a result of the operation of psychiatric, medical, disciplinary, and biopolitical forms of power. The question, however, is whether or not such references indicate an understanding of these energies, qualities, and figures as indicative of some essential human truth or reality which Foucault privileges and which supplies his critique of modernity with its normative foundations. While it is easy to interpret Foucault in this way, I do not believe in the end that such was Foucault's conviction or intention. Foucault himself admitted, first of all, that he encountered some difficulty in purging his work of the humanist trope of repression and naturalistic, romantic appeals to forms of pristine experience seized or snuffed out by modern forms of knowledge and power. Madness and Civilization, he conceded, was filled with references to a lyrical, romantic conception of "madness itself" and the "voice of madness" which had been suppressed by the monologue of psychiatric experience, at great cultural cost. As late as drafts for The History of Sexuality Foucault admitted to continuing to struggle with the temptation to appeal to sex as an

autonomous, pristine, "pre-given datum" of human experience²¹⁸. The fact that Foucault acknowledges it as a temptation which he actively resisted, if not always successfully, undermines the argument that Foucault secretly endorsed or privileged these vitalistic tropes. Other explanations for Foucault's attraction to such figures are also available; however, we shall postpone this question to Chapter Six below.

The compelling nature of the charge made by Habermas and Taylor that Foucault's ethico-political critique of modernity falls victim to the self-referential nature of its own genealogical methodology calls for serious reflection. For his part, Foucault was only too aware of this self-referentiality, and he responded by inviting others to produce a genealogy of the genealogist. Furthermore, he acknowledged that genealogy was always partisan, and that he offered it up only as a tool or weapon "to those who fight" and resist power²¹⁹. If one grants to Foucault's critics that they have, in fact, read him right, that he does in fact engage in the critique of modernity on behalf of some normative standards of justification, acknowledged or otherwise, then it would indeed appear that he must drop his genealogical suspicions of all normative frameworks for the sake of consistency. Eschewing all normative stances while engaging in a clearly ethico-political critique of modernity simply makes no sense, except as an act of fiat.

As some commentators have shown, however, it may be possible to rescue Foucault's genealogical form of criticism from charges of incoherence by interpreting it as a challenge to the very conception of critique on which these charges rest. Foucault saw himself as making a radical break with traditional critique of ideology, onto the

²¹⁸ Foucault, Michel, "The Confession of the Flesh," interview in PK, p.210.

²¹⁹ Foucault, Michel, "Questions of Method," interview in Baynes, Kenneth, et al, eds., After Philosophy: End or Transformation?, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1987, p.114.

terrain of a new kind of groundless critique²²⁰. For Habermas and Taylor, among others, adopting a critical stance in the absence of normative standards of justification is unintelligible. Such standards, they argue, are built into the very grammar of critique. As a number of commentators have recently argued, however, Foucault's commitment to genealogical critique rests on an alternative conception of the very nature of critique itself, and is sustained by a set of convictions which place his version of critique outside the conventional models to which his opponents subscribe. The whole question of the intelligibility of Foucault's anti-humanist approach to metathoretical and ethical-political critique is central to the issue of the reception of Foucault raised in this dissertation. As such, it warrants consideration within the context of a broader discussion of the nature of critique itself, to which the final chapter of this dissertation is devoted.

²²⁰ See, for example: Mahon, Michel, Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power, and the Subject, Albany: SUNY Press, 1992.

Chapter Six

Other Than Man: Toward a Posthumanist "Critical Ontology of Ourselves"

"Humanism administers lessons to 'us' (?). In a million ways, often mutually incompatible. Well founded (Apel) and nonfounded (Rorty), counterfactual (Habermas, Rawls) and pragmatic (Searle), psychological (Davidson) and ethico-political (the French neo-humanists). But always as if at least man were a certain value, which has no need to be interrogated. Which even has the authority to suspend, forbid interrogation, suspicion, the thinking that gnaws away at everything. What *value* is, what *sure* is, what *man* is, these questions are taken to be dangerous and shut away again pretty fast."

Jean-Francois Lyotard, The Inhuman

"The critical ontology of ourselves must be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them [...]"

Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?"

"From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art."

Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics"

After examining Foucault's work, it is difficult to ward off the temptation to conclude that the unrelenting nature of his critique of the various forms of humanistic thought and practice which have dominated Western culture for some three hundred and fifty years leaves little if anything standing in its wake. On the face of it, Foucault's anti-humanism often appears so corrosive as to leave us with precious few resources on the

basis of which to answer those perennial questions posed by Kant, a figure with whom Foucault himself claimed a certain affinity: what can we know?; what should we do?; what can we hope? If, as Foucault argues, efforts to achieve some final attunement between thought and reality are fruitless and informed by an urge to dominate and totalize, then what is there left for thought to do that does not either reproduce falsification or hasten the onset of new forms of domination, or both? If the subject of thought is always already a situated one, and if no amount of reflexive unveiling of the determinations bearing on the situated subject will ever free it of the weight of its own finitude, in what, if anything, might critical thinking today consist? Finally, if all ethical and political programmes based on universal morality or concepts of repressed human nature are tied to mechanisms and effects power, what kind of practice is left to us which is not simply a recapitulation of domination, another chapter in "a series of subjugations"? In other words, in the wake of the demise of Man as the privileged subject and object of thought and practice, what according to Foucault ought we to think, say, and do? Does he, as many critics suggest, leave us with little motivation for resisting what is and no criteria whatsoever on the basis of which to conduct a critical analysis of the present? Judged by the standards of conventional humanist forms of critique, according to which criticism is conducted in the name of truth, to eliminate error, and on the basis of normative standards of justification, this may well be the case. However, if, as I propose, one sees Foucault's work as an attempt to challenge the very conception of critique on which such pessimistic interpretations of it rest, then I believe that his critique of humanism can be rescued from charges that it invites relativism, passivity, and nihilism. In my view, Foucault's critique of humanism entailed even the rejection of the forms and tropes of humanist critique, since these too were attached to the figure of

Man. In Sartre's committed "universal intellectual," for example, Foucault detected the extravagant hubris of the *cogito* of classical humanism endowed with privileged, universal insight into the nature of nature, including Man, and the meaning of history. Meanwhile, humanist ethical and political thought and practice appeared to Foucault always to take recourse to some conception of a human essence or repressed nature as the basis of ethico-political critique. Foucault exhorted his readers to abandon the question of Man, in all its theoretical and practical forms, in favour of what he called a "critical ontology of ourselves,"¹ in which necessarily more limited, local, and specific forms of thought and practice are devoted both to disturbing the sense of necessity and universality attached to the hegemonic concepts, identities, and practices of the modern experience, and experimenting with going beyond them. In other words, a critical ontology of ourselves seeks to make us more alive to the possibility of transcending our humanistic present and of becoming something *other* than Man, or other than ourselves. Only by mobilizing a restless and permanent critique of ourselves, by devoting ourselves to the ceaseless task of revealing to the greatest extent possible both the "cultural unconscious" and the web of contingent events and relations underlying what we have become in the present, will we remain alive to the simultaneously enabling and constraining limits imposed upon us and to the possibility of transcending them. Moreover, by enlivening us to the extent to which all of our knowledge, identities, and practices are criss-crossed by events and contingencies giving the lie to the sense of necessity, naturalness, and self-evidentness attached to them, we can ward off the

¹ Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?," in Foucault, Michel, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954 - 1984, Volume 1, James Rabinow, ed., New York: The New Press, 1997, p.319. Hereinafter cited as EST.

resentment, cruelty, violence, and indifference which tend to flow from the self-assurance of hegemonic forms of knowledge and identity and the inertia of congealed forms of practice². This final chapter is devoted to expounding some the theoretical and practical dimensions of this new anti-humanist form of critique.

i) Humanism and Critique

In proposing a "critical ontology of ourselves" in place of conventional humanist forms of critique, Foucault suggests an approach to criticism that is detached from the figure of Man. Having said that, he was aware of both the advantages of humanist criticism and sensitive to certain affinities between it and the critical attitude he was attempting to articulate³. In wishing to pursue an alternative to humanist criticism, first of all, Foucault does not accuse it of "leading nowhere or of not producing any valid results."⁴ According to Foucault, all critique emerges in response to one problem in particular, that of *being governed*. Humanist criticism was no exception. Foucault locates the motive underlying humanist criticism in the desire to *not be governed*, which has manifested itself in various ways and at various points in the history the West.

² My reading of some of the ethical and political dimensions of Foucault's work is indebted to the work of William Connolly. See, for example: Connolly, William, The Ethos of Pluralization, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996; and Connolly, William, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault," Political Theory, Vol.21, No.3, August, 1993, pp.365-389.

³ In taking up this question of "the critical ontology of ourselves" Foucault sees his work, at times, as continuous with the work of some thinkers he identifies elsewhere as humanists, including Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Husserl, and the Frankfurt School. This suggests that the distance between Foucault's work and at least certain trajectories from within the critical humanist tradition is not as great as is sometimes suggested in Foucault's other self-portrayals. See, for example, his remarks in, Foucault, Michel, "The Political Technology of Individuals," in Martin, Luther H., et al, eds., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p.145.

⁴ Foucault, Michel, "What is Critique?," in The Politics of Truth, Sylvere Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth, eds., New York: Semiotext(e), 1997, p.48.

Chronologically speaking, Foucault argues, modern criticism emerged in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in response to the pastoral forms of Church power and to the rise of the *Polizeiwissenschaften*. Both the Reformation and the birth of theories of natural law manifested specific forms of a more general critical impulse which arises in response to being governed, and the impulse and desire "not to be governed *like that*, by that, in the name of those principles, with such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them."⁵ Out of and in response to the host of justifications and methods of governing adopted over the course of our history, Foucault argues, critique has emerged as "the art of not being governed quite so much."⁶ Humanist criticism, whether in the form of Enlightenment rationalism, liberalism, or nineteenth-century socialism, sided with those who did not wish to be governed so much, or no longer in the usual way, against prevailing justifications and means of governing, which is not to suggest that they did not subsequently impose new justifications, methods, and techniques for governing. To the extent that his *own* problem is also that of resisting being *governed too much*, Foucault's exploration of a new form of criticism is continuous with the tradition of Western criticism, even humanist criticism, insofar as critique always emerges in response to the problem of being governed.

The problem with humanist criticism, Foucault claims, is that it has run its course, and now forms part of the problem of being governed in the present. Humanist criticism, as Foucault understands it, has always been focused on the problem of *legitimacy*⁷. Theoretically speaking, this has meant that criticism has taken the form of

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.29.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.49-51.

restoring or unveiling truth against various forms of error, distortion, or illusion, as well as, after Kant, analysing the limits of knowledge, of the limits beyond which it is impossible for us to know. Practically speaking, humanist criticism has been launched on behalf of universal human rights or human emancipation which trace limits around the form that governing can take, beyond which it becomes illegitimate and gratuitous. At the theoretical level, humanist criticism functions on the basis of the concept of *truth* as a universal, context-independent account of reality and experience, while at the practical level, it operates on the basis of the rights or repressed nature of *Man* as the standard for normative justification and critique. These two concepts, therefore, of truth and Man, constitute the hallmarks of humanist criticism. Without denying that such forms of criticism have produced certain valuable results, however, Foucault's work encourages us to examine whether and to what extent they now contribute to the problem of *being governed too much*. Humanism has furnished ideas of Man which have increasingly become not only normative but *normalizing*, not only universal but *compulsory*, and not only self-evident but *unexamined*. Above all, Foucault suspects that humanism has become part of our simultaneously enabling and constraining cultural *grille*, conditioning what it is possible for us to see, say, do, imagine, and hope today. "What I am afraid of about humanism," he argues, "is that it presents a certain form of our ethics as a universal model for any kind of freedom. I think that there are more secrets, more possible freedoms, and more inventions in our future than we can imagine in humanism as it is dogmatically represented on every side of the political rainbow..."⁸.

⁸ Foucault, Michel, "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault," in Martin, et al, eds., Technologies of the Self, p.15.

According to Foucault, the central problem for criticism today is that of *how we are governed by and through the production of truth*, in particular of the truth of *ourselves*⁹. In an important interview in which he discussed his genealogical methodology, Foucault claimed that the task of governing in modern societies was increasingly carried out via mechanisms for the production of truth. As a result, he claimed the need "to resituate the production of true and false at the heart of historical analysis and political critique."¹⁰ Humanism and the human sciences, which in the last two centuries have generated vast quantities of knowledge about Man, are caught up in and, indeed, at the centre of the operation of this modern form of governing. The "Age of Man", which raises the question of Man as a philosophical, scientific, and practical object of central importance, has as its conditions of possibility forms and practices of power which are extended through the very production of knowledge. Modern humanity, Foucault argues, governs itself through the very production of philosophic and scientific knowledge of itself. In the case of the human sciences, especially, the production of scientific knowledge has become a pervasive means of governing modern society. All of his genealogical analyses of the human sciences attempt to bear witness to this. Not even the emancipatory intent lying behind certain forms of humanist criticism escape this imbrication of knowledge and governing in so far as they are tied to objectifications of the figure of Man. Whether in the form of the juridical discourse of rights or the critical humanist repressive hypothesis, the terms of humanist critique have, Foucault claims, become caught up in the mechanisms of power and become instruments by which we are

⁹ Foucault, Michel, "Questions of Method: An Interview with Michel Foucault," in Baynes, Kenneth, et al, eds., After Philosophy: End or Transition?, Cambridge Mass, MIT Press, 1987, p.108.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.108.

governed in the present. The former, we recall, serves to mask and render tolerable to us the capillary and quotidian nature of modern disciplinary power, while the latter, in its depth psychological forms, feeds into that system of biopolitics by which we are governed by various objectifications of our "true" selves. As a result, whatever its emancipatory effects of the past, humanist criticism and its accompanying concepts, categories, and identities has become part of what governs *us* today. As Lyotard suggests in the introductory quotation at the beginning of this chapter, it has become part of the very cultural unconscious which governs thought today by regulating and legislating it, "as if at least man were a certain value, which has no need to be interrogated."¹¹ In response, the work of criticism must take up humanism itself in order to examine the costs of, as well as the possibility of altering, the means by and extent to which we are governed in the present. If power now operates upon and spreads itself through the social body on the basis of the production of 'true' discourses about the nature of Man, then the "problem of truth" and truth production becomes "the most general of political problems,"¹² and in relation to which humanism constitutes an object of analysis and critique as opposed to a source of insight. "[T]hese notions of human nature, of justice, of the realization of the essence of human beings," Foucault claimed,

"are all notions and concepts which have been formed within our civilization, within our type of knowledge and our form of philosophy, and that as a result form part of our class system; and one can't, however regrettable it may be, put forward these notions to describe or justify a fight which should - and shall in principle - overthrow the very fundamentals of our society."¹³

¹¹ Lyotard, Jean-Francois, The Inhuman: Reflections on Time, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988, p.1.

¹² Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.111.

¹³ Chomsky, Noam, and Michel Foucault, "Human Nature: Justice versus Power," in Davidson, Arnold, ed., Foucault and His Interlocutors, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, p.140.

If political critique must take as its central object the production of truth, or the "objectification of objectivities" by which we are governed in the present, then humanism itself, as one of the richest and most prolific sources of the objectification of Man over the past few centuries, also calls for scrutiny.

Foucault's genealogical analyses of the human sciences, as we have seen, throw into relief the extent to which the emergence and objectification of Man as the putatively most compelling concern for thought and practice was contingent upon certain epistemic and strategic conditions of possibility, including certain modern rationalities and methods of governing. Abandoning the tropes of humanistic thought and practice required, after all, an expiation of the tendency to treat the question of Man as the most compelling and essential object of human reflection and practice. Archaeological analysis displaced the metatheoretical centrality of the very question "What is man?". The conditions under which the objectification of humankind was made possible, that is, under which the question was first able to be posed, have their basis in the deep epistemic structures of discourse and knowledge. The question in no way originated out of the genius of subjective consciousness or the sudden discovery of a "unity" previously hidden to it. The question of Man only appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, as we saw, when the epistemic "analytic of finitude" made the question of the *finite* nature of the knowing subject a compelling one. Since the epistemic conditions of possibility for knowledge and discourse are no less contingent than the epiphenomenal unities and identities to which each *episteme* gives rise, then the very appearance of the question of Man is itself profoundly contingent.

The centrality of the question "What is man?" is further challenged in Foucault's later genealogical works. Genealogical analysis unmask the form of power and social

interests served by posing the question, and reveals the coercive and violent effects of a civilization which has installed a generalized compulsion to answer it. Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality reveal the origins of the nineteenth-century human sciences' probing examination of the normal and the abnormal in the emergence of a new form of power which relied on the production and use of such knowledge of Man. The knowledge produced by new disciplines such as criminology, psychiatry, sociology, clinical medicine, and psychoanalysis did not represent "discoveries" resulting from a heroic, determined struggle by some rational, disinterested, and benignly curious scientific consciousness against the biases of power seeking to repress it. Rather, these new disciplines emerged and produced the kind of knowledge that they did - of "mental illness", "delinquency", and "sexuality", for example - as a result of the emergence of new "disciplinary" and "biopolitical" forms of power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Far from constituting some eternal question with which science and knowledge are inherently intertwined, the question "What is man?" is of a relatively recent vintage which can be located within a particular rationality of governing.

ii) A "Critical Ontology of Ourselves"

In response to humanism as the objectification of objectivities revolving around the figure of Man, a posthumanist "critical ontology of ourselves" entails both theoretical and practical work. Distinguishing between these two dimensions is somewhat artificial, mind you, in the sense that the boundary between them in Foucault's work is highly porous. At the theoretical level, it involves working on contemporary knowledge and practice, in the form of archaeological and genealogical research, in order to uncover that which has been given to us as fixed, natural, and necessary as in fact contingent upon a

polymorphous set of enabling conditions and events. Foucault's is not an approach to knowledge or to ourselves in which the object is to distinguish true from false or reality from illusion, but, rather, one which offers an analytics for investigating the events which have produced our knowledge and by which we have turned *ourselves* into objects of knowledge. At the practical level, Foucault endorses "local" and "specific" interventions into fields of knowledge and practice on behalf of those experiences which have been subjugated and marginalized as a result of the consolidation of hegemonic identities and practices in the present. In doing so, Foucault avoids articulating any universal principles or standards of normative justification on the basis of which to distinguish, once and for all, legitimate from illegitimate practices and forms of power, and refuses to endorse any particular "settled way of life" in favour of offering up his archaeologies and genealogies simply as "tools" or "weapons" for those who fight and resist the impositions and violences inflicted by hegemonic identities, codes, and practices. Finally, the critical ontology of ourselves also calls for a new practical and ethical orientation to ourselves as *selves*. Instead of practices oriented towards discovering, articulating, and actualizing ourselves in terms of what we are deep down - the truth of Man - Foucault endorses the practice of an "aesthetics of existence," a certain kind of ethics of self-fashioning or "care of the self," in which the humanist goal of discovering and restoring our true selves is abandoned in favour of practices which reveal and make us more alive to the contingency and fragility of who we are - and to the web of contingencies, events, and relations which have made us what we are - thereby creating a space for freedom to experiment with ourselves; with becoming, so to speak, *other than Man*. "From the idea that the self is not given to us," Foucault argues, "I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of

art.”¹⁴ In Foucault’s view, such an ethics of self-fashioning or care for the *contingent* self constitutes a certain “practice of freedom” by which we may break out of the tyranny of congealed codes of practice and hegemonic identities as well as foster the kinds of relations of care and concern for others too often suppressed by the latter. Foucault argues that, contrary to suspicions that it underwrites a kind of narcissistic, anti-social self-absorption, a certain care of the self as a product of polymorphous events, forces, and relations may actually promote ethical responsiveness to others by neutralizing the imperious urges which can flow from the sense of necessity attached to hegemonic identities and practices in the present. According to one commentator, William Connolly, Foucault’s belief in the potential for a certain care of the *contingent* self stems from his conviction that “systemic cruelty flows regularly from the thoughtlessness of aggressive conventionality, the transcendentalization of contingent identities, and the treatment of good/evil as a duality wired into the intrinsic order of things.”¹⁵ On the strength of this insight, Connolly argues in defence of Foucault that contemporary threats of cruelty, violence, and social fragmentation today stem not from post-Nietzschean critiques of conventional ethics and morality, as both the neo-Kantians and neo-Aristoteleans would have it, but, rather, from the aggressive assertion of identity and morality against discourses and forms of life which threaten to disturb them¹⁶. If Foucault and Connolly

¹⁴ Quoted in Wolin, Richard, “Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason,” in Wolin, Richard, The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School, Existentialism, Poststructuralism, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, p.191.

¹⁵ Connolly, “Beyond Good and Evil,” p.366.

¹⁶ On this point Connolly has written: “...the most powerful contemporary pressures to social fragmentation flow from struggles between contending, dogmatic identities, each hell bent on installing itself as the universal to which everyone and everything must conform. Enhanced appreciation of our own contingency, and of the differences through which we receive specification, provides an antidote both to the drive to unity and to the social fragmentation such drives often produce. Lebanon, Ireland, Bosnia - to

are right that hegemonic identities and conventional morality, along with the institutions and practices protecting their reassurance, impose gratuitous constraints and undeserved forms of suffering and cruelty, then other discourses and practices, including those of the self, which disturb the sense of necessity attached to them deserve to be examined for their potential to neutralize the imperious urges which flow from them.

a) Critique

Let us now take a closer look at the various elements of the critical ontology of ourselves. At the metatheoretical and methodological levels, first of all, Foucault proposes a new, anti-humanist approach to critique itself. The posthumously published essay, "What is Enlightenment?," contains one of Foucault's more programmatic statements for a form of philosophical critique which resists the dangers of humanism. Firstly, Foucault argues, his anti-humanist form of philosophical critique constitutes a certain "limit-attitude". "Criticism," he insists, "consists of analyzing and reflecting upon limits." Indeed, Foucault goes so far as to suggest a degree of continuity between the Enlightenment and his own manner of philosophizing. According to Foucault, this is a certain philosophical *ethos* of critique articulated in Kant's conception of enlightenment as a kind of *Ausgang*, or escape, from tutelage via the ceaseless activation of "a permanent critique of our historical era"¹⁷. Indeed, Foucault draws on this thread connecting his own project to the Enlightenment as "the permanent reactivation of an

take three recent examples - reflect modes of fragmentation in which some identities insist upon universalizing themselves by conquering, assimilating, or liquidating their opponents. These impulses are closer to calls to universalism and national consensus [...] than to the post-Nietzschean sensibility endorsed here." : *The Ethos of Pluralization*, pp.26-27.

¹⁷ Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?," in EST, p.312.

attitude."¹⁸ However, "if the Kantian question was that of knowing what limits knowledge must renounce exceeding, it seems to me that the critical question today must be turned back into a positive one [...]"¹⁹. This positive questioning consists in asking: "In what is given to us today as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point [...] is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible crossing-over."²⁰ For Foucault, the mark of a mature culture, one that has escaped "tutelage," is one that is in a position to reflect upon and activate critique against all of the means by which it governs itself, including and especially the dominant forms of the production and circulation of truth and its effects of power, and to see how and to what degree it is possible and desirable to change them. At this point, however, Foucault differentiates between the critical *ethos* of the Enlightenment as the permanent critique of the present and the historical Enlightenment's more conventional humanist themes. The thematic of humanism, Foucault now suggests, can be "opposed by the principle of a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy: that is, a principle at the heart of the historical consciousness that the Enlightenment has of itself."²¹

This ethos of critique is what lies, in fact, at the heart of what constitutes, for Foucault, the genuine and essential task of philosophy. This activity of thinking the limits of ourselves is what philosophy will consist of after the humanist themes of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.314.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.315.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.315.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.314.

correspondence, representation, and hermeneutical unveiling have been eclipsed. "But what then is philosophy - philosophical activity I mean,"

"if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not in the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?"²²

It will no longer be practiced in "the search for the formal structures with universal value," in order to make metaphysics possible, or in order to identify and establish the essential identity of Man and world. "We are therefore," he writes, "not attempting to find out what is true or false, founded or unfounded, real or illusory, scientific or ideological, legitimate or abusive."²³ Rather, Foucault argues, critique will take the form of "an historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, and saying."²⁴ Such a form of critique, he writes:

"[...] must be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it must be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them [*de leur franchissement possible*]."²⁵

This form of critique yields no truth claims in the strong sense and offers no roadmaps for the future but, rather, is offered by Foucault as a *tool* for an analysis of the present. Such criticism is not "the premise of a deduction that concludes: This then is what needs

²² Foucault, Michel, The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume II, New York: Pantheon, 1985, p.9. Hereinafter cited as UP.

²³ Foucault, "What is Critique?," p.50.

²⁴ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p.315.

²⁵ Ibid., p.319.

to be done"; it does not "lay down the law for the law." Rather, it is "an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is."²⁶

Foucault's critical *ethos* also entails a highly personal dimension, where the critical ontology of ourselves is conducted not only in relation to culture and practice in a broad sense but, as philosophers and social and political theorists, in relation to ourselves and our own ideas and ways of life. Foucault's *ethos* of critique demands, therefore, that one cultivate and foster a certain capacity for distancing, disengaging, or detaching oneself from oneself - *se dependre de soi-meme*²⁷. What is entailed is an effort to achieve some distance from oneself, from what it is one currently thinks, says, and does. This distance can be achieved by deliberately pursuing knowledge and experience which allows one to stray from oneself, to achieve a certain *egarement*²⁸. One's capacity for thinking one's own limits, for self-detachment, is the product of certain practices such as genealogical analysis, of exposing oneself to new cultural and practical horizons, as well as of broader socio-economic and cultural developments, such as the rise of ethnography and psychoanalysis, which affect the episteme as a whole²⁹. Philosophy today, Foucault argues, is sustained by this thinking of limits, which he equates with a certain curiosity, that is, with a curiosity about the conditions of possibility for what we have come to think, say, and do: "the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one

²⁶ Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.114.

²⁷ James Rabinow translates this phrase as "to release oneself from oneself". See: Rabinow, "Introduction," in EST, p.xxxviii.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.xxxix.

²⁹ Foucault, Michel, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations," interview in EST, p.117.

to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself."³⁰ This effort, this practice oriented toward self-detachment "is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all."³¹ Clearly, here, Foucault does not wish to extinguish or eradicate the thinking subject. What goes for thought in Foucault's view, in fact, is consistent with the critical ontology of ourselves. However, as opposed to representations or mentalities which sustain certain settled forms of life and practice, thought consists of that which:

"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 upon it as a problem."³²

The subject of Foucault's critical *ethos* is a contingent and situated subject of thought which is able, sometimes more and sometimes less efficaciously, and never under conditions of its own choosing, to think the limits of what it currently thinks, says, and does, which opens up the possibility for it to think, say, and do things differently; which is not to suggest that the subject will ever reach a future state in which it will be freed completely from all that determines and limits it. Such thinking is neither possible nor, to Foucault's mind, desirable. "[W]e know from experience," he writes, "that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions."³³ We must learn to live with and accept the limited and partial nature of critical reflection on our own historical

³⁰ Foucault, UP, p.8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.8.

³² Foucault, "Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations," p.117.

³³ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p.316.

limits, which is not to say that such reflection is pointless: "It is true that we have to give up hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge (*connaissance*) of what may constitute our historical limits. [...] the theoretical and practical experience we have of our limits, and of the possibility of moving beyond them, is always limited and determined; [...] But that does not mean that no work can be done..."³⁴.

Critique in the sense now envisioned by Foucault will be pursued on the basis of the kinds of methods elaborated in his archaeological and genealogical works. Such a critique will be archaeological, he writes, "in the sense that it will not seek to identify the universal structures of all knowledge [...] but will seek to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events."³⁵ Foucault's form of critique will be genealogical "in the sense that it will not deduce from the form of what we are what it is impossible for us to do and to know; but it will separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think."³⁶ What Foucault hopes to effect by these methods for the "eventalization" of knowledge and practice is a certain "neutralization" of the effects of necessity, legitimacy, and acceptability which are attached to the ways in which we are currently governed by them. Foucault describes the scope and work of eventalizing criticism in the following:

"I am trying to work in the direction of what one might call 'eventalization'. [...] What do I mean by this term? First of all, a breach of self-evidence. It means making visible a *singularity* at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant [...]"

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.317.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.315.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.315-316.

To show that things 'weren't as necessary as all that' [...] A breach of self-evidence, of those self-evidences on which our knowledges, acquiescences, and practices rest. [...] Secondly, eventalization means rediscovering the connections, encounters, supports, blockages, plays of forces, strategies, and so on that at a given moment establish what subsequently counts as being self-evident, universal, and necessary. In this sense one is [...] effecting a sort of multiplication or pluralization of causes."³⁷

Foucault describes eventalization as "a procedure for lightening the weight of causality" surrounding events and singularities by constructing, out of a "polymorphism" of elements and relations, "a 'polyhedron' of intelligibility, the number of whose faces is not given in advance and can never properly be taken as finite."³⁸ In the field of historical analysis and political critique, *pace* humanism, "we are not [...] under the sign of a unitary necessity." Therefore, our situation calls for a style of critique like "eventalization" or the critical ontology of ourselves designed to reveal that, in the field of knowledge and practice, there are "[a] plethora of intelligibilities," and "a deficit of necessities"³⁹.

Now, we have already seen in detail how Foucault's archaeological and genealogical studies of forms of knowledge and practice since the eighteenth century debunk a number of the central mythologies of humanism. However, each in its own right also contributes to the kind of critical project Foucault has in mind; that of disturbing the sense of necessity attached to the ways in which we think, say, and do things in the present. These various studies, as we have seen, contain a number of critical lessons for us. Each introduces significant instances of historical breach in the manner in which things have been known, experienced, or practiced in the history of the West. "[I]t wasn't as a matter of course," Foucault intended to show in these works, "that mad

³⁷ Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.104.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.105.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.106

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 to be sought through the individual examination of bodies; and so on."⁴⁰ Evidence of such breaches in human experience, knowledge, and practice teaches us that, in so far as things have been known, said, and done differently in the past, there are aspects of our current way of thinking, saying, and doing things which might also be changed.

Secondly, each of these studies disturbs the sense of necessity attached to things by "eventualizing" them and exposing the contingencies and webs of relations and causal forces which produced them as an emergence. By showing how that which *is* has been produced or made under certain conditions, Foucault argues, one shows that they can be unmade and remade, which opens up a space for freedom and experimentation.

"[R]ecourse to history," he claims,

"[...] is meaningful to the extent that history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; ie. that the things which seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, [...] that they reside on a base of human practice and human history; and that since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was they were made."⁴¹

As we have argued above, Foucault accords little weight to his own genealogies as truth-establishing acts of final unmasking; he prefers to see them as means of resistance to and detachment from hegemonic discourses and identities, as well as from the very urge to impose form onto an otherwise ineffably complex reality from which they flow. That is not to say that genealogies are simply fairytales - they throw into relief the operation of

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.104.

⁴¹ Foucault, Michel, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," interview in Foucault, Michel, Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Lawrence Kritzman, ed., New York: Routledge, 1988, p.37. Hereinafter cited as MF.

concrete practices, interests, and rationalities with real effects, but without exhausting the possibilities for other analytics to emerge. In other words, the kind of critique envisioned by the critical ontology of ourselves does not present itself in the form of imperial truth claims but, rather, in the form of new intelligibilities, new experiences, new voices and forms of life designed, as William Connolly argues: "to incite the experience of discord or discrepancy between the social construction of self, truth, and rationality and that which does not fit neatly within their folds."⁴²

b) The Specific Intellectual:

Foucault's ethos of critique was not limited to scholarly fields of knowledge and discourse, to writing genealogies, or doing archival research. The ethos of critique also involves a form of political and ethical practice oriented to exposing gratuitous and unnecessary forms of restraint and suffering imposed by current ways of thinking, saying, and doing things, and to experimenting with going beyond them. "[I]f we are not to settle for the affirmation or the empty dream of freedom," Foucault insists, "it seems to me that this historico-critical attitude must also be an experimental one."⁴³ In addition to engaging in historical inquiry, such an attitude must also "put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take."⁴⁴ Such a practice of the ethos of critique involves, for Foucault, both a form of local, limited political

⁴² Connolly, William, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," *Political Theory*, Vol. 13, No. 3, August 1985, pp.365-376.

⁴³ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p.316.

⁴⁴ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p.316.

intervention and resistance, as well as a certain ethical practice or care of the self which he called the "aesthetics of existence". The remainder of this chapter is devoted to fleshing out Foucault's model for a relationship between intellectual work and politics, and a certain kind of ethical relationship to the self consistent with his ethos of critique.

Foucault's critical ontology was intended not only to eventalize modern forms of knowledge but also the various hegemonic identities and congealed practices attached to them. In other words, his archaeologies and genealogies were explicitly intended to achieve certain practical effects in the real⁴⁵. It is here that we encounter the kinds of practical and political interventions Foucault endorsed as consistent with the historico-critical investigation of our present situation. However, while excavating and enumerating the costs incurred in the course of establishing and consolidating the contemporary Western experience, such as those examined in Chapters Four and Five, Foucault refused either to instruct us as to what must be done in order to right these wrongs, or to endorse any universal programme of reform in the hopes of eliminating them altogether in the future. To do so, he argued, risked falling into the traps of humanism once more. Instead of posing as the Sartrean "universal intellectual" armed with a recipe for alleviating and overcoming once and for all the forms of Man's alienation and oppression, Foucault endorsed a form of what he called "local" criticism, offered up by a "specific" intellectual, as a tool or means for those who fight and resist what is. Here, Foucault challenges the very role of the intellectual in political struggle as it has been traditionally defined by humanists. Within the latter tradition, the ideal of the politically committed, engaged intellectual was embodied in the nineteenth-century

⁴⁵ Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.113.

bourgeois intellectual and, more recently, in revolutionary "universal intellectuals" like Sartre. On this view, the intellectual occupies the position of "master of truth and justice" who stands in as the "consciousness/conscience of us all"⁴⁶. Heavily influenced by his experiences with the orthodoxy and rigidity of the PCF and its intellectual hierarchy, and by his animosity towards "Papa" Sartre as the self-appointed spokesperson for the proletariat, Foucault rejected the traditional humanist mode of criticism based on the engaged, universal intellectual on the grounds of its theoretically retrograde Cartesianism and politically dangerous tendency towards totalization. It is this latter critique which most concerns us here. According to Foucault, while humanism's globalizing theories have provided useful tools with which to engage in certain broad kinds of criticism, they have also hindered other criticisms by suppressing various forms of local, specific, subjugated knowledges and experiences which do not fit within them⁴⁷. For example, as we saw, Marxism's tendency to stress the economic and state structures of power has meant that it has, by and large, in theory and in practice, ignored the plight and voices of figures like Jouy, Beasse, Barbin, and Riviere whose stories bear witness to the corporeal and capillary nature of modern disciplinary power. As a result, *effective* criticism which could penetrate and bring to light this level of the operation of power was delayed in coming. Secondly, and more urgently, humanist views on the nature and privileges of the intellectual are politically dangerous, since they all-too-readily threaten to reproduce the

⁴⁶ Foucault, Michel, "Truth and Power," interview in Foucault, Michel, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972 - 1977, Colin Gordon, ed., New York: Pantheon, 1980, p.126. Hereinafter cited as PK.

⁴⁷ Foucault, Michel, "Two Lectures," in PK, pp.80-83.

very relations of power against which humanism struggles. "I belong to a generation of people," Foucault explains,

"that has seen most of the utopias framed in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century collapse one after another, and that has also seen the perverse and sometimes disastrous effects that could follow from projects which were the most generous in their intentions."⁴⁸

For an intellectual to play the role of "master of truth and justice" and to prescribe or propose answers to the question "What must be done," Foucault argues, "can only have effects of domination."⁴⁹ "[I]f the intellectual starts playing once again the role that he has played for a hundred and fifty years - that of prophet, in relation to what 'must be,' to what 'must take place' - [...] effects of domination will return..."⁵⁰. Indeed, Foucault diagnoses all those who champion the intellectual-as-prophet as afflicted by a totalitarian longing for "a little monarchy" in their lives⁵¹.

Against the humanist "universal intellectual" Foucault proposed the idea of the "specific" intellectual engaged in "local" criticism as the model for a relation between intellectual work and political critique which avoids the pitfalls and dangers of the former. "Specific intellectuals" work "not in the modality of the 'universal', the 'exemplary', the 'just-and-true-for-all'" but, rather, "within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family and sexual relations)," where they experience, Foucault claims, "a much more immediate and concrete awareness of

⁴⁸ Foucault, Michel, "What Calls for Punishment?," interview in Foucault, Michel, Foucault Live: Interviews 1966 - 1984, trans. John Johnston, Sylvere Lotringer, ed., New York: Semiotext(e), 1989, pp.281-282. Hereinafter cited as FL.

⁴⁹ Foucault, Michel, "Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison," interview in MF, p.197.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.197.

⁵¹ Foucault, Michel, "The Masked Philosopher," interview in FL, p.202.

struggles."⁵² By virtue of the local and specific nature of the knowledge and experience she has acquired on the ground, and of her intimate connection to the costs and struggles which attend every practice and form of knowledge, such an intellectual may constitute a greater critical and political threat than that posed by the general, universal discourses of the traditional intellectual in his "*Cartesian poele*". Foucault turned to the postwar figure of Oppenheimer in order to make his point here. The atomic scientist, he contends, was only able to make the critical interventions he did by virtue of his "direct and localised relation to scientific knowledge and institutions"⁵³. By virtue of the extension of technico-scientific structures into the modern economic and strategic domain, fields like biology and physics, in particular, gained a new importance. It is because figures like Oppenheimer, among others, have at their disposal, "whether in the service of the State or against it, powers which can either benefit or destroy life," that they possess such critical potential⁵⁴. This same knowledge with the capacity to disrupt and thwart mechanisms of power is also in the hands, albeit it on a less apocalyptic scale, of all sorts of experts and professionals who have become central to the functioning of modern power, including physicians, psychiatrists, social workers, teachers, parole officers, and sociologists⁵⁵. The ability of the specific intellectual to produce disruptive critical effects in the real increases "in proportion to the political responsibilities he is obliged willy-nilly to accept, as a nuclear scientist, computer expert, pharmacologist, etc."⁵⁶ For his own part, Foucault claims, if his own analyses of psychiatric, medical, and penal

⁵² Foucault, "Truth and Power," p.126.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.128.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.128.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.127.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.131.

discourses and practices enjoyed some success in problematizing them, "it's not because of some polemic I want to arbitrate but because I have been involved in certain conflicts regarding medicine, psychiatry and the penal system."⁵⁷ In the case of madness, for example, Foucault could not have produced Madness and Civilization, with all the shockwaves it sent through French and British psychiatry in the decade following its appearance, had he not spent a considerable amount of time in the 1950s immersed in the study and practice of psychiatry in a number of institutions⁵⁸. Now, by recasting the expert in the human sciences as a "specific intellectual" with the capacity to either transmit or disrupt the effects of power conveyed by the discourses of truth, Foucault reveals an ambivalence regarding the role of experts in modern society that was seldom evident in his denunciations of them as "technicians of behaviour," "experts in normality," and "orthopaedists of individuality" witnessed in Chapters Four and Five. With this notion of the specific intellectual Foucault rehabilitates the figure of the human scientist as at least *capable*, if she chooses, to produce disruptive critical effects upon our current knowledge and practice.

Just as the scope of criticism is narrowed considerably by Foucault's idea of the "specific intellectual," so, too, are the objectives of the "local" kind of criticism in which she engages. Rather than engaging in a form of criticism aimed at revealing the grand pattern of universal history or restoring humanity to its authentic existence, both the theoretical as well as practical dangers of which are well known to us now, Foucault

⁵⁷ Foucault, Michel, "Questions on Geography," interview in PK, p.65.

⁵⁸ The importance of Foucault's experiences as a psychiatric intern of sorts, in relation to Madness and Civilization, are discussed in David Macey's, The Lives of Michel Foucault, New York: Vintage, 1994, pp.57-59, 211-214.

adopts a more modest set of goals. "[T]hrough the analyses that he carries out in his own field," the specific and local critic seeks to "question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted"⁵⁹. For his own part, Foucault describes his critical efforts as giving some assistance in "wearing away certain self-evidentnesses and commonplaces about madness, normality, illness, crime, and punishment," in order that "certain phrases can no longer be spoken so lightly, certain acts no longer [...] so unhesitatingly performed"⁶⁰. The object of criticism is not so much to unmask as oppressive one particular form of knowledge and experience above all others but, rather, to make "facile gestures difficult"⁶¹. Thus, putting of the critique of ourselves to the test in reality also entailed political action and activism. In Foucault's case, this took on many forms, of which his involvement in the formation of the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP)* is perhaps best known.

Finally, Foucault offered up this model of critique not on behalf of any particular class, mode of being, or form of life but, rather, simply as an instrument for those who fight and resist what is, to "whoever wants to get something done"⁶². While he disavows any connection between his critical ontology and the traditional humanist equation of critique with emancipation, he draws a direct relation between the local, specific, genealogical form of criticism he endorses and certain effects of freedom. The work of the specific intellectual contributes to the critical ontology of ourselves as a "practice of

⁵⁹ Foucault, Michel, "The Concern for Truth," interview in MF, p.265.

⁶⁰ Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.112.

⁶¹ Foucault, Michel, "Practicing Criticism," interview in MF, p.156.

⁶² Foucault, Michel, "The Question of Power," interview in FL, p.191.

freedom" both by making local and regional interventions into various fields of knowledge and practice, and as an instance of a wider perpetual mobilization of critique against all congealed forms of knowledge and practice. Clearly, then, while the specific intellectual intervenes as an interested, partisan figure situated within local struggles with the intention of alleviating specific forms of suffering or lifting gratuitous constraints, the critical ontology of ourselves is offered by Foucault as a generic instrument for perpetual use in the struggle to overcome the thoughtless conventionality and congealed forms of knowledge and practice which typify every settled way of life. Together, they produce "effects of truth" which "might be used for a possible battle, to be waged by those who wish to wage it, in forms yet to be found and in organizations yet to be defined"⁶³. In other words, avoiding the pitfalls and dangers of humanist critique, while still engaging in criticism designed to produce the effects of rupture and detachment necessary to create a space for freedom to think things anew, requires that one eschew resort to some kind of universal set of standards of normative justification envisioned by the former, in favour of a permanent, perpetual mobilization of critique which relentlessly resists what is. This means that the practice of critical ontology as a "practice of freedom" abstains from endorsing any settled way of life or programmatic vision of the future as the guarantee of liberty. Contrary to the prophetic and prescriptive vision of the universal intellectual on behalf of some political programme or model for the future, Foucault argues that:

"The liberty of men is never assured by the institutions and laws that are intended to guarantee them. This is why almost all of these laws and institutions are quite capable of being turned around. Not because they are ambiguous, but simply because

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.191.

'liberty' is what must be exercised. [...] it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom."⁶⁴

The critical ontology of ourselves affords the maximum of freedom to the intellectual to engage in the perpetual, ceaseless task of criticism as a practice of freedom. "[T]he work of deep transformation," Foucault argues, cannot be guaranteed by a form of criticism tethered to one putatively universal project of emancipation, the realization of which would imply that critique itself had become redundant, but, rather, only in "a free atmosphere, one constantly agitated by a permanent criticism."⁶⁵

Now, by advocating a *local* form of critique and abstaining from endorsing any positive vision of the future on behalf of which critique is mobilized, for fear of simply reproducing totalizing effects of power and knowledge, Foucault was been criticized by many as leaving us susceptible to being determined by more general structures too broad in scope for discontinuous local critique to discern, of inducing an "anaesthetic" or passifying effect upon those who previously laboured under the illusions of humanism's emancipatory interests, and of infecting criticism with a kind of hopeless pessimism in light of the impossibility of ever achieving a situation in which knowledge and practice might be detached from power⁶⁶. Foucault rejected these responses to his work on several grounds. Foucault, as we know, was far from ignorant of the importance and generality of phenomena like economic inequality and exploitation, as implied by the first of these criticisms. However, he insisted that the mechanisms of power/knowledge on which his

⁶⁴ Foucault, Michel, "An Ethics of Pleasure," interview in FL, p.265.

⁶⁵ Foucault, "Practicing Criticism," p.155.

⁶⁶ Examples of these kinds of criticisms can be found in the following works: Fraser, Nancy, Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp.29; and Habermas, Jurgen, "Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," in Habermas, Jurgen, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, pp.283-284.

work focused had achieved a level of generality in their own right often ignored by Marxists, for example, and which made the relation between truth production and power central to the analysis of our present. Furthermore, recent experience left him and many others suspicious of calls for the kind of complete, emancipatory transformations that would be necessary to eliminate such problems entirely. Foucault expressed his preference for the "partial transformations" achieved in recent decades with respect to relations with authority, between the sexes, and to illness and insanity, as opposed to "the programs for a new man that the worst political systems have repeated throughout the century."⁶⁷ The limited scope of individual instances of specific, local criticism, along with the theoretical and practical dangers attached to the perspective of the universal intellectual, compel the critic to "give up hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge [...] of what may constitute our historical limits. [...] the theoretical and practical experience we have of our limits, [...] is always limited and determined". Again, however, "that does not mean that no work can be done"⁶⁸. To the charge that his denial of the emancipatory effects of humanist knowledge and practice induced apathy and passivity on the part of those who worked with mental patients and prisoners, for example, he replied: "To judge by what the psychiatric authorities have had to say, [...] I have the impression of having had an irritant rather than anaesthetic effect on a good many people. The epidermi bristle with a constancy I find encouraging."⁶⁹ The same could be said of almost all those areas of knowledge and practice on which his work touched. Finally, while Foucault is

⁶⁷ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p.316.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.316.

⁶⁹ Foucault, "Questions of Method," p.113.

ceaselessly characterized by critics as offering a pessimistic, claustrophobic view of modern power from which there is no means of escape, an effect of periodic overstatement on his part and a certain overreading on theirs, Foucault attaches a somewhat surprising optimism to the work of the specific intellectual and the critical ontology of ourselves. Foucault's optimism consists in the fact that,

"so many things can be changed, fragile as they are, bound up more with circumstance than with necessities, more arbitrary than self-evident, more a matter of complex, but temporary, historical circumstances than with inevitable anthropological constants. [...] to say that we are more recent than we think [is] to place at the disposal of the work that we can do on ourselves the greatest possible share of what is presented to us as inaccessible."⁷⁰

Ultimately, the intended effect of the critical ontology of ourselves is not, therefore, to show that we are completely weighed down by history, conventionality, and sedimented practices but, rather, that we are "much freer than we feel."⁷¹ The challenge for the critical ontologist "is to see how far the liberation of thought can make those [possible] transformations urgent enough for people to want to carry them out and difficult enough to carry out for them to be profoundly rooted in reality."⁷²

c) On the Logic of Foucault's "Performative Contradiction":

The above criticisms, as well as Foucault's responses to them, warrant serious examination, to which some space has been devoted in previous chapters. However, the kind of criticism with which we are concerned here, since it touches on the broader

⁷⁰ Foucault, "Practicing Criticism," p.156.

⁷¹ Foucault, Michel, "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault," in Martin, Luther, et al, eds., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p.10.

⁷² Foucault, "Practicing Criticism," p.155.

question of the coherence and intelligibility of his work, is that which has been directed at Foucault's anti-humanist form of critique *qua* critique. Such criticism has been articulated, once again, by Jurgen Habermas and Charles Taylor, among others, who are two of the most influential contemporary defenders of the critical humanist tradition. Foucault's unrelenting criticism of humanist modernity, which eschews explicitly all reference to the conventional grounds of humanist criticism in favour of critique as an *ethos* of detachment and permanent criticism in relation to the givenness of all hegemonic categories, identities, and practices by which we are governed, garnered considerable attention from both. As we have already seen in previous chapters, Habermas and Taylor conclude that, since Foucault's criticisms of modern knowledge and practices of power eschew any reference to a context-independent concept of truth or to normative standards of justification, his own critique is ultimately meaningless and unintelligible. Such standards are built, they claim, into the very "grammar" of critique. That is, critique always comes with a "promise". Since Foucault abjures any such standards, his critique is groundless and therefore unintelligible. While we have encountered this methodological dispute already in a number of previous chapters, our concern here is with these two competing conceptions of critique in the very broadest sense. Our concern is less to defend the coherence of Foucault's methodology now as it is to defend the intelligibility of his anti-humanist form of critique which eschews reference to the conventional humanist criteria according to which, in the view of his critics, critique itself makes sense. According to critics like Habermas and Taylor, criticism makes sense only when launched on behalf of some context-independent truth or undubitable standards of normative justification. I suggest, however, that it is precisely this claim that Foucault's conception of critique calls into question. Such a claim is

definitive of conventional humanist critique as Foucault sees it, but it does not exhaust the possible forms critique can take. It is precisely this disagreement that is suppressed in Habermas' and Taylor's readings of Foucault, in which they translate Foucault's critical project into just the sort humanist critique it resists. Once it is recognized that Foucault was attempting to resist humanism at the level of the very nature, meaning, and function of critique itself, then it becomes possible to see that Foucault was operating on the basis of a different conception of critique as well as why he *had* to avoid these aspects of humanist critique in order to remain *consistent* with his own *anti-humanist* project.

Let us begin by revisiting Habermas' version of this criticism. For Habermas, as we know, the cognitive deficits of Foucault's work are not repaid by the few empirical insights begrudgingly acknowledged, and are so profound as to render it into an unintelligible "dead end"⁷³. We have examined and, in some cases acknowledged, the many "unsettled methodological problems" with Foucault's work indicated by Habermas and Honneth, among others. What my reading of Foucault resists, however, are the conclusions drawn from Habermas' more general and global criticism regarding the intelligibility and coherence of Foucault's work. As a species of what he calls "total critique," Foucault's radical anti-humanist critique of humanistic reason and morality flounders, he claims, on the basis of its own paradoxical structure. Total critique, according to Habermas, falls victim to its own self-referential and self-devouring logic, since it uses the very rational discourse, concepts, and categories it condemns in humanism in order to carry out its own critique. Habermas calls the peculiar fate of

⁷³ Habermas, Jurgen, "An Alternative Way out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative versus Subject-Centered Reason," in Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, p.296.

totalized critique "performative contradiction". This is a compelling and influential critique. However, it is not iron-clad.

Firstly, Habermas himself concedes, in his well-known critique of Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment, that, in fact, totalized critique follows a certain logic and harbours a certain consistency in its own right. Referring to Horkheimer and Adorno's radical critique of reason, Habermas acknowledges the "grandeur of this consistency," according to which the former acknowledged and chose to work within the confines of its paradoxical structure⁷⁴. And even in the case of Nietzsche, whom Habermas faults for trying to suppress and deny this paradox, he nonetheless acknowledges the former's turn to the theory of power as "a consistent step"⁷⁵. Now, clearly, this kind of consistency in the radical critique of reason does not achieve the standard of *performative* consistency which Habermas makes the hallmark of rational communication and debate. Performative contradictions arise not as a result of the assertion of antithetical propositions but, rather, when what is being claimed conflicts with the assumptions or implications of claiming it. In the language of the pragmatics of communication, performative contradiction arises when the *locutionary* dimension of a speech act conflicts with its *illocutionary* force⁷⁶. In Foucault's case, the intelligibility and truth-value of his rational critique of humanist modernity are undercut by his own methodological suspicion of reason and truth as masks of power. One cannot rationally

⁷⁴ Habermas, Jurgen, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," New German Critique, Number 26, Spring/Summer, 1982, p.22.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.28.

⁷⁶ Jay, Martin, "The Debate Over Performative Contradiction: Habermas Versus the Poststructuralists," in Honneth, Axel, et al, eds., Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment, trans. William Rehg, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992, pp.265-266.

argue and claim with performative consistency that the truth about reason, knowledge, and truth is that they are grounded in strategic bids for power. A genealogical account of truth and knowledge as masks for power is devoured by its own methodological suspicions of truth claims, including its own. Such suspicions must also apply to genealogy as an account of truth. As a result, like the work of other thinkers who have engaged in similar kinds of "total critique," such as Nietzsche, Horkheimer, and Adorno, Foucault's must ultimately be judged *performatively* contradictory and nonsensical. What is suggested by Habermas own discussion of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Nietzsche, however, is that failure to meet the standard of performative consistency does not necessarily condemn total critique to unintelligible irrationalist nonsense. Performative *in*consistency is not the same thing as irrationality.

Furthermore, the theory or logic underlying Habermas' trademark performative contradiction argument is itself not necessarily iron-clad, as a number of recent commentators, such as Asher Horowitz, Martin Jay, and Martin Morris have made clear⁷⁷. Habermas's own rejection of the philosophy of consciousness, Jay notes, "raises the question of the location of the responsible speaker who is able to perform consistently." How can Habermas accuse Foucault of performing contradictions "unless he attributes to [him] the ability to decide whether or not [he] will?"⁷⁸ Such an attribution

⁷⁷ See: Horowitz, Asher, "Like a tangled mobile: Reason and reification in the quasi-dialectical theory of Jurgen Habermas," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp.15-20; Jay, "The Debate Over Performative Contradiction," pp.275-276; and Morris, Martin, "On the Logic of the Performative Contradiction: Habermas and the Radical Critique of Reason," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 58, No. 4, Fall 1996, pp.753-760.

⁷⁸ Jay, "The Debate Over Performative Contradiction," p.275. Fred Dallmayr, Morris points out, has made a similar argument: Morris, "On the Logic of the Performative Contradiction," p.758.

implies reliance on the very "philosophy of consciousness" Habermas joins Foucault in condemning.

The question of the performatively contradictory nature of Foucault's work, it seems to me, comes down to what there is to be made of the paradoxical nature of radical critique in general. Habermas adopted a somewhat conciliatory tone with respect to Horkheimer and Adorno because the latter recognized and chose to work within the paradoxical structure of total critique. Nietzsche and, by implication Foucault, are condemned for attempting to escape or hide from it via the theory of power. However, it is clear from Foucault's writings and interviews that, like Horkheimer and Adorno, he was more than prepared to live with the tensions and paradoxes within which contemporary critique must dwell. Foucault openly and candidly acknowledged the difficulties and seeming paradox of the self-referential nature of archaeological and genealogical analysis. Such paradox was, in his view, inescapable. "I think that the central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century," Foucault remarked in one interview,

"has been, still is, and will, I hope, remain the question, *What* is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers? How can we exist as rational beings fortunately committed to practicing a rationality that is unfortunately criss-crossed by intrinsic dangers? One should not forget [...] it was on the basis of the flamboyant rationality of Social Darwinism that racism was formulated [...] This was, of course, an irrationality, but an irrationality that was at the same time, after all, a form of rationality...This is the situation that we are in and that we must combat. If intellectuals are to have a function, if critical thought itself has a function, and, even more specifically, if philosophy has a function within critical thought, it is precisely to accept this sort of spiral, this sort of revolving door of rationality that refers us to its necessity, to its indispensability, and at the same time, to its intrinsic dangers.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Foucault, Michel "An Ethics of Pleasure," interview in *FL*, pp.268-269. See also Foucault's comments in the interview, "How Much Does it Cost for Reason to Tell the Truth," pp.241-245 in the same volume.

Notwithstanding the attraction of Nietzsche's theory of power, Foucault clearly faced up to the intrinsic tensions and paradoxes embraced by the rational critique of reason. Whatever other function served by the concept of power in his work, it does not suppress or conceal them. Unlike Adorno, whom Habermas similarly convicts of floundering within this paradox, Foucault offered no sustained philosophical reflection, equal to the former's "negative dialectics," on how to operate or live within it; he simply encouraged the pursuit of genealogical research. Habermas' main difficulty with total critique, therefore, is not so much its putative lack of consistency but, rather, its willingness to accept and work within this paradoxical structure. His real disagreement with total critique is over the existence of a form of reason and social practice in which the paradox can be overcome and left behind. Provided thinkers like Horkheimer and Adorno see no other possibility on the horizon, they are not, strictly speaking, being inconsistent or incoherent. Therefore, where Habermas' real difficulty with the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Foucault seems to lie is less with the putatively fatal self-referentiality of the critique of reason and more with their failure to see the putative way *out* of the antinomies of total critique to which his own work points; that is, via the linguistic and intersubjective redemption of validity claims. Ultimately, then, Habermas' critique rests not so much on the failure of total critique to meet the standards of rational consistency as on his own conviction that the acknowledged antinomies and dangers of reason can be overcome by resort to an intersubjective and communicative paradigm of reason⁸⁰. For his part, Foucault rejects as utopian the idea that "there could exist a state of communication that would allow games of truth to circulate freely, without any

⁸⁰ On this point see: Jay, "The Debate Over Performative Contradiction," p.276-277; and Morris, "On the Logic of the Performative Contradiction," p.759-760.

constraints or coercive effects". The problem for Foucault, then, becomes one not of trying to "dissolve them in the utopia of completely transparent communication but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the *ethos*, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games with as little domination as possible."⁸¹ It is this very profound disagreement, as well as that over the very nature of critique, which Habermas' interpretation of Foucault's "incoherence" tends to suppress. Since the question of Habermas' paradigm of intersubjective and communicative rationality, as a solution to the dialectic of reason and terror, is far from closed, it would be more than unwise to ignore the contributions of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Foucault on this matter, let alone dismiss them as non-sensical.

While, along with Taylor, Habermas clearly rejects the epistemologically naive stance of the classical humanists, each clings steadfastly to the view that modern knowledge can be disentangled from power and has achieved what Taylor calls a more fine-grained "attunement" to the reality of human experience which constitutes a decisive and meaningful gain both in truth and freedom for Western civilization. Each has made a career of defending this perspective from more corrosive views like Foucault's. Their assessments of Foucault's positions are far from unassailable, however, and rest on presumptions of the escapability of Foucault's paradox implied by the very premises of "attunement" and "non-contradiction". Foucault's paradoxical stance is fatal only if we yield to Taylor and Habermas that there is some exit from the paradox and problem of truth through the truth itself. Foucault explores this paradox from a perspective repugnant to Taylor's and Habermas' own humanist sensibilities and commitment to

⁸¹ Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," interview in EST, p.298.

"making sense". These very sensibilities prevent them from being able to grant the kind of consistency to Foucault's position that I think can actually be preserved. The validity of Taylor's and Habermas' critiques of Foucault's work depends at least as much on the former's ability to defend their own affirmations. Thus, their argument does seem to constitute a certain kind of "blackmail," since the disagreement between them and Foucault, among others, is far from closed. Thus, even if we concede that Foucault's position is a paradoxical one, then, all grounds for condemning it as such begin to evaporate.

In relation to Foucault's work, Charles Taylor vacillates between the role of arbiter of "making sense" and the somewhat more conciliatory role of interlocutor. As we have already seen, Taylor characterizes Foucault's critiques of modern knowledge and practice as incoherent, since each allegedly makes parasitical use of the very ideas of truth and freedom they set out to criticize. While in one essay examined above he claims that, since it lacks any explicit reference to a context-independent notion of truth or standards of normative justification, Foucault's critique of modern knowledge and practice is unintelligible, elsewhere he articulates a position acknowledging a certain kind of *logic* to Foucault's work. "If Foucault is right," Taylor concedes, "then he cannot simply stick to a straight line of noncontradictory argument.":

"If we have to go along with some sort of self-interpretation to function at all, and if at the same time we want to distance ourselves from it in order not to betray the facets of human life that it suppresses, we are forced into a discourse of contradiction [...] You cannot ask of this position that it be formulated simply in the self-consistent propositions of a single theory. The recourse to rhetoric, irony, seeming contradiction is not an optional extra, but indispensable. Hence, the unfairness, the question begging involved in asking Foucault to come clean."⁸²

⁸² Taylor, Charles, "Connolly, Foucault, and Truth," Political Theory, Vol.13, No.3, August 1985, p.381.

Now, ultimately, Taylor will not give up his own version of critique, but here he at least recognizes that in so far as Foucault's anti-humanist form of criticism compels him to forego the kinds of justificatory reference points definitive of humanist critique, it is not, strictly speaking, an inconsistent one.

In fact, as William Connolly has pointed out, Taylor's discomfort with Foucault's anti-humanism can be located more on an ethical-political rather than theoretical register. Their greatest disagreement appears to occur at the level of assessing and evaluating the achievements of political and cultural modernity. Taylor, as we know, argues that grounds exist for privileging the modern experience as closely attuned to what human beings can be when they are at their best. However, it is precisely at this normative level of criticism that Foucault disappoints. In analyzing only the conditions of emergence and the costs of hegemonic forms of modern life, Foucault not only abjures most evaluative assertions regarding the benefits of modernity but steadfastly refuses to endorse *any* "settled way of life" unambiguously⁸³. According to Taylor, Foucault's refusal to endorse or acknowledge as unambiguous gains the achievements of bourgeois political modernity prevents him from being able to engage in "the fine-grained discernment of what has been gained, and what lost" in the course of the development of Western culture and society⁸⁴. And yet, Western culture hardly needs Foucault in order to consolidate its sense that the modern experience of selfhood and identity constitutes one to be privileged and valorized. What it does need, however, and what Foucault's approach to criticism offers, is a further reflexive and critical awareness that our current

⁸³ Connolly, William, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," Political Theory, Vol. 13, No. 3, August 1985, p.369.

²³⁰ Taylor, "Connolly, Foucault, and Truth," p.383.

way of doing and experiencing things is "far from filling all possible spaces," which is not to wax nostalgic for the days of feudalism or Ancient Greece. Keeping such an awareness of other possibilities alive, including those for a different experience of ourselves than that currently available, rests in part on asking the kinds of questions particular to Foucault's genealogical analysis: "How is it that the human subject took itself as the object of a possible knowledge? Through what forms of rationality and historical conditions? And finally at what price?"⁸⁵ Furthermore, Foucault does not in fact deprive us of all ability to make distinctions. He is not *entirely* neutral with respect to settled ways of existence. Foucault is still easily able to distinguish between those forms of life in which such questions are left open and the ones which tend to foreclose discussion of them. It is in the latter type of society that Foucault detects the real danger.

Yet a further defense of the coherence of Foucault's anti-essentialist criticism can be offered. My treatment of this question is indebted to some of the recent work of William Connolly⁸⁶. Among Foucault's Anglo-American commentators, Connolly has made perhaps the most sustained and sympathetic attempt to take up his work as suggestive of an ethics of care, or what he calls "critical responsiveness,"⁸⁷ and has helped to bring the at times elusive ethical-political horizon of Foucault's work into much sharper focus. Connolly has sketched the outlines of what he takes to be the "ethical

⁸⁵ Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," p.30.

⁸⁶ See especially: Connolly, William, The Ethos of Pluralization; and Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil," pp.365-389. Generally speaking, the view of Foucault's work as ethically fruitful has been supported by numerous other commentators, including: Bernauer, James, Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought, Atlantic Highlands: The Humanities Press, 1990; Carroll, David, Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, New York: Methuen, 1987; Halperin, David, Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; and Rajchman, John, Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

⁸⁷ Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, pp.25-40.

sensibility" informing much of Foucault's work. Among the elements identified by Connolly as making up Foucault's ethical-political sensibility are:

"genealogies that dissolve apparent necessities into contingent formations; cultivation of care for possibilities of life that challenge claims to an intrinsic moral order; democratic disturbances of sedimented identities that conceal violence in their terms of closure; [and] practices that enable multifarious styles of life to coexist on the same territory..."⁸⁸

Combined, these elements serve to:

"expose artifice in hegemonic identities and the definitions of otherness [...] to destabilize codes of moral order [...] when doing so crystallizes the element of resentment in these constructions of difference; [...] to cultivate generosity [...] in those indispensable rivalries between alternative moral/ethical perspectives by emphasizing the contestable character of each perspective, including one's own [...] and] to contest moral visions that suppress the constructed, contingent, relational character of identity..."⁸⁹

Together, according to Connolly, all of these aspects of Foucault's work evince a certain ethics of "care"⁹⁰.

Underpinning Foucault's genealogical anti-humanism are, he suggests, convictions of an "onto-political" nature, according to which all forms of knowledge, discourse, and practice are viewed as a kind of imposition on what Connolly calls "the protean diversity of life"⁹¹. Foucault's critique of modernity is supported by a basic ontological conviction that every form of discourse or settled way of life involves forms

⁸⁸ Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil," p.381.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.372.

⁹⁰ Connolly's characterization of Foucault's work is supported by the following remarks the latter made in a 1980 interview: "Curiosity is a vice that has been stigmatized [...] However, I like the word; [...] it evokes 'care'; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us as strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways of thought and to look at the same things in a different way; [...] a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental." Michel Foucault, "The Masked Philosopher," interview in *MF*, p.328.

⁹¹ Connolly argues that Foucault's ethical and political criticism of modern knowledge and practice is supported by certain anti-foundationalist ontological convictions with political implications. See, for example: Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil," pp.365-389.

of imposition, an ontology, if you will, which comes with certain built-in political implications. Connolly makes much of the following statement by Foucault in his essay, "The Order of Discourse,":

"We must not imagine that the world turns toward us a legible face which we would have only to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which presupposes the world in our favor. We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or, in any case as a practice which we impose on them."⁹²

Ample justification for according these words particular significance is provided by Foucault's histories of the human sciences, especially as they have been presented here in Chapter Four. In effect, Connolly argues, Foucault's claim is that "there is more to being than knowing" and that "the advance of the knowledge enterprise into new corners of life is the advance simultaneously of subjectification, normalization, and disciplinary control."⁹³ Foucault's ethical sensibility of care stems, therefore, from these "onto-political" convictions and the belief that, in addition to the violence inherent in the knowledge enterprise, "systemic cruelty flows regularly from the thoughtlessness of aggressive conventionality, the transcendentalization of contingent identities, and the treatment of good/evil as a duality wired into the intrinsic order of things."⁹⁴ On the strength of this insight, Connolly argues in defence of Foucault that contemporary threats of cruelty, violence, and social fragmentation today stem not from post-Nietzschean critiques of conventional humanist ethics and morality, as the neo-Kantians, neo-Aristoteleans and even critics of epistemological foundationalism like Taylor would have

⁹² Connolly, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," p.366.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.366.

⁹⁴ Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil," p.366.

it, but, rather, from the aggressive assertion of identity and morality against discourses and forms of life which threaten to disturb them⁹⁵.

Foucault's ethical sensibility to all discourse and practice as a kind of "violence" we do to things does not, as critics like Taylor suggests, lead to neutrality however. Taylor errs, Connolly insists, in translating Foucault's Nietzschean suspicion of truth-as-imposition into a total relativization of all regimes of truth and settled ways of life. Such a reading drops the implicit evaluative position contained within it, that is, the critique of the violence of the will-to-truth as such. Foucault's stance is not entirely neutral or relativistic where historical forms of life and culture are concerned and he was certainly not neutral with respect to the humanistic will-to-truth and its quest to visibilize and map every aspect of life⁹⁶. The inevitability of our impositions does not sanction indifference to them but, rather, calls for an *ethos* of curiosity and care for what surrounds us, in order to ensure that the suffering imposed by current categories and practices is minimized, and where it is found to be gratuitous, eliminated altogether. As a manifestation of power in its own right, genealogy sides with resistance in the name of overcoming and transformation, and opposes totalizing discourse and practices of domination as forms of power which suppress possibilities for change, reversal of roles, and reciprocal

⁹⁵ On this point Connolly has written: "...the most powerful contemporary pressures to social fragmentation flow from struggles between contending, dogmatic identities, each hell bent on installing itself as the universal to which everyone and everything must conform. Enhanced appreciation of our own contingency, and of the differences through which we receive specification, provides an antidote both to the drive to unity and to the social fragmentation such drives often produce. Lebanon, Ireland, Bosnia - to take three recent examples - reflect modes of fragmentation in which some identities insist upon universalizing themselves by conquering, assimilating, or liquidating their opponents. These impulses are closer to calls to universalism and national consensus [...] than to the post-Nietzschean sensibility endorsed here.": The Ethos of Pluralization, pp.26-27.

⁹⁶ Connolly, "Taylor, Foucault, and Otherness," p.369.

conditioning. As a weapon which disturbs the solidity and promotes the growth of fissures in the bedrock of systems of thought and domination, genealogical critique always strives to show us how, in terms of human discourse and practice, things can always be otherwise. Thus, genealogy allies itself with knowledge and experience which is subjugated by and/or resists the dominant discursive totality and form of life, not so much because the former is intrinsically good but, rather, because it serves as the repository of possibilities and the knowledge that things can and could be otherwise, should we choose to make them so. Having said that, this does not mean that Foucault is driven to endorse, or at least refrain from condemning the subjugated knowledge of Nazism as some critics claim. Such claims stem from the unwarranted assumption that if nothing is fundamental then nothings *matters* and everything is permitted. Such an awareness of the contingency of things might just as easily produce the opposite response, however; a sense that "almost everything counts for something"⁹⁷. To the question, "Do Nazi count then?," Connolly offers this response: "Is not Nazism exactly the doctrine that denies that almost everything counts for something?"⁹⁸. From an awareness of the contingency of everything, and that everything counts for something, Connolly wagers, along with Foucault, that we might be much less attracted to discourses like Nazism informed by the urge to transcendentalize and freeze identities and practices.

Viewed from the perspective of Connolly, then, Taylor's criticisms of Foucault can be seen as failing to acknowledge the *consistency* of Foucault's genealogical critique based on these ontological convictions rather than normative foundations. Furthermore,

⁹⁷ Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, p.40.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.209, fn.34.

we can see how Taylor's claim that genealogical criticism of hegemonic identities and settled ways of life is driven to neutrality is also false, since the latter stems from a set of onto-political convictions which push Foucault towards an ethics of care and demand an ethical response to the violence inherent in the very knowledge enterprise itself.

d) Subjugated Knowledge:

The question of the intelligibility of Foucault's critique of modern forms of knowledge and practice has been raised in the context of one other major strand of criticism. According to an argument advanced by critics like Richard Wolin, Allan Megill, Shadia Drury, and Habermas as well, among others, Foucault's critique of modernity reveals a certain "mad" consistency in so far as it is justified on the normative grounds of a hidden dependency on a Nietzschean vitalism or *Lebensphilosophie*⁹⁹. In this case, Foucault's critique obeys the logic of "the other of reason"¹⁰⁰. Obeying this logic, however, does not rescue Foucault's critique from charges of irrationalism. By following and even valorizing the logic of the other of reason Foucault not only risks but actually invites the plunge into irrationality, nihilism, and relativism. According to Wolin, for example, Foucault's romantic references to "the sovereign enterprise of unreason" in Madness and Civilization has a "foundational status" in light of which the rest of his work can be understood¹⁰¹. This argument, and others like it, is based on a

⁹⁹ See the following: Drury, Shadia, Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994; Habermas, Jürgen, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," pp.266-293; Megill, Allan, Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985; and Wolin, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," pp.170-193.

¹⁰⁰ Wolin, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," p.173.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.173.

certain interpretation of the appearance throughout Foucault's works of references to certain forces, qualities, energies, and figures such as Jouy, Barbin, and Riviere whose experiences and mode of being Foucault is alleged to privilege and endorse as models for nonhumanist forms of life and experience. Reading this aspect of Foucault's work as the barely concealed "cryptonormative" grounds of his critique of modernity is both tempting and at the same time too pat. Its contradiction with the very spirit and intent behind his own anti-essentialist critical ontology would have been patently obvious to Foucault. However, given humanist insistence that criticism must be mobilized on behalf of some higher truth or more profound reality, critics like Wolin are *compelled* to read Foucault in this way. Looking for signs of a hidden normative foundation which they have convinced themselves *must* be there, such critics exaggerate the significance of the slightest gestures of affirmation toward certain marginalized forms of life on Foucault's.

In my opinion, while there are some grounds for interpreting Foucault in this manner, an understanding of the place of this "plebian aspect"¹⁰² in his work as performing a certain critical function of *detachment* as opposed to grounding makes more sense within the context of his critical ontology. I suggest, therefore, that the "plebian aspect" in Foucault's work be understood within the context of one other methodological aspect of his work which has thus far received relatively little attention, that is, what he called the excavation of "subjugated knowledge" and experience¹⁰³. By this Foucault refers to that set of knowledges, voices, and experiences that, in the course of the consolidation of any episteme or system of knowledge like the human sciences

¹⁰² Ransom, John, Foucault's Discipline: The Politics of Subjectivity, Durham: Duke University Press, 1997, p.101.

¹⁰³ Foucault, Michel, "Two Lectures," in PK, p.81.

"have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity."¹⁰⁴ In the context of his own historical investigations of the human sciences, Foucault identifies among such knowledges and voices those of the psychiatric patient, the delinquent, and the sexually non-conforming. In order to further disturb the sense of necessity and universality attached to the Western experience, Foucault encouraged forms of historical research which attempted to unearth and give voice to forms of knowledge and experience which had been eclipsed, excluded, or suppressed in the course of the consolidation of the former. Foucault invites what he calls "an insurrection of subjugated knowledges"¹⁰⁵. Disinterring such disqualified knowledges and voices fulfills a critical function by restoring the memory of the "struggles" and "hostile encounters" by which current hegemonic categories and practices were consolidated and universalized. "[I]t is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges, [...] that criticism performs its work."¹⁰⁶ Excavating such knowledge and experience reminds us that our current ways of thinking, saying, and doing things in relation to, say, punishment, the treatment of the insane, or our relationship to our sex, have been produced, and that things have been thought, said, and done otherwise.

Much of Foucault's genealogical work was devoted to capturing and giving voice to some of these subjugated knowledges and experiences. In addition to recapturing the conditions of emergence for various forms of knowledge and practice in Western modernity, his genealogies of psychiatry, the prison, and sexuality also attempt to

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.82.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.81.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.82.

articulate the experiences of "madness proper," "indiscipline," and "bodies and pleasures," respectively, and are populated by memorable figures such as Jouy and Beasse whom we encountered in Chapters Four and Five. In addition, Foucault's commitment to the excavation of subjugated knowledges led him to publish, along with accompanying archival documents, the memoirs of Riviere and Barbin¹⁰⁷. Foucault's treatment of such knowledges, figures, and experiences has led to a degree of confusion and criticism. Many commentators have read Foucault as valorizing and privileging them as primordial, vitalistic, almost essential qualities, energies, and forces which have been repressed by the dominant forms of modern experience, and which constitute the unacknowledged normative criteria which underpin his critique of humanistic modernity¹⁰⁸. This being the case, as some have charged, Foucault makes parasitical use of the very humanistic concepts and tropes - identity, essence, repression - which he attacks. Some critics go further still, arguing that such experiences, knowledges, and figures constitute privileged models of experience and action which Foucault celebrates as prefiguring a future non-normalized, non-disciplinary, and unrestricted freedom. In other words, by implication, Foucault conducts his critique of humanism surreptitiously on behalf of these valorized and privileged experiences¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁷ See: Foucault, Michel, ed., I, Pierre Riviere, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother...: A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century, trans. Frank Jellinek, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975; and Foucault, Michel, ed., Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite, trans. Richard McDougall, New York: Pantheon, 1980. Hereinafter cited as IPR and HB, respectively.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example: Butler, Judith, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, New York: Routledge, 1990, p.94; Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," pp.282-284; and Wolin, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," pp.187-193.

¹⁰⁹ See: Drury, Alexandre Kojève: The Roots of Postmodern Politics, pp.132-133.

For his part, Foucault himself admitted that he struggled to purge his work of such naturalistic or essentialist criteria throughout his career, even as late as his drafts of The History of Sexuality¹¹⁰. Having said that, Foucault's expiation of the figure of Man is not rooted in privileging or valorizing the "other" of reason or humanism in the forms of madness, orgiastic violence, or unrestrained sexual gratification. His antihumanist criticism does not oppose all forms of being constrained or governed in the name of some opposite claim against being governed *at all*. While Foucault was clearly tempted by certain romantic gestures toward those who have picked up the tab, so to speak, for the hegemonic western experience and the current forms by which we are governed, the critical function performed by such experiences and figures in his work is more consistent with the "ontology of ourselves" than with the more conventional, humanistic approach to criticism. Such figures, experiences, and voices are not so much models to be emulated as they are critical vantage-points, albeit sometimes difficult ones, from which to disturb the sense of necessity, inevitability, and universality attached to the way in which things are currently thought, said and done.

Let us now take a closer look at some of these subjugated knowledges and experiences as they were articulated by Foucault. They constitute what we might think of as the "other" of Man, or as experiences - madness, indiscipline, pleasure - which are *other than Man* as the rational, disciplined, normalized and responsabilized subject of modern experience. Throughout Foucault's genealogical unmasking of the violence of the human sciences and modern power, a valorization of the forces, qualities, populations and individuals which have borne the costs of humanistic, disciplinary and biopolitical

¹¹⁰ Foucault, Michel, "The Confession of the Flesh," interview in PK, p.210.

modernity is often implied. He writes with great sympathy and affecting empathy of the sufferings of the insane, the incarcerated, and the sexually nonconforming at the hands of the agents of discipline and biopolitics who subject them to regimes and rhythms not their own and rob them of their spontaneous "being" and activity. But the negative images of suffering and repression discussed in Chapter Four are offset by a series of positive images of figures, qualities, energies, and forms of experience amounting to what Foucault referred to as "plebs"¹¹¹, which, while bearing the costs of modern culture and practice, also remind us that our modern experience has been made and, therefore, that it can be unmade.

In Madness and Civilization, for example, Foucault laments the silencing and subjugation of the experience and voice of madness at the hands of humanistic reason. We see this in his descriptions of madness as both a worthwhile kind of "being" or experience in itself and a subaltern, world-disclosing cultural force. For all its suggestions of a radical anti-essentialist break with his humanist past, Madness and Civilization betrays a continued attachment to a kind of lyrical, romantic humanism with respect to the being of what he calls "madness proper,"¹¹² which makes it a somewhat problematic text for our purposes. Madness is treated here as a kind of authentic "being" with a "voice" of its own. Foucault refers regularly to what he calls "madness itself"¹¹³,

¹¹¹ Foucault, Michel, "Power and Strategies," interview in PK, p.139.

¹¹² Foucault, Michel, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. Richard Howard, New York: Vintage, 1973, p.66. Hereinafter cited as MC.

¹¹³ While Foucault maintained in interviews that he eschews any reliance on such naturalistic, essentialist or "anthropological" props, he admitted to having availed himself of just such a conception of madness in this work. The introduction to The Archaeology of Knowledge contains a lengthy self-criticism in which he acknowledges this problem in Madness and Civilization. In a later interview he confesses to "positing the existence of a sort of living, voluble and anxious madness". One has the impression from this point forward that Foucault purges his future work of such "anthropological constraints", and yet we shall see

"an experience reduced to silence"¹¹⁴, and the "immediate truth", "voices" and "sovereign enterprise of unreason"¹¹⁵. Clearly, there was for Foucault an experience, a voice, a way of being embodied in madness, the loss of which is to be mourned.

In Madness and Civilization Foucault invokes a certain experience of madness in which it might once more be allowed to express itself in a more authentic way. The opening pages of the book argue that Medieval and Renaissance perceptions of madness were drastically different from our own, displaying a generous tolerance and forbearance of the insane and a reciprocal, dialogic openness, and even awe, in the face of the enigma of madness¹¹⁶. Renaissance experience valorized madness as the reciprocal truth of reason, the revelation of its contingency¹¹⁷. Madness in our midst served as a constant reminder of the tenuousness of reason¹¹⁸. Madness and reason were once an "undifferentiated experience" in which the two engaged in a kind of "dialogue" and shared a "common language" of "stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax"¹¹⁹. In this relation, communication, and "dialogue" with madness was contained something of reason's "truth," or a kind of knowledge that Foucault calls the "wisdom of fools"- which was the truth of reason's precariousness and contingency¹²⁰. The Medieval and Renaissance experience of madness found in it a certain "instructive value", a source of

that the difficulty of escaping them was something with which he continued to struggle at least until the publication of The History of Sexuality. See: Foucault, Michel, The Archaeology of Knowledge, London: Tavistock, 1972, pp.14-17; "Truth and Power," pp.118-19; "The End of the Monarchy of Sex," interview in FL, pp.149; and "The Confession of the Flesh," pp.210.

¹¹⁴ Foucault, MC, p.198.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp.261, 278.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., pp.3-37.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp.21-37.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp.3-37.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp.ix-x.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp.21-22.

tragic and mystical knowledge of man. It is this precarious, historical and contingent sense of reason which has been lost since the "caesura that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason"¹²¹.

Since the beginning of the Classical period, he argues, when reason abruptly seized hold of and imprisoned the insane in the act of the Great Confinement, their relation has been an inherently violent one, the cultural costs of which are still born by the present. Foucault states things here in terms of an historic cultural struggle between the forces of reason and madness. The progress of reason has constituted an invasion of a unique aspect of human experience and its redescription in reason's exclusive terms, culminating with psychiatric discourse and institutions. Psychiatry, in which reason constitutes madness as no more than "mental illness," represents the culmination of "reason's subjugation of non-reason" and the replacement of all dialogue between them with "a monologue of reason *about* madness"¹²². Pinel's asylum represented the final victory of reason over madness, made complete by its call for total silence on the part of the insane and a totalizing scientific gaze and discourse to surround the patient. "Confinement, prisons, dungeons, even tortures," Foucault writes, "engaged in a mute dialogue between reason and unreason - the dialogue of struggle. This dialogue itself was now disengaged; silence was absolute; there was no longer any common language between madness and reason."¹²³ Foucault suggests that there is nothing necessary and, indeed, something lamentable about the loss of dialogue between reason and madness and the denial of the latter as having any place within human experience. It is as if we are

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.ix.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp.x-xi.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.262.

witnessing the extinction of one unique and valuable kind of knowledge and experience of the world at the hands of another that has become willfully ignorant and deaf to it.

Now, justification for reading Foucault as relying surreptitiously on essentialist conceptions of experiences like madness to ground his ethical-political critiques of modern culture and practice is strongest with respect to his early writings like this one. Foucault acknowledged the power that the trope of repression exercised over his work, and he laboured to resist it with uneven success. My argument is that as his work gradually freed itself from the pull of the trope of repression, his continued reference to and periodic affirmation of experiences like madness, delinquency, and erotic abandon assumes a methodological function related to detachment and eventalization as opposed to normative justification.

In other writings meanwhile, including Discipline and Punish, Foucault comes close to valorizing crime, and celebrates a certain elemental energy of "indiscipline" manifest in the figure of the disorderly and exuberant Beasse¹²⁴. Indiscipline, which is threatened with extinction by disciplinary society embodies the experience and resistance of a life lived in spite or outside of the rhythms of capitalist life and work. Beasse, whom we encountered in Chapters Four and Five, was a drifter and petty criminal whose itinerant life, disdain for the rules and regimen of work and responsibility, and scorn for the legal system clearly delight Foucault. "[Beasse] would certainly have passed without trace," he remarks,

"had he not opposed to the discourse of the law that made him delinquent [...] the discourse of an illegality that remained resistant to these coercions and which revealed indiscipline in a systematically ambiguous manner as the disordered order

¹²⁴ Ibid., pp.289-292.

of society and as the affirmation of inalienable rights. All the illegalities that the court defined as offences the accused reformulated as the affirmation of a living force: the lack of a home as vagabondage, the lack of a master as independence, the lack of work as freedom, the lack of a time-table as the fullness of days and nights."¹²⁵

He cites approvingly the Fourierist analysis of Beasse's significance at the time, which saw in him a "native, immediate liberty" and "wildness" containing "lessons" not to be wasted¹²⁶. This undisciplined form of existence was precisely that which the disciplinary techniques of police sought to punish and correct. Furthermore he refers approvingly to the nineteenth-century Phallangist endorsement of crime and criminality as forms of resistance to bourgeois order. Foucault qualifies his enthusiasm for crime by arguing that he does not adhere to any essentialist, romantic, or overly sanguine beliefs in an innately exceptional criminal nature¹²⁷, yet he clearly seemed at times to see certain kinds of nineteenth-century illegality as embodying an indiscipline, wildness, or immediate liberty hostile to the identities, regularities, and limits which modern bourgeois order produces and attempts to impose on individuals.

With his discovery of the case of Riviere, Foucault once again raises the problem of the apparent subjugation and exclusion of certain "voices" and experiences by the human sciences. Clearly, what Foucault privileged and valorized in the life and voice of Riviere was not murderous frenzy. Rather, Foucault and his colleagues were intrigued by the elusive, confounding nature of Riviere's life and discourse, which "so escape every possible handle"¹²⁸. Foucault places Riviere's memoir alongside the accompanying discourses of the various officials, lawyers, physicians and psychiatrists who examined

¹²⁵ Foucault, Michel, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan, New York: Pantheon, 1979, p.290. Hereinafter cited as DP.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp.291-292.

¹²⁷ Foucault, "Truth and Power," p.130.

¹²⁸ Foucault, Michel, "I, Pierre Riviere...", interview in FL, p.132.

him in order to bear witness to this "extraordinary" individual and reveal the awkward and contradictory efforts of the human sciences to pin him down. We are witness to battles between, and contortions within, one expert scientific discourse and another. One takes Riviere's eloquent memoir as evidence of his sanity, and another as proof that he is mad¹²⁹. Foucault privileges the lives and discourses of such figures as Riviere because they unmask and give the lie to the "clumsy" human sciences' attempt to grasp and get a handle on their true natures. Upon the republication of the Riviere dossier, Foucault admitted, "my secret desire, of course":

"was to hear criminologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists discuss the case of Riviere in their usual insipid language. Yet they were literally reduced to silence: [...] I must congratulate them for the prudence and lucidity with which they renounced discussion of Riviere."¹³⁰

In the face of what extraordinary organization of being or experience, however, is such "prudent" and "lucid" silence to be congratulated? Foucault occasionally suggests that in Riviere's act and discourse dwells a certain peasant "experience", at minimum, popular frustration and anger with the *Code Civil* and its encroaching grip on the daily life and affairs of the peasantry¹³¹. Foucault valorizes Riviere's refusal to bend and subject the fate of his family, his father in particular, to this new "juridical universe" of Napoleonic law governing legality, bourgeois property, possessions and marriage. On the other hand, however, Foucault cautions against the "lyricism of violence and peasant abjection" of which so much work *on* the peasantry is guilty, as opposed to works *of* the peasantry, such as Riviere's¹³². His interest in such cases is primarily to expose and diminish the

¹²⁹ Foucault, IPR, pp.x-xiii, 122-136, 142-147, 163-169.

¹³⁰ Foucault, "I, Pierre Riviere...", pp.131-132.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.134.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.136.

undeserved and gratuitous suffering imposed by congealed codes and practices of the sort witnessed in this case, and to call attention to the victimhood of victimizers.

Foucault's writings on such figures stress the degree to which conventional categories of agency, responsibility, and criminality impose gratuitous forms of cruelty and suffering on those subject to criminal judgement and punishment.

Having said this, Foucault's response to certain dimensions of Riviere's case threaten to confirm his critics' gravest reservations and suspicions. When he explains his interest in the case on the basis of the "beauty" of Riviere's memoir and the "utter astonishment it produced in us,"¹³³ Foucault comes precariously close to playing into their hands. Foucault argued that the memoir possessed a "beauty" and sovereignty of singular distinction. So much so that its proper appreciation must take the "prudent" form of silence in the face of an extraordinary "voice":

"we decided not to interpret it and not to subject it to any psychiatric or psycho-analytic commentary. [...] most importantly, owing to a sort of reverence and perhaps, too, terror for a text which was to carry off four corpses along with it, we were unwilling to superimpose our own text on Riviere's memoir. We fell under the spell of the parricide with the reddish-brown eyes."¹³⁴

Elsewhere, Foucault insisted "that time itself had conferred upon this text a sovereignty so to speak empowering it to come forward in its own person without any lingering prejudice still attaching to it."¹³⁵ More disturbing to his critics has been his wilful silence on the brutality of Riviere's crime and the suffering of his victims. When prodded, he defended his silence in the following way:

"...I believe that Riviere's own discourse on his act so dominates, or in any case so

¹³³ Foucault, IPR, p.x.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.53-54.

escapes from every possible handle, that there is nothing to be said about this central point, this crime or act, that is not a step back in relation to it. [...] a crime accompanied by a discourse so strong and so strange that the crime ends up not existing anymore [...]"¹³⁶

By withholding commentary, however, Foucault only duplicates the response of the courts, journalists, and experts of the day who, aside from some forensic interest in the crime and the condition of the victims, immediately leaped upon Riviere's *nature*, and the memoir he produced, as objects of legal, medical, and psychiatric examination and discourse. There is, nonetheless, something troublesome in Foucault's refusal to express any shock or dismay with regard to Riviere's crime, or display any remorse for his victims. We might say that, in his treatment of the case, Foucault demonstrated a certain deficit of care for the victims of this brutal murder. Moreover, by refusing any commentary whatsoever on Riviere's experience Foucault leaves his enthusiasm for this "really extraordinary crime" open to suspicions of harbouring a romantic attraction to unrestrained, destructive violence or a certain vitalism.

In The History of Sexuality and Herculine Barbin, finally, Foucault alludes to some kind of pristine, non-normalized sex pre-dating modern "sexuality". The figures of Jouy and Barbin offer glimpses of an experience of sex prior to the modern experience of sexuality. Against the norm of the responsabilized married couple, the coercive "implantation" of "perversions", and the medicalization of "paedophilia", "homosexuality" and "onanism", Foucault juxtaposes the sexual experiences of Jouy and Barbin as just plain "flesh"¹³⁷ and "bodies and pleasures"¹³⁸. While he laments the

¹³⁶ Foucault, "I, Pierre Riviere...", pp.131-132.

¹³⁷ Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," p.211.

¹³⁸ Foucault, Michel, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume I, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Vintage, 1980, p.157. Hereinafter cited as HS.

obvious narrowing of possibilities for the experience of "bodies and pleasures" imposed by modern biopolitics, he disinters these two figures because they offer glimpses of an experience of sex prior to its medicalization, psychiatrization, and implantation as the deep truth of the self. Foucault treats Jouy's fondling of little girls as one of the innocuous, trivial "bucolic pleasures" and "timeless gestures" of the sexual life of the village¹³⁹. In the figure of Jouy we glimpse a privileged image of pleasures possible prior to the nineteenth-century sexualization of children and medicalization, psychiatrization and criminalization of individuals like Jouy. The case of Jouy suggests a notion of non-normalized, if not pristine, sex, the disappearance of which Foucault clearly laments.

Meanwhile, Foucault describes how Barbin was torn from the happy "feminine milieu" of the convent and deprived forever of the "furtive, nameless pleasures," "strange, secret loves," and "delights" she experienced within its protective confines. In Barbin's hermaphroditic "happy limbo of a non-identity"¹⁴⁰ Foucault invokes the naturalistic image of an autonomous, prediscursive, non-normalized sex, before being overcome and subjugated by the imperatives of medical classification and normalization. Barbin is portrayed as an innocent victim of normalizing Western medicine which "obstinately brought into play this question of a 'true sex' where one might have imagined that all that counted was the reality of the body and the intensity of its pleasures."¹⁴¹ Foucault mourns not only the anguish and torment suffered by Barbin, but laments modern society's inability to tolerate the freedom of such "indeterminate

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

¹⁴⁰ Foucault, Michel, "Introduction", in Foucault, Michel, ed., Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century Hermaphrodite, New York: Pantheon, 1980, pp.xii-xv.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.vii.

individuals" as Barbin¹⁴², and its compulsion to subject them to medical, administrative, and juridical authority. The state of sexual "happy limbo" enjoyed by Barbin and others of indeterminate sex depends upon the indifference and indulgence of a society in which the question of one's "true" sexual identity is not raised or not found compelling.

Foucault, here and in other writings, is clearly enamoured by the erotic possibilities of such an approach to sex, and wary of the costs of one, like our own, which insists that our one, true sex be discovered and placed at the very centre of our identity. Foucault's work on sexuality, while perhaps going the farthest in its attempt to abandon naturalistic valorizations altogether, remains suggestive of them to the end. Without explicitly adhering to any kind of "repressive hypothesis," which indeed Foucault suspects of complicity with the incitement to discourse about sex and its normalization¹⁴³, he does not completely vacate the terrain of sex as an autonomous, non-discursive, "pre-given datum"¹⁴⁴. Foucault confessed that early drafts of The History of Sexuality adhered to a naturalistic conception of sex and that, while constituting the kind of "repressive hypothesis" he wants to avoid, he was not altogether successful in ridding his work of some notion of a pristine, privileged kind of sex¹⁴⁵.

What all of the subjugated forms of experience and knowledge embodied in figures like Beasse, Barbin, and Riviere manifest in common is what, perhaps, we might call "plebs", after an expression Foucault adopted on the occasion of an interview. Although Foucault seldom uses the term, it captures a whole range of qualities, figures,

¹⁴² Ibid., p.viii.

¹⁴³ Foucault, "Two Lectures," p.108.

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," p.210.

¹⁴⁵ Butler argues that Foucault's entire treatment of Barbin is based on an implicit repressive hypothesis of its own. See: Butler, Gender Trouble, p.94.

energies, impulses, and forces described in his work, the existence of which is threatened by the spread of modern forms of power. A 1977 discussion of power raised and elaborated on the problem of a "plebs":

"there is [...] '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 ('de la' plebe). 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."¹⁴⁶

One would be mistaken, however, to conceive the plebs as "the permanent ground of history, the final objective of all subjections, the ever smoldering centre of all revolts."¹⁴⁷ First of all, as Foucault suggests above, there are plebs in bodies and within individuals. In Chapter Three we saw how Foucault preserved a notion of the subject as an active, knowing, desiring agent in which reside certain "irreducibilities". As Ransom has argued, that in the individual which resists subjectification, what he calls the "plebian aspect," constitutes a certain "irreducibility" of the subject¹⁴⁸. However, this irreducibility has no positive content *per se* which we might identify as the primal substance of human nature. Since, according to Foucault, agentification takes various historical forms, the content of the plebian aspect of the individual will vary with it. Compare, for example, the ancient Greek use of pleasure as part of a regimen of good health versus the modern biopolitical suspicion of sex and its etiological power to produce disease and dissipation. Each problematizes a different set of behaviours and relationships and demands a different set of regulations and methods of constraint, and

¹⁴⁶ Foucault, "Power and Strategies," pp.137-138.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.137.

¹⁴⁸ Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline*, pp.101-153.

produces resistances specific to it as a form of sexual subjectification. The process of subjectification always entails that certain qualities, forces, and capacities are enabled and fostered while others, which militate against the hegemonic model of agency are suppressed. As a result, Foucault claims, "there is always within each of us something that fights something else"¹⁴⁹. In other words, Foucault asks us to think of ourselves as composed of "sub-individuals,"¹⁵⁰ some of which must be suppressed in the course of agentification or subjectification; this is the "plebian aspect" at the level of the individual. Therefore, the plebian is no historical constant but, rather, that in the individual which, as Connolly says, "resists agentification". In the context of the formation of the industrial working class in the nineteenth century, then, the plebian is that "indiscipline," "irregularity," and "irresponsibility" - nomadism, absenteeism, tardiness, promiscuity, and idleness - which had to be driven out of individuals in order to adjust them to the rhythms and routines of wage labour, as we saw in Chapter Five.

The concept of plebs has a group dimension to it in Foucault's work as well, which brings us back to figures like Jouy, Beasse, Barbin, and Riviere. Every hegemonic form or settled way of life requires for its maintenance and stability a certain form of agency or subjectivity. Furthermore, as we have already seen, hegemonic forms of life and agency will be resisted by other forms of life and experience which resist adjustment and normalization. It is these latter, recalcitrant forms of life and experience, (fragments of which may exist within every individual), embodied in certain individuals in full-blown manner, which bear the costs of consolidating the dominant form of life. In the

¹⁴⁹ Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," p.208.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.208.

modern experience, then, the plebian element consists of not only madness, indiscipline, and indeterminacy, but of those labelled as *the* insane, *the* delinquent, and *the* indeterminate who must be identified, subject to classification, and subdued; either excluded and constrained, or rendered instrumentally useful as strategic unities of knowledge to foment fear and moral panic in the general population. Each settled way of life will both subjugate and engender resistance from a unique set of minoritarian, plebian forms of life, and will differ from others in terms of the degree of tolerance and forbearance it extends to them. As Foucault's research on madness in the Renaissance period or the practice of pederasty in the Ancient world shows, the kinds of individuals and forms of life comprising the plebian element within the social is not a socio-historical constant. Renaissance forbearance of the insane and the widespread practice of "boy-love" in the Ancient world bear witness to this.

Now, as we know, critics like Habermas, Wolin, and Drury have seized upon these apparently naturalistic and vitalistic tropes and figures in Foucault's work as evidence that he not only relies implicitly upon them as the normative foundation of his critique of modernity but valorizes and endorses them as models which prefigure future non-disciplinary, non-normalized forms of life and experience. As such, they underscore the lack of coherence in Foucault's critique of modern humanism and lend credence to the suspicion that he harbours the instincts of an irrationalist, nihilistic, and amoral "aesthetic modernist". In my opinion, however, while Foucault was clearly tempted by and sometimes made use of humanistic or vitalistic tropes of repression, against his better judgement, such an interpretation of the function performed by these figures and experiences in his works is inconsistent with his conception of critique. In my view, such

figures and experiences are of largely methodological and practical import to Foucault for the effects of distantiation, destabilization, and detachment from current ways of seeing, saying, and doing things that they can help to produce. Admittedly, there is a certain oscillation in his work between the temptation to valorize these experiences and their purely methodological use as vantage points from which to detach ourselves from current experiences and practices. The former seems to suggest a romantic call to return to past experiences prior to the modern one, whereas the latter strategy merely puts these figures to critical use in order to reveal the fabricated nature of our contemporary experience and to create a space for us to experiment with and create new experiences and practices. Foucault's tendency to resort to a certain lyricism of the premodern can also be explained as rhetorical and tactical. It is possible to view Foucault's resort to his own versions of the repressive hypothesis in relation to figures like Jouy, Beasse, Barbin, and Riviere as a tactical move consistent with the "rhetoric of disruption" he adopts in many of his works. As he admitted to one interviewer: "There are moments when such simplifications are necessary. Such a dualism is provisionally useful to change the scenery from time to time"¹⁵¹. Only the latter understandings of the tropics of repression in Foucault's work, however, are compatible with Foucault's critical *ethos* of a permanent "critical ontology of ourselves". Foucault also repeatedly rejected as a valid critical strategy the total rejection of modernity on behalf of some romanticized, archaic, pre-modern form of experience. Indeed, Foucault described as dangerous the "inclination to seek out some cheap form of archaism or some imaginary past forms of happiness that people did not, in fact, have at all [...] There is in this hatred of the present or the

¹⁵¹ Foucault, "The End of the Monarchy of Sex," p.149.

immediate past a dangerous tendency to invoke a completely mythical past." Secondly, he argues, "there is the problem raised by Habermas: if one abandons the work of Kant or Weber, for example, one runs the risk of lapsing into irrationality."¹⁵² He rejected, for example, the notion that by speaking on behalf of the insane, the criminal, or the sexually non-conforming that he placed himself on the "good side". One must, rather, resist "simple cheers (long live insanity, delinquency, sex)". If one must pass over to the other side, it is only "in order to extract oneself from the mechanisms which make two sides appear, in order to dissolve the false unity, the illusory 'nature' of this other side with which we have taken sides."¹⁵³ Furthermore, Foucault also acknowledged the need for constraints in any society in order to restrain the violent, the predatory, and the frenzied¹⁵⁴. "There is no question," he acknowledged, "that a society without restrictions is inconceivable."¹⁵⁵ What disturbed him was not so much the necessity of systems of constraint but the prospect that those upon which a given system is imposed might lose the capacity to change it. In light of these remarks and many others like them, as well as of the conception of critique Foucault articulated, we are compelled in my view to interpret his tendency to privilege certain subaltern qualities and figures as a tactical, methodological move to gain critical distance from the hegemonic experiences, knowledges, and practices he investigates¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵² Foucault, "An Ethics of Pleasure," p.268.

¹⁵³ Foucault, "The End of the Monarchy of Sex," p.150.

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, his comments in the interview, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," in EST, p.289.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.295.

¹⁵⁶ I am indebted to David Carroll's work on the critical function of aesthetic experience in Foucault's work for parts of the following argument. See: Carroll, Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, pp.xi-xviii, 1-22, 53-79, 107-129.

From the perspective of the critical ontology of ourselves, it pays to make use of such history and forms of experience in order to dramatize the costs and disturb the sense of necessity attached to current knowledges and modes of subjectification. Recall that Foucault's critical project seeks to grasp "the system of limits and exclusion which we practice without knowing it [...]" to make the cultural unconscious apparent." One technique he developed for doing so included exposing himself to the kinds of voices and experiences excluded by the hegemonic forms of modern experience in as unmediated a fashion as possible. "[T]he more I remove myself from my natural and habitual centers of gravity, the greater my chance of grasping the foundations I am obviously standing on. To that extent [...] any movement away from my original frame of reference is fruitful."¹⁵⁷ Such plebian figures and discourses as those examined by Foucault, David Carroll has argued, testify "by their mere existence to the reductive, coercive effects" of the systems of thought and practice in place today, and, by reminding us that things "weren't as necessary as all that," open up a space for experimentation with new categories, valuations, and practices.

For all its vestigial remnants of a humanist repressive hypothesis, for example, Foucault's treatment of the relationship between art, madness, and reason in the conclusion to Madness and Civilization already anticipates the critical function played by later figures like Beasse, Barbin, and Riviere in his work. In a broad cultural sense, Foucault valorizes madness as a kind of question, contest or challenge to reason, especially to the latter's privilege as the exclusive experience of the world. Madness and Civilization closes with an ambiguous yet hopeful discussion of art and madness. The

¹⁵⁷ Foucault, Michel, "Rituals of Exclusion," interview in FL, p.71.

psychiatrization of the experience of madness represents only one among a whole series of episodes in the totalization of modern experience by "the language of non-madness". This "monologue of reason" threatens to drive the experiences and world-disclosing languages of non-reason out of modern experience and culture altogether. But the experiences and languages of non-reason, including madness, do they not "transmit", he suggests, "to those able to receive [it], to Nietzsche and to Artaud, giving them for the first time an expression, *droit de cite*, and a hold on Western culture which makes possible all contestations, as well as *total* contestation?"¹⁵⁸ Thus, in the face of the "other madness" that is reason's totalization of experience Foucault poses the world-disclosing potentiality of the "lightening flashes" of non-reason, in particular of the corrosive and agonistic power of art and literature in the writings of such figures as Nietzsche, Artaud, Holderlin and Nerval. The monologue of reason is interrupted and broken, and the possibility for dialogue revived, in the world-disclosing power of the work of art, which stands along with madness, sometimes occupying the same space, among the chief forms of non-reason. "[B]y the madness which interrupts it," Foucault claims, "a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself."¹⁵⁹ It is upon such questioning that, *inter alia*, the memory of reason's history, forgetfulness and "perilous reversibility"¹⁶⁰ depend. Without acknowledging and facing up to this separation of reason from madness, on which reason insisted and then promptly forgot, the real history of reason will never come to light. This history of reason's suppression of the experience

¹⁵⁸ Foucault, MC, p.281.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.288.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.78.

of unreason is characterized by Foucault as a kind of violence, aggression, and paradoxically, *madness*. "We have yet to write the history of that other form of madness," Foucault writes, "by which men, in an act of sovereign reason, confine their neighbours, and communicate and recognize each other through the merciless language of non-madness"¹⁶¹. Only by unbracketing and remembering the original exchange and reciprocity between reason and madness can the "truth" of reason's "perilous reversibility" and contingency be retrieved, and the possibility for new relations with madness be opened up. The endangered experience of madness embodies a mode of "revealing" with the power to mount an ongoing guerrilla conflict against reason in order to forestall its complete totalization of experience. But here Foucault's enigmatic discussion of the questioning and "revealing" of which madness is capable breaks off. Yet the critical potential of art and literature as forms of the world-disclosing experience of *poesis* opposed to the "monologue of reason" continue to preoccupy him throughout the 1960s, manifest in his growing interest in avant garde literature¹⁶².

After Madness and Civilization, Foucault began to draw a more explicit connection between the excavation of "subjugated knowledge" and the release of critical effects. In 1976 he argued, for example: "it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledges [...] of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism does its work."¹⁶³ We see this kind of critical work being done by figures like Beasse, Riviere, and Barbin, especially. In the figure of Beasse we find a

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.ix.

¹⁶² Foucault discusses the importance of contemporary literature as a form of experience that is exterior to reason and philosophy in, for example, "On literature," interview in FL, p.118.

¹⁶³ Foucault, "Two Lectures," p.82.

recalcitrant form of life and experience resistant to adjustment to the rhythms, discipline, and responsibility of capitalist wage labour. The irrepressible exuberance and insolence displayed by this vagabond and petty-thief in the face of the law makes it clear that we are in the presence not so much of an offender who has committed a crime but of the quality of "indiscipline" which disciplinary society seeks to root out and neutralize. Furthermore, Foucault does not portray him as a victim but, rather, as an antagonist at the centre of a confrontation between two forms of experience. Against the disciplinary imperatives of having a home, a station, a fixed identity, and a master, Beasse's cheerful avowal of stationless, masterless liberty "reinscribed indiscipline among the fundamental rights"¹⁶⁴. Against the self-evidentness of work, thrift, and responsibility as the conditions of liberty, prosperity, and well-being taken for granted in modern disciplinary society, Beasse confronts us with a different experience: "the lack of a home as vagabondage, the lack of a master as independence, the lack of work as freedom, the lack of a time-table as the fullness of days and nights"¹⁶⁵. From the vantage point of an experience like Beasse's, exterior to the kind of disciplinary society and individuality examined in Chapter Five, and free of the normalizing discourse of criminology and the hand-wringing of social workers, Foucault offers us a unique critical perspective on modern society.

Foucault's remarks on the case of Riviere, as we saw, appear to endorse both a nostalgic and romantic conception of criminality and a deplorable aestheticist tendency to privilege beauty over human suffering and solidarity. Without question, Riviere

¹⁶⁴ Foucault, DP, p.290.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.290.

exercised a certain sway over Foucault. Yet he rejected explicitly any romantic "simple cheers" on behalf of criminality. And as to Foucault's enthusiasm for the "beauty" of Riviere's memoir, another interpretation is available besides the obvious aestheticist one offered by his critics. The beauty of Riviere's case, I would argue, stems from its essential undecidability and the, albeit bizarre, critical distance it provides on the normalizing discourses of the human sciences. The beauty Foucault ascribes to Riviere's voice and the memoir the latter composed stems not from some aesthetic charge Foucault received from it but, rather, from its ability to escape every theoretical, juridical, medical, and psychiatric discourse which sought to get a handle on it, and the way in which, when juxtaposed with those same discourses, the memoir reveals the discursive battleground of the putatively serene pursuit of the human sciences. It offers, as David Carroll argues, "a privileged vantage point from which to analyze the forms of discursive practice that do not measure up to it."¹⁶⁶ Foucault himself emphasized the critical gains for the analysis of discourse made by this method of disinterring subjugated knowledges and experiences and allowing them to speak in their own voices. In doing so, he claimed, we are able to "draw a map, so to speak, of those combats, to reconstruct these confrontations and battles, to rediscover the interaction of those discourses as weapons of attack and defense in the relations of power and knowledge."¹⁶⁷ Riviere's memoir and all the expert, learned discourses built around it "give us the key to the relations of power, domination, and conflict within which discourses emerge and function, and hence provide material for a potential analysis of discourse [...] which may be both tactical and political"¹⁶⁸.

¹⁶⁶ Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida*, p.109.

¹⁶⁷ Foucault, *IPR*, p.xi.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.xi-xii.

Furthermore, the reverence and silence adopted by Foucault in relation to Riviere's text speaks to his overarching desire not to reproduce the discursive reductions imposed by medico-legal attempts to classify, explain, or interpret Riviere's experience. "As to Riviere's discourse, we decided not to interpret it [...] If we had done so, we should have brought it within the power relation whose reductive effect we wished to show, and we ourselves should have fallen into the trap it set."¹⁶⁹ David Carroll describes Foucault's seemingly spellbound reverence for Riviere's voice in the following way:

"Being subjugated by parricide, by this extreme form of transgression [...] is to occupy a position that is at the limits, or beyond the limits, of the modern system of punishment and the discourses supporting and emerging from it."¹⁷⁰

According to Carroll such a position:

"has all the characteristics of a *disinterested* perspective from which the struggles and battles of power-knowledge can supposedly be understood and described as they are, without distortion - a perspective from which the attempts of all the other discourses in the dossier to explain the memoir and the acts it recounts can be seen as futile attempts to control and diminish the violent, disruptive force of the memoir, to conceptualize its extra-conceptual beauty."¹⁷¹

If Foucault was willing to adopt the stance of Riviere to some extent, to let him speak for himself, it was because this was the only way Foucault saw to achieve the necessary distance from all other interpretive stances and avoid the reductions and falsifications which inevitably accompany them. The best strategy for liberating the disruptive and critical power of Riviere's discourse, then, was to interpret it as little as possible. We might rightly wonder about the potential costs of this kind of strategy, or at the impossibility of Foucault's desire to offer a non-interpretive interpretation of the

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.xiii.

¹⁷⁰ Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida*, pp.126-127.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.127.

significance of Riviere, but our concern here is with explaining the function of such cases in the overall schema of Foucault's critical *ethos* as against those who impose a humanistic interpretation upon them.

- The case of Barbin's "indeterminate" physiognomy and discourse appears to harbour a similar power to unleash disruptive critical effects upon modern knowledge and practice in the field of sex. Against the physicians' "quest for identity" and the "true sex" of the individual, Barbin's confounding indeterminate anatomy and voice "baffles every possible attempt to make an identification"¹⁷². Foucault juxtaposes Barbin's memoir with a dossier of medical and legal documents which accompanied the case once her indeterminate status came to the attention of the authorities. The former, which recounts the "strange, secret loves" and "furtive, nameless pleasures" enjoyed by Barbin and those around her in the convent and evokes the "happy limbo of a non-identity,"
- offers a critical stand-point from which to launch this challenge: "Do we *truly* need a *true* sex?"¹⁷³. The latter demonstrate the reductive nature of medical attempts to specify Barbin's "true sex" and the coercive effects of a medico-legal system which obliged her to assume, in dress, conduct, and rights and responsibilities, the identity of only *one* sex¹⁷⁴. Barbin's case both draws attention to the costs of an experience of sex in which we are forced to produce the truth of our *one* true sex, while at the same time reminding us that such demands were not always made and that the possibility exists for an experience of sex which doctors and judges would *not* be empowered to nullify; in short, one in which what mattered was not one's "true sex" but simply "the reality of the body

¹⁷² Foucault, "Introduction," in HB, p.xii.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.vii.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.119-151.

and the intensity of its pleasures"¹⁷⁵. The image and promise of sexual limbo, of a civilization in which what counts is "bodies and pleasures," constitute vantage points from which the modern bio-political deployment of sexuality can be critically assessed.

Far from constituting privileged models of conduct and experience prefiguring some future condition of unfettered freedom, then, figures like Beasse, Jouy, Riviere, and Barbin are deployed by Foucault in order to achieve the critical effects he desires. By emphasizing the violence, exclusions, and costs of our current practices of knowledge and power he seeks to neutralize the legitimacy and acceptability attached to the latter. By allowing marginalized experiences and forms of life exterior to the dominant one to speak in their own voices without undue commentary and interpretation, adopting their perspective in a sense, Foucault tries to gain the maximum distance from the dominant form of experience. Foucault seeks to reveal the "cultural unconscious" or the foundations of our current systems of thought and practice. Finally, by disinterring these subjugated knowledges and experiences Foucault makes recourse to a history which reminds us that things have been made, that they are not as necessary, natural, or inevitable as all that, and that they can be unmade. The point is not for all to aspire to insanity, criminality, unrestrained violence, or hermaphroditism but, rather, to detach ourselves from our current ways of doing things in order to create a space for freedom to experiment with becoming something other than what we are. Viewed from this perspective, Foucault's effort to liberate the subjugated voices and experiences of the insane, the criminal, and the indeterminate must be seen as *logically consistent* with his

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.vii.

methodology of detachment and the critical ontology of ourselves *rather* than a celebration of or lapse into irrationality.

iii) An Aesthetics of Existence: Care of the Self and Care for others

Thus far we have stressed the theoretical and what we might call the theoretico-political aspects of Foucault's conception of critique as a critical ontology of ourselves. Putting this work done on ourselves and our knowledge to "the test of reality," however, also obliges us to adopt and to engage in practices consistent with a new relationship to ourselves, as individual subjects of what we know, say, and do. A relationship to the self consistent with the critical ontology of ourselves, one which seeks to reveal the limits imposed upon us as subjects as well as the possibility for going beyond them, would take the form, Foucault argues, of a certain kind of asceticism. This asceticism would take the form not of a morality of renunciation but, rather, of "an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being."¹⁷⁶ In other words, Foucault contends that the critical ontology of ourselves entails a particular form of *ethics*, a certain ethical relation to oneself and one's being. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an examination of Foucault's late work on ethics in the final two published volumes of his history of sexuality, The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, as *consistent* with the principles of the critical ontology of ourselves elaborated in his previous works.

In the course of the last few years of his life Foucault began to articulate an approach to ethics which would be consistent with the theoretical and political

¹⁷⁶ Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," p.282.

imperatives of his *ethos* of critique. In his last writings and interviews he dubbed this ethical and critical relation to the self an "aesthetics of existence," in which were combined the serious play of the nineteenth-century dandy and the rigorous exercises entailed in the ancient "care of the self" practiced by the Stoics and early Christians. As we shall see, Foucault's *ethos* of critique demanded that the analysis of limits and experimentation with going beyond them be put to the test in the real by being applied not only to the unities of knowledge and hegemonic practices but to *oneself* as a subject of knowledge and practice. Such a critical relation to oneself promised to reveal the web of contingent events and relations by which one becomes what one has become, thereby loosening the sense of necessity and inevitability attached to what one is and creating a space for freedom to transform oneself. The kind of "care of the self" endorsed by Foucault might be called the care of *contingent* self. In Foucault's view, by directing this historico-critical attitude inward, we can foster a new kind of ethical relationship with ourselves and our identity. At the same, Foucault wagered that a certain kind of ethical care of the contingent self might also engender and foster new relations of care and concern for others as well. In other words, rather than inviting the "inhumane" into our relations with others, as so many anti-humanists like him are accused of doing, Foucault's anti-humanist critical ontology of ourselves was intended to foster more humane and caring intersubjective relations.

Foucault's interest in models of ethical self-fashioning was sparked by, *inter alia*, his encounter with the *epimeleia heautou*, or "the care of self," practiced by the ancient Greeks. Late in his career, Foucault turned to questions of a personal ethics of existence

in response to the waning of "the idea of a morality as obedience to a code of rules."¹⁷⁷ "To this absence of a morality," he insisted, "one responds, or must respond, with research which is that of an aesthetics of existence."¹⁷⁸ The Greco-Roman ethics of the care of the self entailed a relation to the self as an object of one's own ethical self-fashioning, and a set of quasi-spiritual exercises or "technologies of the self" through which one worked on oneself in order to fashion or transform oneself into an ethical subject, a work of art or object of beauty, to be admired by others, oneself, or posterity¹⁷⁹. The ancient Greeks practiced a certain "art of existence" in which one constituted oneself as an ethical subject, as opposed to being guided strictly by a universal code of morality, through the daily observance of ascetics. According to Foucault, it was this ethic of the care of the self which Christianity eventually displaced with the concept of moral behavior as adherence to a universal code of conduct. Prior to the universalization of the Christian code of morality, Foucault argues that ethical behaviour was comprised of a series of deliberate, carefully modulated practices in which the individual engaged in order to work on, adjust, moderate, or exhibit certain aspects of the self. To the extent that the Christian code of universal morality is today in question, Foucault argues, the ethics of the care of the self appears once more on the horizon of possibilities for alternative approaches to ethical conduct, without, we should add, the expectation that such codes will ever entirely disappear¹⁸⁰. Foucault does not suggest that

¹⁷⁷ Michel, "An Aesthetics of Existence," p.311.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.311.

¹⁷⁹ See: Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Volume 3*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York: Random House, 1986, pp.39-68; and Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," pp. 281-301.

¹⁸⁰ Foucault, "An Aesthetics of Existence," p.311.

such an ethics could or should replace code morality altogether, and only ever presented his ethics of self-fashioning as one possible response to the breakdown of congealed moral concepts and categories, to prevent a lapse into irrationality and barbarism.

While Foucault's turn to the idea of the care of self has been seen by some as a significant break from his genealogical histories¹⁸¹, particularly in light of the proclamation of "the death of the subject," such a shift follows quite sensibly from them. A certain ethics of the care of the self follows from an acknowledgement of the essential *contingency* of identities and subject positions revealed in his previous studies. By revealing the artifice, contingency, and lack of necessity lying behind every identity, including one's own, Foucault's genealogies serve to open up a space for experimentation with new identities and social relations. "From the idea that the self is not given to us," he argues, "i think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art."¹⁸² Foucault's ethic is one of the care of the *contingent* self, which demands that one engage in practices or employ certain "technologies of the self" which both reveal the conditions under which one's identity has been produced as well as make possible one's self-transformation and overcoming.

Foucault held out as examples of possible technologies of the self the practices of philosophical and genealogical inquiry, writing, and sex. For an intellectual, he argued, the ethic of the care of the self demands that one engage in practices which disturb, render less comfortable, and detach oneself from what one thinks. "[W]hat can the ethics

¹⁸¹ Best and Kellner, for example, describe Foucault's shift to the question of ethics as an "abrupt and unmediated" one in which his previous political positions are left behind. See: Best, Steven, and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, New York: Guilford, 1991, p.69.

¹⁸² Foucault, quoted in Wolin, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," p.191.

of an intellectual be," he insisted, "[...] if not ['detaching yourself from yourself']: to render oneself permanently capable of self-detachment..."¹⁸³ Intellectual work constitutes a certain care or practice of the self in which one undertakes to think something *other* than what one has thought before. Genealogical inquiry and the practice of writing were considered by Foucault to rank among the most potent technologies of the self through which to pursue intellectual self-transformation. Genealogical analyses of history not only destabilize identities and objectivities, thereby revealing the lack of necessity at the root of things, but produce dissociative effects on the practitioner of genealogy as well. It is this sense that, as Thomas Flynn notes, Foucault's genealogical critique constituted a practice of ethical *parrhesia* reminiscent of the ancient Sophists, Stoics, and Cynics, one in which, in the pursuit and telling of difficult truths, one changed oneself by altering one's own self-perception¹⁸⁴. In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault argues that the purpose of history and genealogy in relation to the self, "is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeleand to which metaphysicians promise a return; it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us."¹⁸⁵ In Foucault's work, as David Halperin observes, the study of history "becomes a spiritual exercise when, through it, the self discovers its past as that which dwells within its present and thereby comes to recognize in itself its own alterity to itself."¹⁸⁶ The dissociating and

¹⁸³ Foucault, "The Concern for Truth," p.303.

¹⁸⁴ See: Flynn, Thomas, "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the College de France," in Bernauer, James, and David Rasmussen, eds., The Final Foucault, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988, p.102.

¹⁸⁵ Foucault, Michel, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Foucault, Michel, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, Donald Bouchard, ed., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977, p.162. Hereinafter cited as LCMP.

¹⁸⁶ Halperin, Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography, p.105.

desubjectivizing experience of alterity within oneself erodes the sense of necessity attached to what one is and creates a space for experimentation. As a practice of the self, genealogical inquiry helps us to "separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think ..." ¹⁸⁷.

In the 1960s, Foucault came to appreciate the possibilities of writing for the transformation and outright effacement of the self, inspired by literary figures like Blanchot, Bataille, Klossowski, and Roussel ¹⁸⁸. The avant-garde styles and writings of Roussel and Blanchot held out the possibility for a transgressive, literary self-overcoming in the practice of writing itself, a radical alternative to the relation to and experience of the self as the subject of reason. Meanwhile, in the sheer transgressive ferocity of Bataille's celebration of eroticism, violence, sacrifice, and excess, and in the force and confounding "beauty" of Riviere's "astonishing" memoir, Foucault discovered the world-disclosing, and world-shattering, power of the "limit-experience" and the poetic languages of non-reason. His writings in this period explored the critical potential of transgressive writing as a challenge to both the metaphysics of subjectivity and the totalized "enframing" of the world by reason. In the opening paragraphs of his 1966 essay, "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside", Foucault writes:

¹⁸⁷ Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," pp.315-16.

¹⁸⁸ See: Foucault, Michel, "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought From Outside," in Blanchot, Maurice, and Michel Foucault, Foucault/Blanchot, trans. Brian Massumi and Jeffrey Mehlman, New York: Urzone, 1987, pp. 9-58; Foucault, Michel, "Language to Infinity," in Foucault, LCMP, pp.53-67; and Foucault, Michel, "What is an Author?," in Foucault, LCMP, pp.113-138. The critical function of literature in Foucault's work in relation to reason, philosophy, and subjectivity is discussed at length in the following: Carroll, Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, pp.53-79, 107-129; and Rajchman, Michel Foucault, The Freedom of Philosophy, pp. 9-41.

"The reason it is now so necessary to think through fiction - while in the past it was a matter of thinking the truth - is that "I speak" runs counter to "I think". "I think" led to the indubitable certainty of the "I" and its existence; "I speak," on the other hand, distances, disperses, effaces that existence and lets only its empty emplacement appear. Thought about thought, an entire tradition wider than philosophy, has taught us that thought leads us to the deepest interiority. Speech about speech leads us, by way of literature as well as perhaps other paths, to the outside in which the speaking subject disappears. No doubt that is why Western thought took so long to think the being of language: as if it had a premonition of the danger that the naked experience of language poses for the self-evidence of "I think".¹⁸⁹

Foucault saw in the transgressive style of Roussel and the "thought from outside" in Blanchot a language which questions the self-evidence of the "I think" of the metaphysics of subjectivity, one which, thanks to the emergence of structuralism, ethnography, and psychoanalysis, constitutes "an experience now being heralded at diverse points in culture."¹⁹⁰ Writing constituted a practice which, with respect to identity and subjectivity, entailed a certain degree of risk. Upon embarking on a new project, the writer risks transforming not only the thinking of others, but his or her own as well. "Someone who is a writer," Foucault argued, "is not simply doing his work in his books, [...] his major work is, in the end, himself in the process of writing his books."¹⁹¹ The aesthetics of existence demands that one continuously risk oneself and one's thinking in practices such as writing. Foucault himself was an enthusiast of such literary risk-taking as a practice of the self. "I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face," he declared in The Archaeology of Knowledge, clearly anticipating the distinction he would later draw between an ethics of the care of the self and the moral coding of conduct: "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us

¹⁸⁹ Foucault, "Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside," pp.12-13.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.15.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in: Macey, David, The Lives of Michel Foucault, London: Vintage, 1993, p.xiii.

their morality when we write."¹⁹² Often viewed as evidence of lack of rigour or the failure of his various projects, Foucault's work took the protean, discontinuous form it did because he worked, in part, as a means of working on and going beyond himself.

Apart from philosophy, genealogy and writing, Foucault also identified sex as a field for transformative practices consistent with the ethic of the care of the contingent self. In the field of sex Foucault endorsed experimentation with new practices which heighten and multiply the dissociative and desubjectivizing effects of intense pleasure¹⁹³. In the practices of S/M, for example, one not only attempts to desexualize pleasure by creating new sites for it on or within the body, but experiments with and risks a certain self-effacement as well¹⁹⁴. A desire to experiment with identity and non-identity also explains the appeal of anonymous bath-house sex for Foucault as well, where "you stop being imprisoned inside your own face, your own past, your own identity," and in which "it's not the assertion of identity that's important; it's the assertion of non-identity"¹⁹⁵. Foucault's "queer" ethics and politics called not for a celebration of gayness as a code of existence but demanded, rather, the pursuit of "relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Foucault, AK, p.17.

¹⁹³ Foucault often discussed his interest in intense pleasures in which one's sense of self is lost, and relates these experiences to a kind of death. See, for example: Foucault, Michel, "Michel Foucault: An Interview With Stephen Riggins," interview in EST, p.129.

¹⁹⁴ Foucault's interest in the dissociating and desubjectivizing possibilities of S/M are discussed in: Foucault, Michel, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," interview in EST, pp.164-70; Halperin, Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography, pp.91-7; and, more salaciously and controversially, in Miller, James, The Passion of Michel Foucault, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992, pp.259-73.

¹⁹⁵ Quoted in: Macey, op.cit., p.xv.

¹⁹⁶ Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," p.166.

In these examples from Foucault's own attempts to engage in an aesthetics of existence, one can see how an ethics of the care of the self can take the form of a relationship to oneself that is ever cognizant of its fragility and contingency, and in which one seeks one's own self-overcoming. Foucault's call to re-examine the ethics of the care of the self has been the subject of considerable debate, however. His interest in Greco-Roman ethics has been criticized by some feminist theorists, for example, as the unfortunate revival of an ethics of style tainted by elitism and androcentrism¹⁹⁷. However, although Foucault certainly took inspiration from Greek ethics as an alternative to the Christian universal coding of moral conduct, he was not at all romantic or nostalgic about ethical and social life in Antiquity, and was more than well aware that "[t]heir sexual ethics, [...] rested on a very harsh system of inequalities and constraints (particularly in connection with women and slaves)..."¹⁹⁸. Furthermore, charges of an elitist failure to recognize the strategic importance of the formation and consolidation of oppositional identities¹⁹⁹ stick only if Foucault's experimental ethics of the self constitutes a universalizing ethical programme intended to supplant more conventional ethical-political practice altogether. But Foucault only ever offered the aesthetics of existence as one possible tool for thawing out congealed identities and codes, and always

¹⁹⁷ For an overview of feminist appropriations and critiques of Foucault see: Sawicki, Jana, Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body, New York: Routledge, 1991, pp.95-109.

¹⁹⁸ Foucault, UP, p.253. Foucault acknowledges the unsavoury aspects of ancient Greek culture, especially the treatment of women and slaves, in a number of other writings and interviews, including: Michel Foucault, "The Return of Morality," interview in FL, p.319; Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: Overview of a Work in Progress," Afterword in Dreyfus, Hubert and Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics, Second Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, p.232; and Foucault, UP, pp.69-77, 82-86, 146-151, 215-225.

¹⁹⁹ Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault, pp.106-107.

acknowledged the need to excavate subjugated knowledges, experiences, and identities, including those of women.

Foucault's call for an "aesthetics of existence" has also been the subject of intense criticism on the part of neo-Kantians like Habermas and Wolin, as a result of the alleged dangers inherent in attempts to blend ethics and politics with aesthetics. The danger inherent in an ethics of self-fashioning such as Foucault's, so the argument goes, is that it encourages a deficit of care for others and sanctions potentially imperious, self-aggrandizing practices of the self, including murder, in the individual's pursuit of his or her own aesthetic self-perfection²⁰⁰. As such, the ethics of self-fashioning signals not a new form of ethical practice but the absence or demise of ethics altogether. As I argue, however, while critics like Wolin rightly warn us of the dangers of a certain model of self-aggrandizing aestheticism, this is not the model of self-fashioning on which Foucault's aesthetics of existence is based, nor to which it inevitably leads. Furthermore, I argue that the model for the care of the self endorsed by Foucault may well serve as a basis for cultivating care and concern for others.

Jurgen Habermas initially registered ethical concerns about French poststructuralists, including Foucault, when, in his landmark piece on Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment, he sketched their affinities with the "nihilistic *dark* writers of the bourgeoisie," particularly de Sade and Nietzsche²⁰¹. Unable to accept the radical critique of reason and societal modernization, Habermas diagnoses them all as

²⁰⁰ See, for example: Wolin, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," pp.192-193.

²⁰¹ Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment," p.13. Emphasis in original.

carriers of the contagion of Nietzsche's "aesthetic modernism"²⁰², which he equates with irrationalism, nihilism, and immoralism²⁰³. Richard Wolin and Allan Megill also assimilate Foucault's work to Nietzsche's "pan-aestheticism," in which the notion of the aesthetic as a separate and autonomous sphere of activity is rejected in favour of aestheticizing the whole of existence²⁰⁴. Nietzsche's imperial dedifferentiation of aesthetic and social experience leads necessarily to what Wolin calls "aesthetic decisionism," the tendency to aestheticize and instrumentalize others as material for one's own self-fashioning, with disturbing implications for human empathy, mutuality, and solidarity²⁰⁵. The pan-aestheticist position, he claims, gives *carte blanche* to "forms of life that are manipulative and predatory"²⁰⁶. Thus, Foucault's ethics of self-fashioning "favors either an attitude of narcissistic self-absorption or one of outwardly directed,

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp.13, 23-28. Habermas's later writings on Foucault continue to make this point, though the putative affinities between Foucault and aesthetic modernists such as the French Symbolist, Tailhade, or the Italian Futurist, Marinetti, are never convincingly demonstrated. Rather, Habermas finds it sufficient to trace all aestheticizing impulses back to Nietzsche's putatively nihilistic rejection of modernity, supposing that such a pedigree speaks for itself. See, for example, Habermas, "Some Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again," p.275. For a more nuanced and cautious approach to the question of aesthetics and politics see Martin Jay's "The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology: Or What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?" in Jay, *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Criticism*, New York: Routledge, 1993, pp.71-83.

²⁰³ Habermas' interpretation of Nietzsche, as well as his view of the ethical and political implications of his work, have been challenged on numerous occasions. See, for example: Nehamas, Alexander, "Nietzsche, aestheticism, modernity," in Magnus, Bernd and Kathleen M. Higgins, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.223-251; and Strong, Tracy, "Nietzsche's political misappropriation," in Magnus and Higgins, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, pp.119-147.

²⁰⁴ See: Wolin, Richard, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," *Telos*, 67, pp.73-74; and Megill, Allan, *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, pp.2-4.

²⁰⁵ Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," pp.71-86; and Wolin, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," pp.192.

²⁰⁶ Wolin, "Foucault's Aesthetic Decisionism," p.84.

aggressive self-aggrandizement."²⁰⁷ Similarly, while generally more cautious in his conclusions regarding the ethical and political implications of post-structuralist aesthetic theory, Martin Jay warns that Nietzschean preoccupations with creative self-fashioning recall "the elite and narcissistic world of the nineteenth-century dandy, who deliberately rejected the telos of a natural self in favour of a life of contrived artifice, and did so with minimal regard for its impact on others"²⁰⁸. Finally, in spite of the qualified esteem in which he holds Foucault's work, Charles Taylor also expresses grave reservations, seeing in his late interest in the ethics of self-fashioning a disturbing celebration of "unrestrained, utterly self-related freedom."²⁰⁹ Ultimately, his critics warn, by aestheticizing ethics, turning inward to the care of the self, and forswearing resort to universal conceptions of reason, justice, human nature, or the Good, Foucault risks underwriting the ethically and politically noxious formula of might-makes-right against any claims for human mutuality, respect, or concern for others.

Criticisms such as these can be met with a number of arguments. Firstly, critics like Habermas, Wolin, and Megill reproach Foucault's alleged pan-aestheticism, in which the aesthetic experience swallows all other experiences whole, including the rational and ethical. Such an interpretation of the aesthetic components of Foucault's work is questionable, however. As a general interpretation of Foucault, it engages in a certain

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.85. While somewhat more sanguine about the "therapeutic" benefits of work such as Foucault's, Megill, too, stresses the "risks" and "dangers" alleged to inhere in attempts to blend politics and aesthetics: Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, pp.183-256, 339-352.

²⁰⁸ Jay, "The Morals of Genealogy," p.45.

²⁰⁹ Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, p.489.

overinflation of its own²¹⁰. Pan-aestheticist interpretations of Foucault are belied by statements demonstrating clearly that he did not see the social field as *merely* discursive or textual material for aesthetic manipulation but, rather, as "a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, [and] moral and philanthropic propositions [...]"²¹¹ both inhabited by and imposed upon thinking, acting, and desiring subjects who are made no less *real* by the fact that they have been *fabricated* by a web of contingent relations and events²¹². As David Carroll's work indicated above, Foucault's interest in the aesthetic experience stemmed from his interest in its "paraesthetic" use for the alternative, transgressive perspective they provide on the historical-political field, as opposed to seeing aesthetic experience as that after which all else must be modeled²¹³.

Secondly, Habermas' and Wolin's procrustean reading of Foucault through the lens of neo-Kantianism forces his attempts at a fruitful intersection of aesthetic and ethical experience onto a hostile interpretive grid. The Kantian perspective restricts the possibilities for meetings of these allegedly distinct realms to scenarios of cruel aestheticism. Such a narrow and restricted view of the field on which the aesthetic and

²¹⁰ I am indebted to the following on this point: Bennett, Jane, "How Is It, Then, That We Still Remain Barbarians? Foucault, Schiller and the Aestheticization of Ethics," *Political Theory*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 1996, pp.657-664; and Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida*, pp.189, fn.2.

²¹¹ Quoted in Best and Kellner, *Postmodern Theory*, p.27.

²¹² In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, Foucault stresses that while the modern subject is the product of certain disciplinary operations, the disciplinary individual remains "a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power". The fact that the individual is produced by power does not mean therefore that the fabricated individual is nothing; rather, such individuals are part of the reality that power produces. Foucault, DP, p.194.

²¹³ Carroll, *Paraesthetics: Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida*, pp.xv-xviii.

the social come into play, which sees only an illegitimate and dangerous form of invasion or colonization by the aesthetic, is contestable. The neo-Kantians' view is justified only if such distinct realms or domains of experience, each with its own logic and set of values, in fact exist. But, as Jane Bennett has recently argued, "that 'if' is precisely one of the issues between them and Foucault that is suppressed by their redescriptions of his project."²¹⁴ Grounds for resisting the neo-Kantian critique are supplied by numerous theorists who have broadened the possibilities for a more fruitful intersection between the aesthetic and the ethical-political, including Schiller, Arendt, and Lyotard²¹⁵. Martin Jay, by no means an enthusiast of Foucault, concedes that such "thoughts on the potentially benign links between aesthetic judgement and politics serve as useful reminders that not every variant of the aestheticization of politics must lead to the same dismal end."²¹⁶

Lastly, the expectation of violence which attends the neo-Kantian perspective on every flirtation of the ethical with the aesthetic realm is amplified in its response to an ethics based on *self-fashioning* such as Foucault's. Wolin equates the aestheticization of the self with the imperious, narcissistic, and amoral impulses of the Symbolist poet, Tailhade, who once remarked: "What do the victims matter if the gesture is beautiful?"²¹⁷ Again, however, there is no justification for restricting the field of possible modes of self-fashioning to this obviously anti-social one. The recent work of theorists like Rorty,

²¹⁴ Bennett, "How Is It, Then, That We Still Remain Barbarians?," p.658.

²¹⁵ Jay, "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology," pp.71-83. It is worth noting that Jay does not mention Foucault in this respect, having qualms about the implications of Foucault's late emphasis on the practice of self-fashioning, which he registers in his, "The Morals of Genealogy," p.45.

²¹⁶ Jay, "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology," pp.82-83.

²¹⁷ Quoted in Jay, "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology," p.73.

Connolly, Nehamas, Bennett, and Lysaker²¹⁸, to name a few, demonstrates that there are various modes of self-fashioning available, some of which militate against aggressive, aestheticist narcissism and show potential as means to cultivate and expand relations of care, concern, and ethical responsiveness to others. In my opinion, Foucault's aesthetics of existence constitutes a mode of self-fashioning distinct from the very mode about which Wolin rightly warns us. Rather than endorsing a narcissistic, imperious, and self-aggrandizing form of self-fashioning, the aesthetics of existence is informed by and actively cultivates a keen awareness of the *fragility* and *contingency* of the self, and of the web-work of relations and contingencies underlying every identity, which militates against the kind of cruelty and violence which can flow from attempts to consolidate, glorify, and transcendentalize one's identity. The aesthetics of existence, as William Connolly contends, is not "a recipe of narcissistic individualism; it is a formula of self-aestheticization through a mode of individualization that works against vengeful, narcissistic demands to atomize or transcendentalize what you have become."²¹⁹

Reductive readings like Wolin's routinely suppress the fact that there is more than one model of self-creation available to self-fashioning agents. While they attack Foucault's aesthetics of existence as proof of the moral deficit of postmodernism, the model of self-fashioning and aestheticized violence against which Wolin and Jay rightly warn has much more in common with that of the "strong poet," the privileged cultural

²¹⁸ See: Lysaker, John, "The shape of selves to come: Rorty on self-creation," Philosophy & Social Criticism, vol. 22, no. 33, pp.39-74; Nehamas, Alexander, The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections From Plato to Foucault, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; and Rorty, Richard, Contingency, irony, and solidarity, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

²¹⁹ Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, p.70.

hero of Harold Bloom and Richard Rorty²²⁰. According to the latter, the strong poet is motivated to create new words, vocabularies, and self-descriptions by a peculiar set of fears and imperatives. The strong poet is racked by what Bloom calls "the anxiety of influence," or the "horror of finding himself to be only a copy or a replica"²²¹. His is a fear of failing to create anything new in the world, new words, or a new language, and of failing to establish a unique "I" against the "blind impress" of history, culture, and society²²². The strong poet's view of personal as well as aesthetic failure consists in accepting someone else's description of the world and himself, and in executing in life "a previously prepared program [...] elegant variations on previously written poems."²²³ Success in strong poetry is marked by the individual's ability to recognize himself as his own creation, by the ability to look back upon what he has become and say "thus I willed it"²²⁴. Rorty's analysis of the strong poet emphasizes the edifying potential of a certain kind of practice of strong poetry, such as that pursued by "ironist" thinkers like Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, which has the power to radically transform our cultural inheritance by furnishing us with whole new vocabularies and metaphors with which to understand and redescribe ourselves.

The strong poet's model of self-fashioning, however, poses problems in terms of the question of social solidarity and concern for others. Almost inevitably, Rorty concedes, the obsessiveness and self-absorption with which the strong poet struggles

²²⁰ There is an irony here. While Foucault's thoughts on self-fashioning have become a lightning-rod for criticism of all sorts, Rorty's writings on the same subject have, as one commentator recently pointed out in this journal, been largely ignored. See: Lysaker, "The shape of selves to come," pp.40-41.

²²¹ Bloom is quoted in Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, p.24.

²²² *Ibid.*, pp.23-25.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p.28.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.29.

against the world's "blind impress" and attempts to elaborate a singular "life-poem" lend a callous imperiousness to her relations with others, to the point where the latter come to be perceived as little more than raw material for her own aesthetic self-perfection²²⁵. The strong poet is compelled by this anxiety to create and, in many cases exhibit to others, a distinctive and unique identity. Oftentimes, she cannot confirm her singularity, cannot know that she has achieved her own aesthetic self-perfection, without acting in the world, carrying out deeds and creating new words or self-descriptions which can be recognized for their singularity. While the strong poet may be extremely sensitive to certain experiences and sensations, she is also given to indifference and incuriosity in regard to the costs and suffering her self-creative activities sometimes impose on others²²⁶. In this respect, she is capable of acts of the utmost cruelty or callousness. Along with Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger, Rorty's gallery of strong poets is filled with "sensitive killers, cruel aesthetes, and pitiless poets,"²²⁷ including Dickens' Skimpole and Nabokov's Humbert Humbert. As a result, Rorty insists that the practice of strong poetry must be limited to solitary activities restricted to the private sphere, such as reading or writing ironist theory.

From this brief description, some of the major differences between strong poetry and the aesthetics of existence as models of ethical and aesthetic self-fashioning are readily apparent. While each treats the subject as the object of its own aesthetic and ethical work, there is a considerable gap between them. This gap is opened up by the imperious, self-transcendentalizing ambition of the strong poet versus the self-critical

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.159.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.141-168.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.157.

and unceasing practice of becoming *other than what one is* at the centre of Foucault's aesthetics of existence. Whereas the former seeks to transcend the "blind impress" of conditions frustrating his or her ambition to create a *glorious* self, the latter engages in the kinds of practices which reveal the fragility and contingency of the self and its identity, and promote the desubjectivization, destabilization, and even effacement of the self. Just as Foucault's philosophical ethos calls for an unceasing critique of the present, so his aesthetic and ethical model of self-creation calls for the subject's continual scrutiny of and experimentation on itself. Unlike the strong poet's bid for transcendence, which cultivates an identity which is both glorious and *terminal*, the practitioner of the aesthetics of existence is obliged to continually explore the contingent relations and events by which she has become what she is, as well as the possibilities for *becoming something else*. Adherence to an aesthetics of the self requires that she eschew efforts to consolidate and freeze her identity around some idealized, naturalized, terminal self-sameness.

The gap between strong poetry and the aesthetics of existence is widened further when we examine these modes of self-fashioning in relation to the problem of cruelty. The cruel indifference of the strong poet seems to be invited by the aestheticization of others as *merely* contingent artifacts and material. Given that Rorty's version of strong poetry resembles so closely the cruel aestheticism invoked by Wolin and Jay, it is not surprising that they agree on the dangerous implications of self-creation for intersubjective relations or public life. In so far as his model of strong poetry harbors an inherent capacity for incuriosity and cruelty in relation to others, Rorty recommends that

its practice be strictly limited to the edifying activities of the individual in private life²²⁸. While Rorty agrees that human solidarity depends in great measure on the presence of intersubjective care and curiosity, especially in relation to one another's respective pain and suffering, his own model of strong poetry prevents him from seeing how an ethic of self-fashioning can engender them. On the other hand, Foucault's practitioner of the aesthetics of existence is so attuned to the contingent, aesthetic elements in the *self* that any effort to transcendentalize her identity, particularly at the expense of others, would conflict with her ontological awareness of her own contingency and fragility as a fabricated unity. The imperiousness and callousness of the strong poet stems largely from the ambition she harbours for recognition, and the consolidation and transcendentalization of a glorious identity. In the practice of an aesthetics of existence, Foucault wagers such ambitions would be neutralized by the acknowledgement of the contingency and instability of all identities and subject positions, including one's own. The contingent, relational, and critically reflexive nature of the self that is achieved under the aesthetics of existence, as opposed to the imperial, self-same, and transcendental one cultivated by the strong poet, may well be immunized against the insensitivity and imperiousness which can infect aesthetic as well as other ambitions of transcendence. The double imperative of recognizing oneself as a product of a web of relations and contingent events, and of ceaseless self-transformation, immunizes the practitioner of Foucault's aesthetics of existence against the tendencies toward incuriosity

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.83, 94-5, 120-1. For a critique of Rorty's "partition solution" see: Fraser, *Unruly Practices*, pp.100-105. Lysaker takes issue with Rorty's claim that strong poetry can be practiced safely only as a solitary, private pursuit, and proposes a modified version of strong poetry in which the practice of self-creation is safely widened to various social settings. See: Lysaker, "The shape of selves to come," pp.47-66.

and cruelty inherent in the strong poet's project of self-transcendentalization. With respect to the the question of the care of self in Foucault's ethical stance, Connolly resists arguments which collapse every mention of the self as a work of art into an anti-social, self-aggrandizing aestheticism-without-limitation. "[T]he aim," when Foucault recommends the self as a work of art, he claims, "is not self-narcissism, as neo-Kantians love to insist. *The point is to ward off the violence of transcendental narcissism [...]* The goal is to modify an already contingent self [...] so that you are better able to ward off the demand to confirm transcendently what you are contingently."²²⁹ Such a practice of the care of the self entails a certain kind of "cautious" and "mature" work on the self which awakens one to the web of relations and contingent events which have contributed to what one has become, and fosters ethical responsiveness to others "across the space of difference" by militating against the urge to dominate them which flows from attempts to glorify and transcendentalize one's identity. Here, I concur with Connolly that practices which enhance "appreciation of our own contingency" and fragility may offer an antidote to the potential for cruelty which seems to inhere in attempts to transcendentalize identity or universalize morality. "By working patiently on specific contingencies in oneself," he claims

"one may become more appreciative of the crucial role of contingency in identity and desire. And this in turn opens up new possibilities of ethical responsiveness to difference. [...] Eventually, it may become possible to work through these arts of the self [...] to recover a modified conception of the responsible self, a self that draws upon fragments of its contingent subjectivity to work patiently and cautiously upon those elements in its code of identity, desire, and judgement that are ugly, vengeful, or otherwise less admirable than they might be."²³⁰

²²⁹ Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil," p.373. Emphasis in original.

²³⁰ Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, pp.69-70.

In other words, a reflexive curiosity and care for the diversity of life is the product not only of the generosity, forbearance, and curiosity one extends to that diversity, to the social other, but to that diversity and otherness which is *constitutive of the self*. Through a certain kind of care of the contingent self, Connolly suggests that the individual might be able to “turn disturbance of what you are into critical responsiveness to what you are not.” By becoming “more alert to the traces of the other in themselves [...]” Connolly continues:

“[e]ach [self] may come to acknowledge these traces as differences it regulates to *be* what it is, recognizing thereby a certain affinity with the other it resists or engages across the space of difference. It might even come to feel that it is implicated in a set of differences that define it *and* inhabited by diffuse energies, remainders, and surpluses that persistently exceed its powers of articulation. It may, thereby, affirm a certain indebtedness to what it is not while reconfiguring dogmatic interpretations of what it is. A new respect might emerge for drives by the other to break out of injurious definitions, even as these drives destabilize and denaturalize the identity of established communities.”²³¹

Care for the contingent and relational nature of the self, Connolly argues, may produce a more careful and generous curiosity in relation to others by mitigating the imperious urges flowing from the drive to transcendentalize one’s identity. But let us be more concrete.

For example, in the case of a “critically responsive” approach to violent crime, Connolly claims that the flow of revenge into our encounters with offenders can be staunched not only by concern for the etiology of criminal desire, but by a certain reflexive concern for the self that is involved in exercising criminal judgement. By working on ourselves, as judges of crime, we can reveal and dissipate our own feelings of revenge, and heighten the sense of our own contingency as well as that of the identities,

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p.xviii.

hierarchies, and exclusions which surround us²³². Judging offenders with care requires a certain "mature" and "cautious" work on the self which helps one to recall, recognize, and "move through the everyday experience of paltry, imperious desires in oneself to recognition of their more dramatic embodiment in violent criminality."²³³ In other words, a self-conscious and unblinking examination of one's own desires and "paltry little sovereignties" will bring one to realize that these lie on a continuum of feelings of revenge and bids for sovereignty on which all of our desires can be registered²³⁴. In cases of criminal judgement and punishment, among others, then, such practices may actually work "against vengeful, narcissistic demands to atomize or transcendentalize what you have become relationally and contingently,"²³⁵ as Connolly writes, thereby cultivating ethical responsiveness to difference. In my opinion, then, while the aestheticization of ethics and politics is not without its risks, concerns about the putatively anti-social implications of Foucault's aesthetics of existence, such as those articulated by Wolin, are *misdirected* and more germane to the kind of model of self-fashioning adopted by Rorty's strong poet.

Contrary to Rorty's insistence upon the solitary nature of strong poetry, or Wolin's characterization of the aesthetics of existence as strictly narcissistic, it is worth noting that all of the the practices of the self endorsed by Foucault are intrinsically social. Intellectual inquiry, philosophizing, writing, and sexuality, as he practiced them, all involved intersubjective relations of communication, reciprocity, and mutuality.

²³² *Ibid.*, p.69.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p.70.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.70.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.70.

Foucault, among others, has tried to allay suspicions of the care of the self by returning to various ancient, pre-Christian texts on the subject²³⁶. In The Use of Pleasure he draws inspiration from the ancient Greeks and Romans, including that master practitioner of the care of the self, Socrates; showing that an ethic of the care of the self need not be incompatible with or separate from our care and concern for others. Foucault recalls Socrates' instruction to Alcibiades that the care of the self was "a precondition that had to met before one was qualified to attend to the affairs of others or lead them [...]"²³⁷. For the ancient Greeks in general, the care of the self and care for others were intertwined; the practices of the care of the self, which most often took the form of self-mastery, constituted an important prelude to the fulfillment of one's role as husband, father, mentor, lover, friend, master, and ruler, in which one engaged in the care of and for others²³⁸. The entwinement of the ancient care of the self with care for others has also been discussed in recent works by Alexander Nehamas and Pierre Hadot. While, as Nehamas points out, Socrates admonishes his fellow citizens to tend to themselves before they attend to the affairs of the city, his is by no means an invitation to neglect the latter. The care of the self is not only not incompatible with living in the city but "will ultimately make both citizens and the city as a whole better."²³⁹ In the Apology (30b), Socrates defends his practice of the care of the self to the jury in the manner he does in

²³⁶ Foucault discussed the ancients in his books, The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, as well as in his public lectures at the College de France and various lectures in the United States. For an account of the lectures see, for example: Flynn, "Foucault as Parrhesiast: His Last Course at the College de France," pp.102-118.

²³⁷ Foucault, UP, p.73.

²³⁸ See, for example: Foucault, CS, pp.69-95; and Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," pp.287-288.

²³⁹ Nehamas, The Art of Living, p.181.

order to save *them*, rather than his own skin. While essentially individualistic, Nehamas argues, Socrates's care of himself shows that "[o]ne can care for oneself without disregarding others: one can be a good human being without *devoting* oneself to them."²⁴⁰ Socrates' seemingly private pursuit of the care of his own soul, then, was one of "public significance"²⁴¹. Foucault also shows, in both The Use of Pleasure and The Care of the Self, how various Stoic exercises and spirituals were related to the practitioner's social relations and public functions. While somewhat critical of Foucault's interpretations of the Stoics, Hadot, too, insists that Stoic exercises and spirituals were always intended to bring one into closer harmony with what was thought to be universal in our experience: nature, reason, and the human community²⁴². In spite of the patriarchy and misogyny of ancient Greek culture, then, the principles of the care of the self, according to which one had to govern oneself in order to properly govern others, illustrate how assumptions about the inherently anti-social nature of an ethics of the care of the self are unfounded.

More controversially, Foucault also argued that, today, certain aspects of sexual pleasure and the gay "art of life" evince a similar relationship between the care of the self and care for others. Foucault's thoughts on homosexuality oscillate between an enthusiasm for the dissociative and desubjectivizing effects of certain sexual practices, such as S/M, and interest in the production of identities, novel relationships, and affective ties which stem from them. Many of the dissociative and desubjectivizing

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p.12. Emphasis in original.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p.180. Nehamas makes essentially the same argument about Foucault's life, pp.169-188.

²⁴² Pierre Hadot, "Reflections on the notion of 'the cultivation of the self,'" in Armstrong, Timothy, trans. Michel Foucault: Philosopher, New York: Routledge, 1992, pp.225-232.

sexual practices endorsed by Foucault were intended to weaken and destabilize the experience of self and identity as something fixed, necessary, and transcendental; to show that our present experience of ourselves "is far from filling all possible spaces."²⁴³ On the other hand, inventiveness in the field of sexuality afforded opportunities for the formation of new identities, relations, and communities. Certain sexual "technologies of the self" have the capacity to cultivate relations of care, including new forms of friendship and love. Following the work of Gayle Rubin, for example, Foucault emphasized the extent to which gay and lesbian S/M afford new possibilities for relations of trust, mutuality, and pleasure, as well as give rise to whole new affective communities²⁴⁴. "The practice of S&M is the creation of pleasure, and there is an identity with that creation. And that's why S&M is really a subculture. It's a process of invention."²⁴⁵ In Foucault's sexual aesthetics of existence, far from constituting a callous and ethically suspicious form of self-love and selfishness, the ethics of the care of the sexual self requires one to engage in practices which occasion rather than suppress recognition of our obligations, relations, and responsibilities to others. For Foucault, the question of homosexuality was not "'Who am I?' and 'What is the secret of my desire?'" "Perhaps," he suggests, "it would be better to ask oneself, 'What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?' The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex, but, rather, to use one's sexuality

²⁴³ Foucault, Michel, "Friendship as a Way of Life," interview in EST, p.140.

²⁴⁴ Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," pp.170-3; and Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp.85-9. Of course, such an experience of the bathhouses and leather bars was not uniform. Leo Bersani, for example, emphasizes the rigid hierarchy and competitiveness of these environments in his article, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," *October*, 43, Winter 1987, pp.205-209.

²⁴⁵ Foucault, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," pp.169-170.

henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships."²⁴⁶ What interests Foucault about homosexuality, then, including his own, is not so much the act of sex as it is the opportunities it affords, as a whole way of life, for the invention of and experimentation with as yet untried relationships and affective ties with others outside heterosexist norms²⁴⁷. "The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends," he claims, "is the one of friendship."²⁴⁸

Still, critics like Wolin charge that dangers persist with an ethics based on self-fashioning as a result of the fact that, in the absence of any universal moral coding of conduct or humanist standards of normative justification, the care of the self will be absolutized into a *carte blanche* invitation to unrestrained domination and abuse of others²⁴⁹. He fears for the future of social solidarity and mutual concern in a community ruled by no other ethical imperative than that of the care of the self. When ethics takes the form of an obligatory and continuous experiment with oneself and what one might become, on what basis could the range of possible identities be restricted, provided they are all fleetingly occupied? What is to stop the practitioner of the aesthetics of existence from transcending a provisional and contingent identity imbued with care and curiosity to one which is not, if only temporarily? Could one not become, for a time, a self-ironizing Nazi? However, the danger that a certain "absolutization" of the care of the self might lead to the domination and abuse of others is mitigated, Foucault believes, precisely by the nature of such care itself. For the ancient Greeks, "the risk of dominating

²⁴⁶ Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," p.135.

²⁴⁷ Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," pp.141-156.

²⁴⁸ Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," p.136.

²⁴⁹ Wolin, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," p.192.

others and exercising tyrannical power over them arises precisely only when one has *not* taken care of the self and has become the slave of one's desires. But if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know ontologically what you are, [...], if you know what it means to be a citizen of a city, to be the master of a household in an *oikos* [...] if you know all this, you cannot abuse your power over others."²⁵⁰ Today, taking proper care of the self involves disturbing the sense of necessity in hegemonic categories and identities by which one understands oneself - that is, pursuing a "critical ontology" of what one is - in order to stem the aggression and resentment which can flow from attempts to consolidate and naturalize them. Failure to take care of ourselves in this sense, that is, when we are tempted to naturalize or transcendentalize what we have become relationally and contingently, more often than not produces the kind of domination and tyranny over others about which critics like Wolin worry. Nazism, it is worth pointing out, is precisely the kind of ideology which *denies* the role of contingency in the acquisition of identities in favour of naturalizing them. Having said that, Foucault never advocated the absolutization or universalization of the care of the self to all of ethical life, nor did he express the wish that it be adopted to the exclusion of all other ethical practices, or moral codes for that matter.

Foucault's relation to moral codes, in particular, has been misunderstood. The ethics of self-fashioning is routinely misinterpreted as utterly hostile to humanistic moral codes or other systems of restraint. Witness Charles Taylor's discomfort with Foucault's alleged endorsement of an "unrestrained, utterly self-related freedom". Foucault's own views, however, reflect an acknowledgement of the inescapability of such codes and

²⁵⁰ Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," p.288. Emphasis added.

systems of restraint. With regards to sexual conduct, for example, Foucault readily acknowledged that "there are sexual acts like rape which should not be permitted [...] I don't think we should have as our objective some sort of absolute freedom or total liberty of sexual action."²⁵¹ "[T]he important point here," he continues,

"is not whether a culture without systems of restraint is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system. Obviously constraints of any kind are going to be intolerable to certain segments of society. The necrophiliac finds it intolerable that graves are not accessible to him. But a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals affected by it don't have the means of modifying it. [...] There is no question that a society without restrictions is inconceivable..."²⁵²

The ethics of the care of the self is intended as part of a whole ethical ensemble, including genealogical analysis, intended to expose and transform elements of such restrictions when they are found to be unnecessary or to impose gratuitous suffering, and not to overthrow restraint and restriction altogether. Foucault never contemplated the care of the self in isolation from the moral coding of conduct, and his writings reflect an understanding of a complex relationship of interdependence between them. Every morality, in the broad sense, he argued, comprises both "codes of behaviour and forms of subjectivation," but certain of them, such as Christianity, emphasize the code aspects of morality whereas others, such as in the ethics of late-Antiquity, can be found "in which the strong and dynamic element is to be sought in forms of subjectivation and the practices of the self."²⁵³ The Christian code of morality, as Foucault points out, was always accompanied by certain practices of the self, even if they took the ascetic forms of self-disclosure, renunciation, and effacement. Greco-Roman practices of the self,

²⁵¹ Foucault, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act," p.289.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.294-295.

²⁵³ Foucault, UP, pp.29-30.

meanwhile, always took place within the context of a rudimentary set of moral conventions. In the contemporary context, one in which many aspects of the Christian code have lost their authority, Foucault was more inclined to dwell on the forms of subjectivation and the care of self. This need not be read as a total repudiation of code morality. Such reductive readings as Wolin's, Bennett has argued, "are based on the underargued presumption that if one does not endorse a 'command' ethics one has no ethics at all."²⁵⁴ Foucault's ethics of self-fashioning was only ever offered up as one possible means by which to challenge congealed aspects of moral codes and the violence they can do, and to fill the void left by their recent ebb. What he resisted above all else were efforts to identify and consolidate a *universal* morality that would, in its very universality and self-evidentness, become so taken-for-granted and insulated from criticism as to become impermeable to efforts to change it. The search for such universally obligatory forms of morality struck Foucault as "catastrophic"²⁵⁵. Combined with this kind of hyperbole, his decision not to endorse any concrete vision of a moral code or system of restraint superior to the present one certainly leaves him open to this kind of misunderstanding, but it seems clear that he recognized the inescapability and even necessity of one. Loath to endorse broad programmes aimed at overcoming large-scale forms of oppression and deprivation once and for all, Foucault called for vigilance as to the impositions and violences which accompany such programmes as well. Given, however, that we must ultimately *chose* our systems of restraint as well as render them

²⁵⁴ Bennett, "How Is It, Then, We Still Remain Barbarians?," p.667.

²⁵⁵ Foucault, Michel, "The Return of Morality," interview in FL, p.330.

open to transformation, it might have been more helpful had Foucault offered one up for debate.

None of this is to say that the model of self-fashioning embodied in Foucault's notions of the aesthetics of existence or the care of the self entails no dangers or risks whatsoever. We have seen only that it is not dangerous or risky in the way that certain critics like Wolin and Jay suggest. Different models of ethical self-fashioning exist, each with its own unique implications for relations of care and concern for others. I have argued that Foucault's aesthetics of existence, understood as a certain kind of care of the *contingent* self, is a relatively benign model in this sense. Fears that Foucault's model of ethical self-fashioning underwrites the imperious aggrandizement, assertion, and transcendentalization of the self, and the wanton manipulation of others as material for one's own aesthetic self-perfection, are clearly misplaced. Foucault's self-fashioning ethical agent engages in practices of the self which reveal its contingency and fragility, its dependence on a host of relations and events which have produced it. Acknowledging the lack of necessity at the root of what one is creates a space for freedom and experimentation with what one can become. Foucault and Connolly wager that such ontological awareness of the contingent, fragile, and constructed nature of one's own identity will mitigate resentment towards differences, as well as the urge to dominate them. They argue that the very kind of violence, cruelty, and indifference so often described as the inevitable outcome of the post-Nietzschean critique of identity and morality flows, more often than not, from efforts to secure, naturalize, and transcendentalize hegemonic identities and congealed moral codes and categories. "[T]he most powerful contemporary pressures to social fragmentation," Connolly has argued, "flow from struggles between contending, dogmatic identities, each hell bent on

installing itself as the universal to which everyone and everything must conform.”²⁵⁶ Seeds of conflict, violence, and cruelty are more often than not sown by those who aggressively universalize traditional hierarchies of identity and congealed codes of morality. Through Foucault and Connolly, I have tried to show how the post-Nietzschean ethics of self-fashioning, in which one’s identity becomes something to fragment, reconfigure, and continuously recreate, rather than transcendentalize and freeze, offers possibilities as an antidote to the potential for cruelty inherent in aggressive assertions of identity and universal morality. I have tried to move from the argument that Foucault’s model of self-fashioning in no way implicitly or explicitly underwrites violence and cruelty, to one suggesting that it can in fact help to cultivate care and concern in relation to others. It is in this sense that I maintain that Foucault’s anti-humanist critical ontology of ourselves need not and should not be seen as sanctioning or endorsing the inhumane.

Finally, however, one must concede that Foucault’s ethical sensibility, in general, and his ethics of the care of the self, in particular, entail certain risks. There is inherent risk, as Connolly admits, in “scrambling fundamental parameters of morality”, and cruelty even, in depriving individuals of the comfort and security of hegemonic identities and stable categories and concepts of moral judgement²⁵⁷. Rorty concurs that ironist *redescription* of identities and whole cultures involving the “tearing down of the particular structures of language and belief in which [we are] socialized” can be cruel and painful²⁵⁸. Moreover, on its own the care of the self is inadequate as an ethical-

²⁵⁶ Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p.26.

²⁵⁷ Connolly, “Beyond Good and Evil,” pp.365-366.

²⁵⁸ Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, pp.176-188.

political practice, and needs to be practiced in tandem with other activities including conventional political engagement, lest it regress into a hyperindividualized form of passive nihilism which only reinforces the status quo²⁵⁹. In the case of criminal judgement and punishment, for example, Foucault and Connolly are well aware of the limits of self-fashioning with respect to effecting humane and meaningful change, and both endorsed more conventional political practice "to remedy large, institutional sources of crime," including poverty and unemployment²⁶⁰. Some danger persists, too, that sanctioning such practices at the intersection of the aesthetic and the ethical will be misused or misunderstood. There is no way to eliminate the possibility that some will misappropriate it as an invitation to gestures of "imperial de-differentiation," as Jay warns, in which the criteria of beauty might be scandalously applied to the deaths of others²⁶¹. For Foucault, however, such gestures may be more effectively met with an ethical and ontological sensibility undermining *all* drives to glorify and transcendentalize identity, as opposed to simply being opposed by some hegemonic counter-identity no matter how well-intentioned. In the final analysis, though, there is no way to guarantee that destabilizations of congealed moral codes and hegemonic identities, or experiments in ethical self-creation, will be risk-free. On the other hand, as both Connolly and Jane Bennett argue, neither are such guarantees provided by commitments to rationality, consensus, the benevolent exercise of authority, the defense of human rights, or just about any other "experiment in morality"²⁶².

²⁵⁹ Connolly expands significantly on this point in his article, "Beyond Good and Evil," pp.378-384.

²⁶⁰ Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, pp.65-66.

²⁶¹ Jay, "The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology," p.73.

²⁶² See: Bennett, "How Is It, Then, That We Still Remain Barbarians'," p.667; and Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil," p.365.

Without question, the ethical stance adopted by Foucault is staked out on difficult terrain. Without endorsing the imperious self-transcendentalization of the strong poet or other narcissistic forms of self-fashioning, he resists the collective imperiousness of attempts to consolidate and universalize the conceptual categories of subjectivity, agency, and responsibility, on the basis of which the former are condemned. The latter urge threatens to freeze current categories and identities in a manner no less dangerous than the risks inherent in subjecting them to the thaw of a profound criticism such as Foucault's critical ontology since, as Connolly points out, they are all-too-readily "infiltrated by a drive to revenge against culturally marked constituencies whose very being threatens the self-certainty of established identities."²⁶³ Greater than that posed by individuals engaged in acts of self-transformation is the danger constituted by a society which, by categories and practices designed to consolidate and defend hegemonic identities and exclude others, renders itself incapable of transforming itself. Indeed, we may well be more effectively immunized against the twin dangers of individual and collective imperiousness and cruelty by the addition of certain practices of the self to our current ethical resources than we have thus far been by repeated attempts to install and defend hegemonic humanist identities and universal moral codes.

²⁶³ Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization, p.xxv.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

While Foucault's work has been widely regarded as offering one of the most brilliant and provocative meditations on modern thought and practice in the second half of the twentieth century, a certain consensus has also emerged according to which, on balance, it must ultimately be dismissed as a failure. As we have seen, leading contemporary thinkers such as Jurgen Habermas and Charles Taylor have concluded that Foucault's analyses and critiques of modern thought and practice are both methodologically confused and ethically and politically suspect. On this view, Foucault's anti-humanist criticism, since it eschews reference to any epistemological and normative standards of justification for its own position, must ultimately lapse into irrationalism and nihilism. But is this necessarily the case? Are these arguments based on valid construals of the nature of Foucault's project, or do they not insist on evaluating his work according to the very humanist criteria of cognitive rigour and benign moral and political practice he seeks to contest? The purpose of this dissertation has been to offer a reading of Foucault's work which blunts some of the force of these dominant critical appraisals within contemporary thought and to, thus, neutralize the delegitimizing effects they have had on it. For all its ambiguities and blind alleys, I contend that Foucault's work contains much that is of value, and which threatens to be lost if the arbiters of making sense and "intellectual hygiene" should be allowed to have their way.

At stake in this confrontation between Foucault and the contemporary defenders of the humanist tradition is the status of a kind of criticism which takes nothing, not even reason, truth, or the centrality of the question of Man, as the most compelling object of human reflection for granted. Substantively, the importance of Foucault's work lies in its poignant and chastening insights into the costs, in terms of human suffering and the impoverishment of experience, of the modern forms of western rationality and of the coercive practices and orthopaedic effects associated with the objectification of ourselves as scientific objects of knowledge since the birth of the human sciences in the eighteenth century. As even a critic like Taylor acknowledges, by drawing attention to the extent to which we have been not only socialized but "bullied" into modern forms of life and experience, Foucault's work documents the losses suffered in the course of their consolidation. In addition, by registering the degree to which modern knowledge has been produced as a result of certain unconscious, epistemic habits of thought and more or less explicitly strategic rationales of control, Foucault's work undermines the rationalistic and benign pretensions of contemporary modes of thought and knowledge. Now, Foucault is not unique among thinkers for having drawn our attention to the costs associated with the imposition and spread of hegemonic Western rationalities and life-forms. As we know, his work takes considerable inspiration from anti-humanist predecessors like Heidegger and Nietzsche. What is distinctive and valuable in Foucault's variation on anti-humanism, at the substantive level, is its focus on the genealogy of the human sciences. By patiently digging and sifting through the ignoble and "most unpromising places" where so much of the work of turning ourselves into objects of scientific knowledge has taken place, Foucault has given us pause to consider

whether the whole question of human nature is as necessary and benign as so often assumed.

The value of Foucault's work exceeds its documentary functions, however, in posing a challenge to standard conceptions of truth, rationality, philosophy, criticism, political struggle, and ethics imbued with humanist assumptions. According to the latter, any attempt to subject the basic terms and values of humanist reflection - reason, knowledge, truth, subjectivity - to radical questioning and critique stumbles on its own self-refuting logic and betrays the tendencies of an anti-modern irrationalism and nihilism. But is this inevitably the case? Are all attempts to offer a radical critique of humanism doomed from the outset to irrationalism and nihilism? This dissertation has argued that this is not necessarily so, and that Foucault's work offers us a glimpse of a kind of perspective on and critique of the fundamentals of humanism without lapsing into irrationality and nonsense, on the one hand, or endorsing inhumanity, on the other. How is it possible to question the reasonableness and benevolence of humanism without appearing to rely on the very criteria of rationality and humanity such questioning would seem to imply or, alternatively, appearing to abandon them cavalierly and altogether? In claiming to enlighten the Enlightenment about itself and condemning the inhumanity of humanistic reason and practice, such a critique is putatively destined to make parasitical use of the very terms it seeks to question, or to require that these be discarded altogether as utterly worthless. It is one of the distinguishing features of Foucault's work, however, I have argued, to point in the direction of a form of anti-humanist criticism which lapses into neither irrationalism nor ethical-political indifference and inhumanity. Foucault shows us how it might be possible to launch both a rational critique of reason and a humane critique of humanism without surrendering to either irrationalism or barbarism.

Against the claim that Foucault's work lacks consistency and coherence I have offered several responses. I read Foucault in such a way as to throw into relief the abiding suspicion of humanism, in its several forms, that he maintained throughout his life. In my view, such a focus helps us to see how it might be possible to arrive at an interpretation of Foucault which renders his work less susceptible to the methodological critiques which have been directed at it. By throwing into relief the extent to which the question of humanism serves as the axis of reflection around which all of his work orbits, if elliptically, my interpretation demonstrates that Foucault's work was consistent to that extent at least. But critics such as Taylor and Habermas will have none of this, as we know, and insist that the methodological deficiencies of Foucault's ruminations on humanism render them unintelligible. In so far as his archaeological and genealogical analyses of modern thought and practice putatively result in their unmasking as ciphers for power, the former must make parasitical and disingenuous use of the very terms they are intended to call into question. As I have conceded above, there are some grounds for this charge in the case of archaeology, especially as a result of some of the more imprudent claims initially made by Foucault on its behalf, which gave it the distinct look of a successor discipline to epistemology. On the other hand, as I have argued, Foucault's work reveals an increasing emphasis on the results of archaeology and genealogy as *eventalizing* analyses of truth and knowledge as opposed to truth-establishing discourses in their own right. Criticism like Taylor's and Habermas' succeed only by translating the results of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical criticisms into the very kind of truth-establishing claims his work seeks to destabilize. Only by suppressing the fact that what separates Foucault from these critics is not only conflicting evaluations of the achievements of modern thought and practice but differing conceptions of what truth,

philosophy, and critique themselves consist of, can the latter present his work as incoherent. To read Foucault's work as incoherent on these grounds does constitute a kind of "blackmail".

Now, there are I admit, a number of difficulties with attempting to impose or to read unity or consistency unto Foucault's work. Not least of these is his own refusal and rejection of such consistency for himself; indeed, he was openly hostile toward critics who demanded of him a singular, self-consistent authorial voice and intention. "I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face," he declares in the Introduction to The Archaeology of Knowledge. "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write."¹ To construct such a unity or identity, to put Foucault's papers in order *for him* so to speak, in relation to a body of work which actively resists such univocity risks falsifying it. The spirit or ethos of intellectual work to which Foucault subscribed demanded that one think and write in an effort to detach oneself from oneself, to surpass oneself, to escape the prison of one's current thinking in order to think what one has been unable to think before². But there is, afterall, a certain logic and consistency to this mode of work and critique as the permanent work of self-detachment and escape, one which it is possible to discern and describe in Foucault's work. In deliberately seeking to ceaselessly detach himself from himself, the very essence of critical work according to Foucault, he evinces a certain

¹ Foucault, Michel, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A.M Sheridan Smith, London: Tavistock, 1972, p.17.

² Foucault, Michel, "What is Enlightenment?," in Foucault, Michel, Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth - The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954 -1984 Vol.1, ed. James Rabinow, New York: The New Press, pp.315-316.

unity and consistency in spite of himself, though perhaps not the sort that would satisfy his critics. Yet, Foucault would squirm, perhaps, at my suggestion that his work evinces a certain sameness and repetition in the form of repeated gestures of critique and refusal of humanism and the figure of "Man". How would Foucault have responded to the suggestion that, for all its radical rejection and refusal of humanism, his work failed to break free of its gravitational pull?

Finally, any attempt to find consistency and continuity in Foucault's work risks domesticating it, or surrendering it to his more hostile critics, in the name of rationality and "making sense". I am mindful of the fact that the reading offered here risks *disciplining* Foucault. In attempting to resuscitate those elements of unity and consistency in his corpus, one wonders if there is at work here an urge to vindicate Foucault according to the very criteria of philosophical success laid down by his critics, conceding too much to their insistence upon self-consistency, logical argumentation, and making "sense" which he himself tried to problematize³. However, rather than rehabilitating his work in the eyes of his critics and judges, restoring it to the "normal" standards of coherence and consistency as laid down by them, I have sought to shift the debate onto different terrain where the disagreement between Foucault and his critiques as to the very nature of critique and philosophy, and as to the possibility of a rational critique of reason and a humane critique of humanism, is not yet foreclosed and can be fully aired. Methodologically speaking, what the "critical ontology of ourselves" suggests in opposition to humanist criticism is an alternative way of conceiving of critique and its

³ For one of the strongest defenses of Foucault against such intellectual policing of "sense" see: Bove, Paul, "Forward: the Foucault Phenomenon: The Problematics of Style, in Deleuze, Gilles, Foucault, trans. Sean Hand, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, pp.vii-xl.

antecedent assumptions. Eventualizing criticism like Foucault's can be found incoherent, in humanist terms, only by translating it into conventional humanist criticism while suppressing other modes of critique as well as the disagreement between them.

Foucault's anti-humanism challenges humanism not only at the level of its approach to knowledge, methodology, and political analysis and practice, but at the level of the very conception of the meaning and function of philosophy and critique by which it condemns work like Foucault's. In so far as conventional humanist critique itself produces tendencies toward the "objectification of objectivities" revolving around the figure of Man, it too must be subject to scrutiny. Against both the theoretical and ethico-political understanding of criticism subscribed to by humanists of various sorts, including Habermas and Taylor, Foucault proposed a posthumanist "critical ontology of ourselves," entailing both theoretical and practical work. I have attempted to characterize Foucault's critical *ethos* in such a way as to illuminate the degree to which it obeys a certain logic in its own right, in spite of criticisms that it is unintelligible, and that its implications for both ethical and political practice are not nearly so nefarious as some critics have suggested.

At the theoretical level, this involves working on contemporary knowledge and practice, in the form of archaeological and genealogical research, in order to uncover that which has been given to us as fixed, natural, and necessary as in fact contingent upon a polymorphous set of enabling conditions and events. Foucault's is not an approach to knowledge or to ourselves in which the object is to distinguish true from false or reality from illusion, but one which investigates the events which have produced our knowledge and by which we have turned *ourselves* into objects of knowledge. At the practical level, Foucault endorses "local" and "specific" interventions into fields of knowledge and

practice on behalf of those experiences which have been subjugated and marginalized as a result of the consolidation of hegemonic identities and practices in the present. In doing so, Foucault avoids articulating any universal principles or standards of normative justification on the basis of which to distinguish, once and for all, legitimate from illegitimate practices and forms of power, and refuses to endorse any particular "settled way of life" in favour of offering up his archaeologies and genealogies simply as tools or weapons for those who fight and resist the impositions and violences inflicted by hegemonic identities, codes, and practices. We have seen, as well, that the "critical ontology of ourselves" also called for the disinternment of various "subjugated knowledges" and experience which have borne much of the cost of the establishment and consolidation of the hegemonic form of life today. However, such figures do not indicate a desire on Foucault's part to valorize the experience of, say, madness, as an alternative model of existence but, rather, they have a certain methodological and tactical use within an overall conception of critique as detachment and distanciation from familiar ways of seeing and habits of thought. Through them, one gains a certain critical perspective upon one's own culture and practice. In this respect, to adopt the stance of the madman or the parricide constitutes a certain logical step consistent with the critical ontology of ourselves.

It is clearly a mistake, therefore, to read Foucault as offering truth claims in any strong sense, and to assume that in so far as he engages in criticism at all, he must be doing so, unbeknownst to him, on *behalf* of something. As Foucault himself argued, however, the purpose of his anti-humanist archaeological and genealogical criticism was not so much to uncover some final exhaustive truth of modern experience or restore humanity to its true identity as it was to offer a means to *detach* us from the truths,

identities, and practices by which we are currently constrained. Therefore, conceived as an *instrument* of cultural and practical detachment and defamiliarization, as opposed to some fixed criterion or accumulating body of knowledge, Foucault's approach to critique is not strictly speaking contradictory.

Finally, the critical ontology of ourselves also calls for a new practical and ethical orientation both to our current set of hegemonic identities and social practices and to ourselves as *selves*. Instead of practices oriented towards discovering, articulating, and actualizing ourselves in terms of what we are deep down - the truth of Man - Foucault endorses the practice of an "aesthetics of existence," a certain kind of ethics of self-fashioning or "care of the self," in which the humanist goal of discovering and restoring our "true" selves is abandoned in favour of practices which reveal and make us more alive to the contingency and fragility of who we are - and to the web of contingencies, events, and relations which have made us what we are - thereby creating a space for freedom to experiment with ourselves; with becoming, so to speak, *other than Man*. "From the idea that the self is not given to us," Foucault argues, "I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art."⁴ For Foucault, such an ethics of self-fashioning or care for the *contingent* self is wholly *consistent* with a certain anti-essentialist political ontology and constitutes a certain "practice of freedom" by which we may break out of the tyranny of congealed codes of practice and hegemonic identities as well as foster the kinds of relations of care and concern for others too often suppressed by the latter.

⁴ Quoted in Wolin, Richard, "Michel Foucault and the Search for the Other of Reason," in Wolin, Richard, The Terms of Cultural Criticism, New York: Columbia, 1992, p.191.

Foucault's ethical-political attachment to the conditions in which the forces of resistance and change can flourish is informed by what he described as his greatest fear: the loss by any society of the ability to see that things have been and might be otherwise, and the freedom to choose them to be and to make them so. While Foucault was, therefore, in favour of a corrosive critique of everything, this did not mean that he disputed the validity or necessity of certain constraints and limits. "There is no question that a society without restrictions is inconceivable". "[T]he important question," however, was "whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system [...] a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals effected by it don't have the means of modifying it."⁵ In Foucault's view, the loss of such perspective, as well as the resources for critique and resistance, posed a greater threat to freedom than that which putatively comes from the failure to articulate and aggressively defend explicit normative criteria, such as those supplied by humanism. Thus, genealogical critique is not so much on the side of the right or the good as it is on the side of that which preserves and promotes the possibility of things being otherwise. Foucault has often been accused of offering little hope or incentive for pursuing projects of individual and collective resistance; yet, his critical ethos toward the modern condition made room for a surprising optimism. Foucault's role as a dissident intellectual and critical philosopher was, he argued, "to show people that they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence, some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called

⁵ Foucault, Michel, "Sexual Choice, Sexual Act: Foucault and Homosexuality," interview in Foucault, Michel, Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Lawrence Kritzman, ed., New York: Routledge, 1988, pp.294-295.

evidence can be criticized and destroyed.”⁶ If Foucault and Connolly are right that the hegemonic identities and conventional morality universally ascribed to all of humankind by humanism, along with the institutions and practices protecting their reassurance, impose gratuitous constraints and undeserved forms of suffering and cruelty, then other discourses and practices, including those entailed by a posthumanist critical ontology of ourselves, which disturb the sense of necessity attached to the former deserve to be examined for their potentially felicitous effects in the struggle against such suffering and cruelty. In my view, Foucault’s critical ontology offers a powerful tool with which to do so.

⁶ Foucault, Michel, “Truth, Power, Self: An Interview with Michel Foucault,” in Martin, Luther, et al, eds., Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p.10.

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