Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol. II, No. 2, 1996, pp. 3-30

Foucault on Freedom and Truth*

CHARLES TAYLOR
University of Montreal
Canada

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

But Foucault himself repudiates this suggestion. He dashes the hope, if we had one, that there is some good we can *affirm*, as a result of the understanding these analyses give us. And by the same token, he seems to raise a question whether there is such a thing as a way out. This is rather paradoxical, because Foucault's analyses seem to bring *evils* to light; and yet he wants to distance himself from the suggestion which would seem inescapably to follow, that the negation or overcoming of these evils promotes a good.

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

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

* This has been given by the author for publication in this journal. It was earlier published in Hoy, David Couzens, ed. *Foucault: A Critical Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1988.

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

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

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

I

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

The first that I want to take up is the contrast drawn in *Surveiller et punir* between modes of punishment in the classical age and today. The book opens with a reveting description of the execution of a parricide in seventeenth-century France. The modern is appalled, horrified. We seem to be more in the world of our contemporary fanatical perpetrators of massacre, the Pol Pots, the Idi Amins, rather than in that of the orderly process of law in a civilized, well-established regime. Obviously something very big has changed in our whole understanding of ourselves, of crime and punishment.

Bringing us up against this evidence of radical historical discontinuity is what Foucault does superlatively well. For our eyes, the details of the execution of Damiens bespeak gratuitous cruelty, sadism. Foucault shows that they had another reason then. The punishment can be seen as a kind of 'liturgy' ('la liturgie des supplices').[3] Human beings are seen as set in a cosmic order, constituted by a hierarchy of beings which is also a hierarchy of goods. They stand also in a political order, which is related to and in a sense endorsed by the cosmic one. This kind of order is hard to explain in modern terms, because it is not simply an order of things, but an order of meanings. Or to put it in other terms, the order of things which we see around us is

thought to reflect or embody an order of Ideas. You can explain the coherence things have in terms of a certain kind of making sense.

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

So the punishments have a meaning. I find Foucault convincing on this. The violence done to the order is restored by being visited on the wrongdoer. Moreover this restoral is made the more effective by his participation in the (to us) grisly scenario, in particular his avowal. As Foucault puts it, one of the goals was to 'instaurer le supplice comme moment de verite'.[4] Moreover, since the order violated includes the political order—royal power in this case—and this order is public, not in the modern Benthamian sense of touching the general interest, but in the older sense of a power which essentially manifests itself in public space, the restoral has to be enacted in public space. What to us is the additional barbarity of making a spectacle of all these gruesome goings-on was an essential part of what was being *effected* in the punishments of that age. 'L'atrocite qui hante le sepplice joue donc un double d'autre part l'exasperation du chatiment par rapport au crime. Elle assure d'un meme coup l'eclat de la verite et celui du pouvoir; elle est le rituel de l'enquete qui s'achieve en la ceremonie ou triomphe le souverain'.[5]

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

What lies behind this modern humanitarianism? This is a big and deep story. No one can claim to understand it fully. But I have to go into it a little, because his interpretation of it is central to Foucault's position. I think one of the important factors which underlie it is the modern sense of the significance of what I want to call 'ordinary life'. I use this as a term of art for that ensemble of activities which are concerned with the sustaining of life, with its

continuation and reproduction: the activities of producing and consuming, or marriage, love and the family. While in the traditional ethics which came to us from the ancients, this had merely infrastructural significance (it was the first term in Aristotle's duo of ends: 'life and the good life', *zen kai euzen*; a career, *bios*, concerned with it alone puts us on a level with animals and slaves), in modern times it becomes the prime locus of significance.

In traditional ethics, ordinary life is overshadowed by what are identified as higher activities—contemplation, for some, the citizen life, for others. And in medieval Catholicism something like this overshadowing of ordinary lay life occurs relative to the dedicated life of priestly or monastic celibacy. It was particularly the Protestant Reformation, with its demand for personal commitment, its refusal of the notion of first- and second-class Christians (unless it be the distinction between saved and damned), its refusal of any location of the sacred in human space, time or rite, and its insistence on the Biblical notion that life was hallowed, which brought about the reversal. This reversal continues through the various secularized philosophies. It underlies the Baconian insistence on utility, and partly in this way feeds into the mainstream humanism of the enlightenment. It has obviously levelling, anti-aristocratic potential.

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

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

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

But Foucault doesn't take that stance at all. Ultimately, as is well known,

he wants to take a stance of neutrality. Here are just two systems of power, classical and modern. But at first blush, there seems to be a *value* reason for refusing the Enlightenment valuation. This lies in a reading of modern humanitarianism as the reflection of a new system of domination, directed towards the maintenance and increase of 'biomass'. This is the second analysis, which I would like to look at briefly.

The picture is drawn, in both *Surveiller et punir* and volume 1 of *Histoire de la sexualite*, of a constellation combining modern humanitarianism, the new social sciences, and the new disciplines which develop in armies, schools and hospitals in the eighteenth century, all seen as the formation of new modes of domination. In an immensely rich series of analyses, Foucault draws the portrait of a new form of power coming to be. Where the old power depended on the idea of public space, and of a public authority which essentially manifested itself in this space, which overawed us with its majesty, and relegated the subjects to a less visible status, the new power operates by universal surveillance. It does away with the notion of public space: power no longer appears; it is hidden, but the lives of all the subjects are now under scrutiny. This is the beginning of a work we are familiar with, in which computerized data banks are at the disposal of authorities, whose key agencies are not clearly identifiable, and whose *modus operandi* is often partly secret.[6]

The image or emblem of this new society for Foucault is Bentham's Panopticon, where a single central vantage point permits the surveillance of a host of prisoners, each of whom is isolated from all the rest, and incapable of seeing his watcher. In a striking image, he contrasts the ancient to the modern society through the emblem structure of temple and panopticon. The ancients strove to make a few things visible to the many; we try to make many things visible to the few. 'Nous sommes bien moins frecs que nous ne le croyons'.[7]

The new philosophy of punishments is thus seen as inspired not by humanitarianism but by the need to control. Or rather, humanitarianism itself seems to be understood as a kind of stratagem of the new growing mode of control.[8] The new forms of knowledge serve this end. People are measured, classed, examined in various ways, and thus made the better subject to a control which tends to normalization. In particular, Foucault speaks of the medical examination, and the various kinds of inspection which arose on its model, as a key instrument in this. The examination, he says, is at once 'le deploiement de la force et l'etablissement de la verite'.

Far from explaining the rise of this technology of control in terms of the modern identity of man as an individual, Foucault wants to explain the modern notion of individuality as one of its products. This new technology brings about the modern individual as an objective of control. The being who is thus examined, measured, categorized, made the target of policies of normalization, is the one whom we have come to define as the modern individual.[9]

There is another way of contrasting modern power with the classical. Foucault touches on it in *Sureveiller et punir* but sets it out more explicitly in later work.[10] The classical understanding of power turned on the notions of sovereignty and law. Much of early modern thought was taken up with definitions of sovereignty and legitimacy. In part these intellectual efforts were deployed in the service of the new centralized royal governments, which built up towards their apogee in the 'absolute' monarchies of the seventeenth century. In part they were concerned with the opposite movements, a definition of the limits of rightful sovereignty, and hence the rights of resistance of the subject. At the limit, this line of thought issues in the post-Rousseauian definitions of legitimate sovereignty as essentially founded on self-rule.

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

This change goes along with two others. First, where the old law/power was concerned with prohibitions, with instructions requiring that we in some way restrict our behaviour to conform to them, the new kind of power is *productive*. It brings about a new kind of subject and new kinds of desire and behaviour which belong to him. It is concerned to form us as modern individuals.[12] Second, this power is not wielded by a *subject*. It is essential to the old model that power presupposes a location of the source of command. Even if no longer in the hands of the king, it will now be located in a sovereign assembly, or perhaps in the people who have the right to elect it. In any case, the orders start from somewhere. But the new kind of power is not wielded by specific people against others, at least not in this way. It is rather a complex form of organization in which we are all involved.[13]

We still live in the theory of the old power, understood in terms of sovereignty/obedience. But the reality we have is the new one, which must be understood in terms of domination/subjugation.[14] In political theory, we still 'need to cut off the king's head'.[15]

Now this second analysis may remind us of another important theme of critical political theory, indeed, a central theme of Critical Theory (in capitals), that of the link between the domination of nature and the domination of man. This is set out in perhaps its clearest form, in one of its

most influential formulations, in Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1975).[16] But it was taken up and continued in a variety of ways, and emerges as an explicit theme in the writings of the Frankfurt School.

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

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

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

Seen in this way, Foucault offers the Frankfurt School an account of the inner connection between the domination of nature and the domination of man which is rather more detailed and more convincing than what they came up with themselves. It is the measure of the great richness of his work that this 'gift' is not at all part of his intentions. On the contrary, Foucault will have nothing to do with this Romantic-derived view of the oppression of nature and our 'liberation' from it.

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

Central to the Romantic notion of liberation is the notion that the nature

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

Foucault aims to dismantle this whole conception, and show it to be thorough-going illusion. The idea that we have a sexual nature, and that we can get it by speech, by avowal—perhaps with the help of experts—Foucault sees as an idea with deep roots in Christian civilization. It links together earlier practices of confession, through counter reformation, practices of self- scrutiny (and also reformed ones, naturally; but Foucault tends to be more familiar with French Catholic sources) to Freudian psychoanalysis, the 'talking cure'. We live in 'une societe singulierement avouante'.[17] But this idea is not the statement of a deep, culture-independent truth about us. It is rather one of these 'truths' which are produced by a certain regime of power. And in fact, it is a product of the same regime of power through the technology of control that we have just been examining.

Foucault's idea seems to be that the notion that we have a sexual nature is itself a product of those modes of knowledge designed to make us objects of control. Our acceptance that we have such a nature makes us an object of such control. For now we have to find it, and set our lives to rights by it. And finding it requires the 'help' of experts, requires that we put ourselves in their care, be they the priests of old or the psychoanalysts or social workers of today. And part of putting ourselves in their hands is our avowal, the requirement that we go on trying to *say* what we are like, what our experience is, how things are with us.

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

signification, au sexe-discourse'.[18]

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

> What is the response on the side of power? An economic (and perhaps also ideological) exploitation of eroticisation, from sun-tan products to pornographic films. Responding precisely to the revolt of the body, we find a new mode of investment which presents itself no longer in the form of control by repression but that of control by stimulation. 'Get undressed—but be slim, be good-looking, tanned'![19]

The ruse is diabolic. The whole idea that we are generally too sexually repressed, and need above all liberation; that we need to be able to talk more freely; that we need to throw off taboos and enjoy our sexual nature—this is not just another of those illusions which makes us see power always in terms of prohibitions. In fact the self-experience whereby we have a sexual nature which is held down or confined by rules and taboos is itself a creation of the new kind of power/control. In going for liberation, we see ourselves as escaping a power understood on the old model. But in fact we live under a power of the new kind, and this we are not escaping; far from it, we are playing its game, we are assuming the shape it has moulded for us. It keeps us tied to the whole 'dispositif de sexualite'.[20]

The very idea of modern sexuality thus develops as part of technologies of control. It is at the hinge where two axes of such development join.[21] On one hand, it is related to the disciplines of the body; on the other, to the regulation of populations. It serves the preservation and extension of life as the 'bio-mass', which is the over-riding direction of much modern policy.

II

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

is seen as a growing system of control.

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

And so we come to the bottom line. What about the evaluation which seems to flow from the third analysis? This would offer us some idea of a liberation, but not via the correct or authentic expression of our natures. It would be a liberation from the whole ideology of such expression, and hence from the mechanisms of control which use this ideology. It would be a liberation which was helped by our unmasking falsehood; a liberation aided by the truth.

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

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

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

Does he really do it? Even this is not so clear. There are moments where some notion of liberation seems to peek through. It is true (?) that he repudiates the notion of liberation through the truth: 'La verite n'est pas libre, ni l'erreur serve'.[22] But later there is the hint of a possible point *d'appui* for at least a relative freeing: 'Contre le dispositif de la sexualite, le point d'appui de la contre-attaque ne doit pas etre le sexe- desir, mais les corps et les plaisirs.'[23] What exactly this could mean I want to discuss later. But here, I

just want to point to the implication that once one has rejected the false idea of a liberation through the truth of one's natural sexual desires (*le sexe-desir*), there remains something else it can be founded on. In this connection, we might also mention the passages where Foucault talks about the need for a kind of revolutionary practice which did not just reproduce the forms of control which exist in the structures against which they are rebelling.[24]

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

Before I do this, I want just to mention another line of critique that one could take up against Foucault, but that I do not want to pursue here. Foucault's analyses are terribly one- sided. Their strength is their insightfulness and originality, in bringing usually neglected aspects to light. The weakness is that the other aspects seem denied altogether. We can see this with the three analyses above.

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

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

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

The point is that collective disciplines can function in both ways, as structures of domination, and as bases for equal collective action. And they

can also slide over time from one to the other. It can be argued that some of the disciplines which helped to found the societies based on contract and responsible government in earlier times, which represented a great leap forward in egalitarian politics, are now serving bureaucratic modes of irresponsible power which are sapping our democracy. I think that there is a lot in this. And undoubtedly the feeling that something like this is happening adds plausibility to Foucault's analysis, at first blush. But on reflection, we can see that Foucault's notion of modern power incapacitates us from understanding this process.

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

Foucault's attraction is partly that of *a terrible simplificateur*. His espousal of the reversal of Clausewitz's aphorism, which makes us see politics as war carried on by other means,[25] can open insights in certain situations. But to make this one's basic axiom for the examination of modern power as such leaves out too much. Foucault's opposition between the old model of power, based on sovereignty/obedience, and the new one based on domination/subjugation leaves out everything in Western history which has been animated by civic humanism or analogous movements.[26] And that means a massive amount of what is specific to our civilization. Without this in one's conceptual armoury Western history and societies become incomprehensible, as they are for reason to so many Russians (like Solzhenitsyn).

In the third analysis, Foucault is certainly on to something in the claim that sexual desire has been given exceptional importance in Western civilization, and that in the very attempts to control it, neutralize it and go beyond it. He is certainly right to point to the Christian roots of this. Again, we can appreciate the force of the point that we have somehow been led to place a tremendous weight of significance on our sexual lives and fulfilment in this culture, more than these can bear. But then to understand this simply in terms of technologies of control leaves out its roots in the theologies/ethics of ordinary life, in the Christian concern for the quality of the will, which foucault himself rightly sees as basic to this.[27] And to reduce the whole Western post-Romantic business of trying to save oneself to an artefact of such a technology of control approaches absurdity. That the aspiration to express one's true nature can *become* a mechanism of control is indeed true, and Foucault can offer insights on this. But just as in the case of bureaucratization above, you incapacitate yourself to understand this *becoming* if you conceive it from the beginning as essentially being control.

III

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

First, the idea of power without a subject. There are a number of interesting ideas here, of which two are especially important for this discussion. First, Foucault is setting aside the old model, where power is a matter of one person (group) exercising sovereign control over another; where some give orders and others obey; where some impose their wills on the others. This is usually conceived as a relation alongside the others—social, economic, familial, sexual, etc.—that people stand in with each other, conditioned by and conditioning the others, but distinct from them. On the contrary, the power Foucault is interested in is internal to, intrinsic to, these other relations. One could say that it is constitutive of them, that built into the very understanding of the common activity, or goods sought, or whatever forms the substance of the micro-relation, are forms of domination.[28] Thus the doctor-patient relation is defined by a supposed common goal, constituted by a stance of helper on the part of the professional and a recognition of need on the part of the patient. But this coming together in a common goal is inseparable from a relation of power, founded on the presumption that one *knows* and that the other has an overwhelming interest in taking advice. The relation of force is integral to the common goal as defined.

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

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

And we see from this, also, how this kind of relationship can permit reversals. There is not necessarily a continuing identity of dominators and dominated over time. There was, for instance, an ensemble of father, mother, educator and doctor constituted in the nineteenth century around the control of the child's sexuality. The original relation puts the doctor on top, offering 'advice' to parents, who are in turn controlling their children. But later, the relation of psychiatrist to child is the basis on which the adult's

sexuality is called into question.[29]

But Foucault is also putting forward a second thesis under the head of power without a subject, one about the relations of micro-to macro-contexts of power. It is not entirely clear what this thesis is, because it is stated somewhat differently in different places. But the baldest statement is perhaps this: 'que le pouvoir vient d'en bas'.[30]

This seems to mean that we cannot hope to explain the local 'rapports de forces' in terms of some global relation of dominators and dominated. This is not to say that there may not be identifiable classes or groups of those who are 'on top' or 'on the bottom' at any given time. But we have to explain this division in terms of the combinations, alignments, mutual effects, opposition, side-effects, etc, which the micro-contexts of domination produce on each other and with each other. Or, perhaps better, we have to allow for a circular relation, in which the grand alignments, which become concretized in, say, political or military institutions, both result from and have repercussions on the micro-'rapports de forces'.[31]

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

Foucault's target in this thesis is plainly Marxism, even as he rejects the Hobbesian model with the other. It is a mistake to take the relations of opposition at one level as explanatorily *basic*. That is what Marxism does. It is the global class struggle and its exigencies which are used to explain the way people square off in the micro-contexts, of family, factory, professional association and so on. There is a widely accepted view that we ought to explain, for example, the incarceration of the mad in the sixteenth century, or the repressive interest in infantile sexuality in the nineteenth century, in terms of the requirements of the rising bourgeois economy. Foucault rejects this. Rather the relation was that these contexts of domination developed in their own fashion, and were then taken up and used by the macro- context of domination. They 'came to be colonized and maintained by the global mechanisms and the entire state system', in which the bourgeoisie was hegemonic.[32]

So far, so clear. Indeed, we might be tempted to say: so far, so true. But now there is a third thesis under this head which Foucault also seems to be propounding. Perhaps this is a good statement of it: 'que les relations de pouvoir sont a la fois intentionnelles et non subjectives'.[33] What Foucault seems to be affirming here is that, aside from the particular conscious purpose which agents pursue in their given context, there is discernible a strategic logic of the context itself, but this cannot be attributed to anyone as their plan, as their conscious purpose. As he puts it in *Power/Knowledge*, talking of the kind of history he writes, 'the coherence of such a history does

not derive from the revelation of a project, but the logic of opposing strategies'.[34]

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

> Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter-attack in that same body. Do you recall the panic of the institutions of the social body, the doctors and politicians, at the idea of non-legalized cohabitation [*l'union libre*] or free abortion? But the impression that power weakens and vacillates here is in fact mistaken; power can retreat here, re-organize its forces, invest itself elsewhere. . . and so the battle continues.[35]

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

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

a. We can recognize a certain purposefulness in people's action where their motivation and goals are unacknowledged or perhaps unacknowledge-able. An example would be the (I think profound) Dostoyevskian analysis of modern political terrorism in terms of projected self-hatred and the response to a sense of emptiness. These purposes are not only unacknowledged, they could not be acknowledged without undermining the whole enterprise, which depends crucially on the notion that one is acting out of purely political-strategic considerations. But they might explain certain systematic features of terrorism better than the overtly avowed goals.
b. Then there are theories of unintended but systematic consequences, such as 'invisible hand' theories, that is, theories where the situation is so constituted that individual decisions are bound to concentrate in a certain systematic way. The best-known example is the (malign) invisible hand account of capitalism by Marx. The structure of a capitalist economy is that individual decisions have to concatenate towards an ever-greater polarization, immiseration of the masses, concentration of capital, falling rate of profit and so on.
c. There are unintended consequences theories which touch on the results of

collective action, and not just the combination of individual actions. As an example, we can perhaps see a certain pattern in Leninist politics whereby the possibilities of devolution and a move towards participation are more and more restricted. This is a consequence unintended by Leninist parties at the outset, but it could perhaps be shown that it follows ineluctably from their model of mass mobilization, which systematically ends up destroying the bases for developed power. The tragedy would be that a movement aimed at liberation and radical democratization should end up destroying these more effectively than predecessor regimes.

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

It is a mistake to think that the only intelligible relation between a pattern and our conscious purposes is the direct one where the pattern is consciously willed. This is a hang-up which did come down to us from classical Cartesian-empiricist views of the mind. Foucault is right to ridicule it: 'ne cherchons pas l'etat-major qui preside a sa rationalite' (*sc. du pouvoir*).[36] But this must not be confused with the explanatory requirement outlined above. It is certainly not the case that all patterns issue from conscious action, but all patterns have to be made *intelligible* in relation to conscious action.

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

In order to stick by the second thesis in this case, we would need some

account on model (b), where micro-reactions concatenate in this systematic way. I don't say something like this cannot be found, but I am at a loss to say as to where one should start looking for it. And Foucault doesn't even feel the need to start looking.

This is not to say that there is a difficulty with Foucault's second thesis in principle. On the contrary, there are obviously lots of aspects of social life in which this reciprocal play of micro-practice and global structure, each producing (largely unintended) consequences for the other, is the right explanatory model. The problem arises only when one combines this with Foucault's very strong claims to systematicity, in the idea that there are pervasive *strategies* afoot which condition the battle in each micro-context, that 'power' can 'retreat' or 're-organize its forces'. These can only be combined via some account of how actions concatenate systematically some model of type (b). But Foucault doesn't even try. He leaves us with a strange kind of Schopenhauerian will, ungrounded in human action.[37]

One of the most important reasons why Foucault doesn't feel a need to offer an account here is the confusion which has afflicted the republic of letters during these last decades about the supposed 'death of subjectivity'. This had its epicentre in Paris. Foucault took part in it.[38] Hacking praises Foucault for having stepped beyond the old conception of subjectivity, which required all purposefulness in history to have a purposer.[39]

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

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

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

Indeed, for purposes of such diachronic explanation, we can question whether we ought to speak of a priority of language over act. There is a circular relation. Structures of action or languages are only maintained by being renewed constantly in action/speech. And it is in action/speech that they also fail to be maintained, that they are altered. This is a crashing truism, but the fog emanating from Paris in recent decades makes it necessary to clutch it as a beacon in the darkness. To give an absolute priority to the structure makes exactly as *little sense* as the equal and opposite error of subjectivism, which gave absolute priority to the action, as a kind of total beginning.

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

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

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

'Power' in the way Foucault sees it, closely linked to 'domination', does not require a clearly demarcated perpetrator, but it requires a victim. It cannot be a 'victimless crime', so to speak. Perhaps the victims also exercise it, also victimize others. But power needs targets.[40] Something must be being imposed on someone, if there is to be domination. Perhaps that person is also helping to impose it himself, but then there must be an element of

fraud, illusion, false pretences involved in this. Otherwise, it is not clear that the imposition is in any sense an exercise of *domination*.[41]

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

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

This is recognized by Foucault in his thesis that there is no power without 'resistances.'[42] Indeed, Foucault is sometimes dramatically aware of the force and savagery of the imposition. Take this passage, about knowledge, but illustrating its close connection to power:

> . . . its development [sc. of knowledge] is not tied to the constitution and affirmation of a free subject: rather it creates a progressive enslavement to its instinctive violence. Where religions once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge.[43]

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

The Foucaultian thesis involves combining the fact that any set of institutions and practices form the background to our action within them, and are in that sense unremovable while we engage in that kind of action,

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

So 'power' requires 'liberty'. But it also requires 'truth'—if we want to allow, as Foucault does, that we can collaborate in our own subjugation. Indeed, that is a crucial feature of the modern system of control, that it gets us to agree and concur in the name of truth, or liberation of our own nature. If we want to allow this, then 'truth' is an essential notion, because the imposition proceeds here by foisting illusion on us; it proceeds by disguises and masks; it proceeds thus by falsehood: 'Cest a la condition de masquer une part importante de lui-meme que le pouvoir est tolerable. Sa reussite est en proportion de ce qu'il parvient a cacher de ses mecanismes. Le pouvoir serait-il accepte s'il etait entierement cynique? Le secret n'est pas pour lui de l'ordre de l'abus: il est indispensable a son fonctionnement.'[44]

Mask, falsehood, makes no sense without a corresponding notion of truth. Truth here is subversive of power: it is on the side of the lifting of impositions, of what we have just called liberation. The Foucaultian notion of power not only requires for its sense the correlative notions of truth and liberation, but even the standard link between them, which makes truth the condition of liberation. To speak of power, and to want to deny a place to 'liberation' and 'truth', as well as the link between them, is to speak incoherently. That is, indeed, the reason why Foucault seems to be contradicting himself in the passages I quoted above (section II). He doesn't just slip into these formulations, which seem to allow for the possibility of a liberation and, indeed, one founded on a puncturing of illusions, a defence founded on 'les corps, les plaisirs, les savoirs, dans leur multiplicite et leur possibilite de resistance'.[45] He is driven by the contradictory position he has adopted.[46]

In the end, the final basis of Foucault's refusal of 'truth' and 'liberation' seems to be a Nietzschean one. This is not all of Nietzsche; there is more, and not all of it compatible with this part. But at least in the *Frohliche Wissenschaft* we have a doctrine which Foucault seems to have made his own; there is no order of human life, or way we are, or human nature, that one can appeal to in order to judge or evaluate between ways of life. There are only different orders imposed by men on primal chaos following their will-to-

power. Foucault espouses both the relativistic thesis from this view, that one cannot judge between forms of life/thought/valuation, and also the notion that these different forms involve the imposition of power. The idea of 'regimes of truth',[47] and of their close intrication with systems of dominance, is profoundly Nietzschean. In this relationship Foucault sees truth as subordinated to power. Let me quote that passage again more fully:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.[48]

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

> There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. This is the case for every society, but I believe that in ours the relationship between power, right and truth is organized in a highly specific fashion. . . I would say that we are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we *must* speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess to or discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth; it institutionalizes, professionalises and rewards its pursuit. In the last analysis, we must produce truth as we must produce wealth. . .[49]

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

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

There has to be a place for revolt/resistance aided by unmasking in a position like Foucault's, and he allows for it. But the general relativity thesis will not allow for liberation through a transformation of power relations. Because of relativity, transformation from one regime to another cannot be a *gain* in truth or freedom, because each is redefined in the new context. They are incomparable. And because of the Nietzschean notion of truth imposed

by a regime of power, Foucault cannot envisage liberating transformations *within* a regime. The regime is entirely identified with its imposed truth. Unmasking can only destabilize it; we cannot bring about a new, stable, freer, less mendacious form of it by this route. Foucault's Nietzschean theory can only be the basis of utterly monolithic analysis; which is what we saw above in his failure to recognize the ambivalence of modern disciplines, which are the bases both of domination and self-rule.

And so, for him unmasking can only be the basis for a kind of local resistance within the regime. In chapter 5 of *Power/Knowledge*, he speaks of rehabilitating subjugated and local knowledges against the established dominant truth. He uses the expression 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges'.[50] The term bespeaks his basic idea: there is no question of a new form, just a kind of resistance movement, a set of destabilizing actions, always local-specific, within the dominant form. One of Foucault's historical paradigms seems to be the popular riots and uprisings which occurred in the former regimes at some of the execution scenes. Plebeian resistance is a kind of model:

> No doubt it would be mistaken to conceive the plebs as the permanent ground of history, the final objective of all subjections, the ever smouldering centre of all revolts. The plebs is no doubt not a real sociological entity. But there is indeed always something in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power, something which is by no means a more or less docile or reactive primal matter, but rather a centrifugal movement, an inverse energy, a discharge. There is certainly no such thing as 'the' plebs; rather there is, as it were, a certain plebeian quality or aspect. There is plebs in bodies, in souls, in individuals, in the proletariat, in the bourgeoisie, but everywhere in a diversity of forms and extensions, of energies and irreducibilities. This measure of plebs is not so much what stands outside relations of power as their limit, their underside, their counter-stroke, that which responds to every advance of power by a movement of disengagement.[51]

We can see at least some of the motivation for this espousal of local insurrections. Foucault is deeply suspicious of 'global, totalitarian theories'[52] which claim to offer the overall solution to our ills. The target, as it must be in the world Foucault inhabits, is of course principally Marxism. And one can have a great deal of sympathy for this reaction, in face of the destruction wrought by such global revolutionary schemes. There is a great deal to be said on the Left for a politics which stays close to the local, to lived experience, to the aspirations which groups spontaneously adopt. But this by itself does not determine one to adopt the Nietzschean model of truth, with its relativism and its monolithic analyses. Just because some claims to truth are unacceptable, we do not need to blow the whole conception to pieces.

Something else drives Foucault to Nietzscheanism. I think it will come out if I try to grapple with the central issue around this position. What does this combination of relativism between forms and monolithism of forms leave out? It leaves out—or better, it blocks out—the possibility of a change of life-

form which can be understood as a move towards a greater acceptance of truth—and hence also, in certain conditions, a move towards greater freedom. But in order to conceive a change in these terms we have to see the two forms as commensurable; the form before and the form after the change cannot be seen as incommensurable universes. How can this come about?

Biographically, we see examples all the time. After a long period of stress and confusion, I come to see that I really love A, or I really don't want to take that job. I now see retrospectively that the image of myself as quite free and uncommitted had a merely superficial hold on me. It did not correspond to a profound aspiration. It just stood in the way of my recognizing the depths of my commitment to A. Or the picture of a career which that job instantiated, which seemed before so powerful, so non-gainsayable, turns out to be a model which my entourage was pressing on me, but which I cannot really endorse.

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

Is there nothing comparable in politics/history? There is. There are changes which turn on, which are justified by, what we have become as a society, a civilization. The American revolutionaries called on their compatriots to rise in the name of the liberties which defined their way of *life* (ironically as Englishmen). This kind of claim is always contested (there were Tories, there were Loyalists, as is well known, where I come from). But is it by its nature unacceptable? Is it always sham? Foucault would have us believe so.

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

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

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

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

Foucault's monolithic relativism only seems plausible if one takes the outsider's perspective, the view from Sirius; or perhaps imagines oneself a soul in Plato's myth of Er. Do I want to be born a Sung dynasty Chinese, or a subject of Hammurabi of Babylon, or a twentieth-century American? Without a prior identity, I couldn't begin to choose. They incarnate incommensurable goods (at least prior to some deep comparative study, and conceivably even after this). But this is not my/our situation. We have already *become* something. Questions of truth and freedom can arise for us in the transformations we undergo or project. In short, we have a *history*. We live in time not just self-enclosed in the present, but essentially related to a past which has helped define our identity, and a future which puts it again in question.

And indeed in his major works, like *The Order of Things* and *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault sounds as though he believed that, as an historian, he could stand nowhere, identifying with none of the epistemai or structures of power whose coming and going he impartially surveys. But there were signs that this was not to be his last word. It would appear that Foucault was going to elaborate in forthcoming publications his own conception of a good life.

From certain indications,[53] this would seem to be based, as one would expect, on a rejection of the whole idea that we have a deep self or nature which we have to decipher. Foucault thinks that Christianity introduces this false turn into Western culture. Where the ancient 'care of the self' was concerned with self-making and self-mastery, Christian spirituality was preoccupied rather with purity and self-renunciation. 'From that moment on the self was no longer something to be made but something to be renounced and deciphered'.[54]

Foucault's project seems to be to return to these ancient sources, not in order to revive them—even if this were possible, he believes there is lots to criticize in ancient culture on other grounds—but as the point of departure for a different line of development. This would bring us to a conception of the good life as a kind of self-making, related in this way to the ancient 'aesthetic of existence'[55] that one would make one's own life a work of art. '... the principal work of art one has to take care of, the main area to which one has to apply aesthetic values is oneself, one's life, one's existence.'[56]

It is understandable how Foucault, from the standpoint of an ethic of this kind, should want to distance himself from the banners of 'freedom' and 'truth', since these have been the key terms in the view he is repudiating, that we ought to bring to light our true nature of deep self. And the affinity with Nietzsche in the stress on self-making is very understandable also. But this in no way lessens the paradox involved in the attempt to avoid these terms altogether. Indeed, in offering us a new way of re-appropriating our history, and in rescuing us from the supposed illusion that the issues of the deep self are somehow inescapable, what is Foucault laying open for us, if not a truth which frees us for self-making?

Perhaps Foucault was moving, before his sudden and premature death, to free his position from this paradox, seemingly linked with the impossible attempt to stand nowhere. Perhaps we can see the last work as a step towards and acknowledgement of his own sources, an identification of moments when these sources were lost or obscured (the rise of Christian spirituality), and a definition of what we have to undo to rescue what needs saving.[57] At that point, the really interesting debate can begin, on the issues which count, which Foucault's mode of expression up to now has obscured.

There are two such issues, which it is worth tabling for future discussions.

1. Can we really step outside the identity we have developed in Western civilization to such a degree that we can repudiate all that comes to us from the Christian understanding of the will? Can we toss aside the whole tradition of Augustinian inwardness?

2. Granted we really can set this aside, is the resulting 'aesthetic of existence' all that admirable?

These questions are hard to separate, and even harder to answer. But they are among the most fundamental raised by the admirable work of Michel Foucault.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon, 1980, p. 131.
2. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975; *Histoire de la sexualite*, vol. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1976.
3. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, p. 53.
4. Ibid., p. 47.
5. Ibid., pp. 59-60.
6. Cf. the ancient idea of tyranny as power hiding itself, as in the myth of Gyges.
7. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, p. 219.
8. Thus in explaining the unplanned rise of this new form, Foucault says: 'Take the example of philanthropy in the early nineteenth century: people appear who make it their business to involve themselves in other people's lives, health, nutrition, housing; then, out of this confused set of functions there emerge certain personages, institutions, forms of knowledge: public hygiene, inspectors, social workers, psychologists' (*Power/Knowledge*, p. 62). Foucault is precisely not claiming that there was a plot laid by anyone. The explanatory model of history here seems to be that certain things arise for a whole host of possible reasons, and then get taken up and used by the emerging constellation. But what is clear is that the dominating thrust of the constellation which uses them is not humanitarian beneficence but control. I will discuss this understanding of historical change below.
9. Cf. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 98.
10. E.g. in ibid., chap. 5.
11. Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, p. 224. Cf. 'society of normalization', Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 107.
12. Cf. the references to Marcuse in *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 59, 120.
13. In *Power/Knowledge*, p. 140, Foucault points out the close link between these two changes.
14. Ibid., p. 96.
15. Ibid., p. 121.
16. Esp. letter 6.
17. Foucault, *Sexualite*, p. 79.
18. Ibid., p. 102.
19. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 57.
20. Cf. the reference to Wilhelm Reich in Foucault, *Sexualite*, p. 173. This analysis obviously has parallels to Marcuse's about 'repressive de-sublimation', and this just underlines the point above about the possible utility of Foucault's analysis for critical theory. But the crucial difference remains, that Critical Theory stays within the notion of liberation through true expression, while Foucault denounces this. Hence his critique of Marcuse (*Power/Knowledge*, p. 59) for

thinking of power still purely in terms of repression.

21. Foucault, *Sexualite*, p. 191.
22. Ibid., p. 81.
23. Ibid., p. 208.
24. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 60, 61.
25. Ibid., p. 90; see also Foucault, *Sexualite*, p. 123.
26. The sovereignty model is meant to cope with the rebellion against despotic power and the rise of representative institutions. But in fact it can only illuminate its Lockean aspect. The civic humanist aspect precisely cannot be put in terms of who is giving orders to whom. The concept of sovereignty cannot be integrated without strain in this form of thought.
27. *London Review of Books*, 21 May-3 June 1981, p. 5.
28. Foucault, *Sexualite*, pp. 123-24.
29. Ibid., p. 131.
30. Ibid., p. 124.
31. Ibid., pp. 131-32.
32. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 99-101.
33. Foucault, *Sexualite*, p. 124.
34. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 61.
35. Ibid., p. 56.
36. Foucault, *Sexualite*, p. 125.
37. Hacking, *New York Review of Books* (14 May 1981), has already pointed out the Schopenhauerian overtones of the title of volume 1 of *Histoire de la sexualite, La Volonte de savoir* (see above, p. 34). But even Schopenhauer would not do as a theoretical background for Foucault, for that would give an account in our 'nature'. He has to be more evasive than this.
38. This set of doctrines is sometimes called 'structuralist', or 'post-structuralist', but the aspiration to overcome subjectivity goes well beyond people who hold some structuralist model or other. Foucault is a case in point.
39. *New York Review of Books*, p. 35.
40. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 98: '[Individuals] are not only its [sc. power's] inept or consenting target: they are also the elements of its articulation'. But this means that they are targets.
41. I indicated above how heedless Foucault is of this boundary, in which the self-disciplines of freedom are distinguished from the disciplines of domination. This all turns on whether and how they are *imposed*.
42. Foucault, *Sexualite*, pp. 125-27; *Power/Knowledge*, p. 142.
43. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Oxford: 1977, p. 163; quoted in an unpublished paper by Mark Philip.
44. Foucault, *Sexualite*, p. 113.
45. Ibid., p. 208.
46. Of course, there is a question whether Foucault isn't trying to have it both ways with his notion of a resistance founded on 'les corps et les plaisirs', on something quite inarticulate, not on an *understanding* of ourselves, or an *articulation* of our desires/purposes. But does this make sense? Can we 'faire valoir contre les prises du pouvoir les corps et les plaisirs . . .' (ibid) without articulating them for ourselves, and affirming the truth of that articulation against the specious claims of the system of control? I don't see how. Foucault seems to be talking here out of both sides of his mouth.

47. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 131.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid., p. 93.
50. Ibid., p. 81.
51. Ibid., pp. 137-8. This idea of political resistance without a positive new vision is parallel to the notion of resistance to the dominant sexuality based on the essentially unarticulated 'bodies and pleasures'. In both cases, the question very much arises whether Foucault can have it both ways. Is there a plebeian resistance which does not at least point to an alternative model, even if it may for some reasons be unrealizable in practice? Or if there is, if we can find really mindless insurrections in history, do they really offer us models for our political action?
52. Ibid., p. 80.
53. See the new chapters in the second edition of Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, University of Chicago Press, 1983.
54. Ibid., p. 248.
55. Ibid., p. 251.
56. Ibid., p. 245.
57. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualite*, Paris: Gallimard, 1984, vol. 2, *L'Usage des plaisirs*, and vol. 3, *Le Souci de soi*.