

**Modernity and Politics of the Self: An Investigation of the  
Political Project Underlying the Work of Michel Foucault**

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I would like to point out three areas which should be disclaimed with regards this dissertation:

1) In this dissertation I have only used English translations of Foucault's work ; I am not responsible for the accuracy of these.

2) All quotes appear as they do in the various translations, whether in British or American style English. I have not changed American wording to suit my own vernacular.

3) Throughout this paper I refer to "Man" and want to make it clear that this is with full consciousness of the way in which language has apprehended itself in a recent more inclusionary world. This is *not* a move on my part to exclude, quite the contrary. "Man" is the word used by Foucault to describe a particular entity which he believes has been created through history, with this very fact rendering it fragile and open to change. I have used male-centred language throughout the dissertation *where it is appropriate*, but again with full consciousness of this, and with no intention of offending my readers.

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**ABSTRACT**

of the MA Dissertation entitled  
“Modernity and Politics of the Self: An Investigation of the Political  
Project Underlying the Work of Michel Foucault” by Stephen  
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The central task of this dissertation is to explore Michel Foucault's conception of the human subject, and its interaction with power. Foucault offers a unique and controversial description of both the latter. After positing that his work is both coherent and political in nature, the dissertation investigates Foucault's books, lectures, interviews and articles throughout his three main periods. I have named these his Knowledge, Power, and Ethics periods to delineate different theoretical focuses in each period which are nevertheless underscored by a singular and continuous concern on Foucault's part with the constitution of the modern human subject; in addition, Foucault is interested in problematizing the “birth” and existence of this latter construction, which he believes is problematic in terms of the epistemological foundation upon which it rests, and the ontological consequences of such an entity.

In the first part of this dissertation, I explore Foucault's first three important texts, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), and *The Order of Things* (1966), in order to describe his theories around knowledge and the ways in which the birth of a modern science concerned with the nature of the human subject gave birth to Man, an epistemologically definable entity.

Part II of this dissertation concerns itself with Foucault's second period in which he introduces a theory of power. This compliments his theories of knowledge and the constitution of Man, and allows Foucault to explain how it is that knowledge flows within society and affects social, political and economic change. In addition, this section introduces Foucault's notion of bio-politics, a particular political agenda which focuses on

human life and its maximization. He links the constitution of Man with this political agenda, and this gives rise to serious concerns about the nature of modern power. The texts which are centrally explored in this section are *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1) (1976).

Once Foucault's general theoretical concerns are introduced, two important questions emerge. From a liberal perspective, Charles Taylor criticizes what appears to be the lack of the ability for the subject to construe meaningful truth as a result of the way in which Foucault describes both the human subject and power; his argument is introduced in his "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," and I use this article both to critically examine Foucault's work from the perspective of a very different philosophical tradition, as well as to introduce Foucault's later work.

The second important criticism introduced in the dissertation is a broadly marxist concern, introduced in Martin Jay's *Marxism and Totality* and supported by other marxist theorists. This tradition is primarily concerned with a seeming lack of political agency in Foucault's work, the ability of the human subject to act in a specifically political way against forms of exterior oppression. Given Foucault's description of a constituted subject and its interaction with power relations, a marxist model of revolution is made impossible.

The final part of the dissertation explores the final two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* (1984). I am centrally concerned here with describing the politics which emerge in Foucault's work on ethics. Looking back to ancient Greece and Rome, Foucault uses Stoic thought to outline an ethics for modern thought which is innately political. This serves the two-fold purpose of defending Foucault's work against the marxist critiques, as well as supporting my thesis that his work contains a political agenda, and is primarily concerned with the political implications of modern humanism and the resultant constitution of the human subject in power-knowledge relations.

The thesis concludes with describing what the author believes to be an innately political theoretical paradigm. Although Foucault's ideas do not support (in fact reject)



traditional conceptions of human nature, rights, and power as sovereignty, he nevertheless does take into account the concerns of the humanist tradition as introduced above, and supersedes the strength of their models. I conclude that Foucault's *oeuvre* is both coherent, in terms of the uniform emphasis put on the constitution of the human subject and its relationship to modern power, as well as innately political.

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As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity--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 to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeable and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would better be left backstage; or, at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But, then, what is philosophy today--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? There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or when it works up a case against them in the language of naive positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The "essay"--which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication--is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an "asceticism," *askésis*, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.

The studies that follow, like the others I have done previously, are studies of "history" by reason of the domain they deal with and the references they appeal to; but they are not the work of a "historian." Which does not mean that they summarize or synthesize work done by others. Considered from the standpoint of their "pragmatics," they are the record of a long and tentative exercise that needed to be revised and corrected again and again. It was a philosophical exercise. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from which it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2)

# **INTRODUCTION**

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*INTRODUCTION:*  
**“WHO IS MICHEL FOUCAULT?”**

I think I have in fact been situated in most of the squares on the political checkerboard, one after another and sometimes simultaneously: as anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised Marxist, nihilist, explicit or secret anti-Marxist, technocrat in the service of Gaullism, new liberal, etc. An American professor complained that a crypto-Marxist like me was invited to the U.S.A., and I was denounced by the press in Eastern European countries for being an accomplice of the dissidents. None of these descriptions is important by itself; taken together, on the other hand, they mean something. And I must admit that I rather like what they mean.

Michel Foucault, interview April 1983

I don't feel that it is necessary to know exactly what I am. The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end.

Michel Foucault, interview October 1982

Despite the range of political labels that a motley of persons and persuasions have attempted to pin on Michel Foucault, he remains enigmatic. His desire to avoid intellectual categorization and retain political anonymity is expressed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* as the wish to create “a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse...in which I can lose myself and appear at last to

eyes that I will never have to meet again.”<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, however, Foucault’s life and work was also marked by a distinctive commitment to the political responsibility and consequence of being an intellectual: for the purposes of exploring his work and its value for contemporary political philosophy, the question, “Who is Michel Foucault?”, might thus better be construed as follows: “What does Foucault offer us intellectually, and equally importantly, politically? Does his work and thought involve a distinct and coherent political project, and, if so, what is its nature?” Rather than attempting to label Foucault, I wish to bring his intellectual and political project more clearly to light.

For the purposes of better understanding the underlying concerns of Foucault’s work, I ask my reader to consider the following quote. I believe that it provides some evidence to suggest that, while Foucault shies from being labeled as an adherent to a particular political paradigm, his work does involve a peculiar “politics” of his own. In his concern with modern subjectivity and human identity, Foucault postulates that perhaps

“the problem of the self is not to discover what it is in its positivity, maybe the problem is not to discover a positive self or the positive foundation of the self. Maybe our problem is now to discover that the self is nothing else than the historical correlation of the technology built into our history. Maybe the problem is to change those technologies. And in this case, one of the main *political* problems would be nowadays, in the strict sense of the word, *the politics of ourselves*.”<sup>2</sup>

In this, we see a linking of the self to a particular “technology” and to a kind of “politics”. Two things are important here. First, that the Foucauldian subject is introduced as a *constructed* entity. I use the word “constructed” to juxtapose Foucault’s description of the modern subject with that of the traditional understanding of the subject as a unified entity founded on essential properties which are widely accepted as constitutive of the human self. Particularly in *The Order of Things*,

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup>Foucault, “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self: Two Lectures at Dartmouth,” ed. Mark Blasius, in *Political Theory*, 1993 (Vol. 21), pp. 222-223. My emphasis.

Foucault shows the concept of “the self” to be something which is constituted or moulded within discourse and through history, a contingent entity whose birth is traceable to a particular time and to particular events within knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

The second important point in this passage is Foucault’s allusion to a possibility that in some way the “technologies” which constitute the self are themselves open to “change”, and that this process is principally *political* in nature. If the historical process of constituting identity can be shown to be political in nature, then any challenge presented to this position must also be inherently political. This is where Foucault’s political project emerges. Essential for the purpose of this thesis is Foucault’s description of human bodies caught up in complex relations of modern knowledge and power, the latter linked to socio-political and economic practices. Foucault’s earliest works (*Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The Order of Things*) investigate the emergence of modern knowledge as initially concerned with naming and categorizing the human condition or human experience. From *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault links knowledge and the creation of a normative understanding of Man with what he calls “disciplinary techniques”, a political practice which imposes acceptable forms of behaviour on the human body. These techniques of the bodies are indicative of a particular political agenda in modernity, a pervasive concern with *population*, the size and nature of those who make up a particular country’s labour force and thus economic strength. Foucault links these various techniques which mould the body, (and thus produce the self as a constructed entity), with the economic necessity in modernity to maximize human economic utility, and simultaneously ensure sufficient political docility. In a scathing attack on modern liberalism, Foucault’s “politics of ourselves” is a rejection of the ontological limitations on the subject and the knowledge structures which force identity upon the modern. His politics is thus an investigation into, and a subsequent desire to overturn, the limits of modern thought around the human subject. It is a politics which operates on the liminal frontiers of the

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<sup>3</sup>Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. xiii-xiv.

knowledges which define our reality, and a project which encourages the modern to transgress these restrictive boundaries.

Given the scope of Foucault's intellectual thought, and the formulation of some of his ideas, (particularly around knowledge, power, and their interaction in the creation of Man), there has been a great deal of controversy over how to define his work. I propose to show that Foucault's work is progressively consolidated over his career around a central and lasting concern: the human subject. I contend that Foucault's *oeuvre* is coherent, and further, that intrinsic to his philosophic concerns is a discernible political project. I use the word "coherent" to mean that while Foucault's work can be divided into three distinct periods, it can similarly be related to a central goal or theme which provides structure and focus throughout his *oeuvre*. Before expanding on the task presented for this dissertation, I think it important to clarify Foucault's central philosophic concerns, which will expand on his reference to the subject, identity, and "the politics of ourselves" in the quote above.

We find guidance to his central philosophic concerns in an article written quite late in his career, "The Subject and Power": "The goal of my work...has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects."<sup>4</sup> Foucault is centrally interested in historicizing the constitution of the modern subject; such a process, begun with early modern investigations into the "nature" of Man, produced epistemological and ontological knowledge of human beings and facilitated a process of naming and identity-formation. A central concern running throughout his works is a description of how it is that "Man" has come to exist as a known and empirically definable entity within knowledge formations that have the human species as their principle source of interest. Foucault problematizes these human sciences on two levels: first, in terms of the modern *epistémé*,<sup>5</sup> or knowledge foundation, which unproblematically has elevated these bodies of knowledge to the

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<sup>4</sup>Foucault, "The Subject and Power," (Afterword), in *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, p. 208.

<sup>5</sup>Foucault uses the word "*epistémé*" to describe a primary knowledge structure which determines for a particular age what is deemed "truthful", scientific, or correct. We will spend a good deal of time discussing this concept later in the dissertation.

status of *sciences*. Second, he undermines the widely-held humanist perception of Man as an entity which has a stable and scientifically discernible nature. On the one hand, his philosophical project thus involves an investigation into the emergence of the modern human sciences as knowledges which claim to scientifically discern and describe a grounded human interior; on the other, it involves an undermining of the principle of Man itself. For these reasons, the notion of the subject is central to both Foucault's work, and to this dissertation, in terms of ways in which human subjects might problematize both *epistemological truths* imposed on them by the human sciences, as well as the *ontological limits* which result from a totalized theory of the subject and its nature. To provide the necessary theory in addressing these problems, Foucault introduces his methods of archaeology and genealogy: archaeology as method seeks to define the epistemological structure of knowledge in a particular age; genealogy uses this archaeological knowledge to investigate the ways in which knowledge of the human subject affects social practice, i.e., the ways in which discourse and action intersect to create reality.

In "The Subject and Power", Foucault summarizes his concern with the historical constitution of the subject in an important passage worth quoting in length. In this, he makes reference to, and thus distinguishes, three ways in which "human beings are made subjects," "three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects."<sup>6</sup> Of these modes, he writes

"The first is the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences [the human sciences as mentioned above]; for example, the objectivizing of the speaking subject in *grammaire générale*, philology, and linguistics. Or again, in this first mode, the objectivizing of the productive subject, the subject who labors, in the analysis of wealth and economics. Or, a third example, the objectivizing of the sheer fact of being alive in natural history or biology. In the second part of my work, I have studied the objectivizing of the subject in what I shall call 'dividing practices.' The subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others. This process objectivizes him. Examples are the mad and the

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<sup>6</sup>"The Subject and Power," p. 208.

sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the 'good boys.' Finally, I have sought to study...the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject. For example, I have chosen the domain of sexuality--how men have learned to recognize themselves as subjects of 'sexuality'."7

Foucault thus outlines three creative techniques, or operations of thought, which bring about what we refer to as the modern "subject". The first of these processes concerns itself with defining an objective *epistemology* of the human being, the latter empirically observed in the formation of various treatises on the "human condition". Here Foucault is concerned with understanding the process through which, and parameters within which, thought has come to investigate Man, and then recorded these observations within discourse. Further, he will seek to understand the process whereby these various knowledges, concerned with a wide range of human experiences (from speech, through labour, to Man as a living organism), acquired the status of *sciences*.

Second, Foucault concerns himself with ways in which this knowledge has been used to define human subjects *ontologically*. Once known within discourse, Foucault seeks to discover how knowledge of the human condition is applied to human bodies in a process of dividing the Self from his Other. The "Self" would be that which is considered a normal condition for the human species in terms of a particular discourse; that which violates such a definition would thus be considered Other, normality's anomalous twin. Foucault begins such investigations with inquiries into modern penality and human sexuality, and hereby plots the various modern methods used to divide bodies and spaces which are perceived as either useful or a threat to society.

Third, Foucault investigates practices which human beings bring to bear upon their own bodies in a process of transformation or self-definition. He is interested here in the process by which a person comes to recognize himself as constitutive of a particular identity; or is aware of himself as indicative of particular qualities, forms of

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<sup>7</sup>ibid.

Man, and his epistemological instability as a result of this, as well as with the possibility, (perhaps even the necessity), of overcoming this humanist creation.

In his second, *genealogical* phase, Foucault writes histories of particular social institutions, to illustrate how it is that knowledge is translated into social practice. Foucault's central works during this phase, (*Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1), introduce his theory of power to illustrate how knowledge garnered by the human sciences work to define Man's identity and consciousness, and are thus innately oppressive and ontologically limiting. During this stage of his work, Foucault is increasingly concerned to show how knowledge overlaps and intersects with power relations, hereby linking discursive formations with social practices. Because of the direct link which Foucault makes between knowledge and the manipulation of bodies within social space, he is also able to suggest a possible transformation of these practices through a problematization of intellectual truths which are taken for granted as universal and scientific in nature.

However, given his rejection of a unified subject and his definition of power as uninvested in bodies, Foucault cannot provide a traditional account of political or ontological liberation. This is a particularly controversial political thesis: Foucault rejects both marxist and liberal causal interpretations of ways in which oppression can be accounted for. On the marxist account, oppression is to be understood by the oppressive link between workers and capitalist bosses; in the liberal view oppression is understood as the negation or stifling of inherently owned political and social rights which are enshrined in law. In both accounts oppression is assumed to be a negation of some deep human essence or truth. Marxists concern themselves with the doing away of economic and social alienation which is brought about by the imposition of an exploitative capitalist system on the majority of the worlds population (the workers); liberals are primarily concerned with the protection of human rights and a justice which they perceive to be the inherent right of every human being. Foucault rejects both on the grounds that they remain steadfastly rooted in the humanist tradition, with Man conceived as the sole entity constitutive of reality. Because Foucault rejects any notion

of an inherent human consciousness or rights, oppression for Foucault is simply the process whereby limits are placed upon the ontological choices open to the modern human subject; the degree to which epistemological limits to thought impede a thinking Other than the norm.

Foucault's final *ethics* period is concerned both with the history and practice of self-construction as a *reinforcement* of techniques of modern power and discipline, as well as with the ways in which identity and self-understanding might be manipulated for the purpose of strategizing *resistance* against such inhibiting disciplines. It is here that we find his politics emerging more explicitly. In fact, this has been part of his project all along. First Foucault undermined modern knowledge at an epistemological level; second, he problematized the theories of Man which emerged from these knowledges, and thus challenged "who we are" as moderns, the ways in which we have come to understand identity and difference, Self and Others, the normal and pathological, and the deviant anomalies which threaten our vested interest in a grounded human nature. The full force of Foucault's project emerges in this final stage as a radical critique not only of our systems of knowledge, but the very names we give ourselves, and the identities which we are forced to accept in modernity.

For our present purposes, three central problems emerge as critical areas to be investigated *vis-à-vis* Foucault's political project: first, his archaeological account of the discovery of the Man within the human sciences; second, his genealogical investigation into the construction of the self within particular "discursive practices", as well as within "technologies" of power, involving a conception of power radically opposed to a traditional (liberal) understanding of power as sovereignty and the ability to coerce with force; third, and perhaps most important for the purposes of this dissertation, the way in which Foucault describes the subject as problematizing the interaction between power/knowledge relations and Being, hereby overturning "technologies" intrinsic to this process. I wish to explore each of these problems in turn, and thus provide an outline for the four parts that make up this dissertation.

The first problem is that of Foucault's archaeological account of the creation of the self, i.e., of the "birth" of modern Man. Foucault will describe this entity as being created within knowledge structures. The central problem which he seeks to explain in his first texts is how it is that bodies of knowledge, such as psychology and medicine, came to be formulated through complex interactions between doctors and patients, tradition and changing technologies, and history and the present. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault asks how it was that, in the eighteenth century, madness suddenly took the place of leprosy as a symbol of that which Europe sought to exclude, punish, reject, and cleanse from society. In *The Birth of the Clinic* he inquires into how it was that conceptions of the human body changed so fundamentally from the early eighteenth century with the opening up of corpses. Finally, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault seeks to understand how it was that epistemology changed in terms of its structure and central problems with the advent of modernity. In this archaeology of the human sciences, Foucault sought to discover how it was that modern knowledge, with specific reference to the human subject, came about within history. In addition, and adjacent to this question, Foucault sought to understand if the subject was conceived differently in modern thought as opposed to earlier epochs, if in fact such an entity existed at all before the eighteenth century. Thus the first problem which this dissertation seeks to resolve is concerned with the nature and history of knowledge concerned with Man.

The second question which this dissertation seeks to resolve is how it is that knowledge finds actuality within a social setting, i.e., how it is that a knowledge of Man is imposed upon society. In his genealogical period, and to begin answering this question, Foucault introduces his theory of power and its relationship with knowledge. In exploring this relationship between knowledge and power, we are primarily concerned with the *effects* of this on the human subject, and how this leads to a critique of Foucault's work as nihilistic. During his early archaeological phase, Foucault's work is primarily interested in uncovering the epistemic structure of modernity, lurking beneath all discursive practices, and which, by its very nature, determines what is

“knowable”, “true”, and “examinable” in a particular epoch of human existence. After Foucault’s archaeological investigations into the forms and central interests of modern knowledge, he begins to explore the ways in which knowledge and power intersect, overlap, reinforce and modify one another. His later genealogical work, building on his earlier archaeological discoveries, suggests more generally that there is a complex interplay between knowledge (or discourse), and power:

“...[i]n a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. 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.*”<sup>8</sup>

In effect, Foucault makes clear reference to the fact that power and truth imply and even “produce” one another. There are serious questions which emerge around Foucault’s conception of power, which he describes as a mediating force *anterior* to social institutions, and not something to be understood in legal terms. Because this notion is so central to Foucault’s work, and so controversial, I believe it important to investigate it in some depth here in order to thresh out central questions which this dissertation will seek to answer.

Foucauldian power is described as action upon bodies which is *positive* in its ability to transform attitudes, gestures, and thoughts. This is a definition of power which is *productive*, the effect of knowledge upon the field of possible actions or choices, “a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions. What therefore would be proper to a relationship of power is that it be a mode of action upon actions.”<sup>9</sup> Foucault conceives of power as something which “circulates”

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<sup>8</sup>Foucault, “Two Lectures,” in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 93. My emphasis.

<sup>9</sup>“The Subject and Power,” p. 222.

and moulds bodies, working on actions towards desired goals. Rather than as something “appropriated” or singularly possessed, power works as a mediating agent, a force which serves to direct actions and thoughts. In addition, this process does not take place within a model of power as sovereignty; power circulates within and between bodies, never possessed or intrinsically “owned”:

“Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands...not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. *They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application...*This non-sovereign power, which lies outside the form of sovereignty, is disciplinary power.”<sup>10</sup>

The modern disciplines, which are a result of the complex interaction between knowledge of human bodies and their social manipulation, are grounded first in various bodies of knowledge (psychology, criminology, sexology, demography), concerned with the human subject both as an individual and as a member of a population at large. Second, they are grounded in particular socio-political and economic techniques which produce a particular conception of the human subject. It is precisely this notion of a manipulation or *construction* of the subject, this realization of “disciplinary power”, that increasingly forms the core of Foucault’s concerns around the modern subject.

I wish to show the way in which for Foucault this conception of power is linked to the constitution of the modern subject, and how this emerges as problematic in his work. As discussed above, Foucault conceives of power as intersecting or “circulating” with knowledge in the form of creative technologies. These technologies define modern human Being, and allow for the formation of the “hermeneutical sciences” which have as their chief concern the exploration of human interiority. Important here, however, is the fact that this triad of knowledge, power and truth

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<sup>10</sup>“Two Lectures,” pp. 98, 105. My emphasis.



works to categorize human experience, and is creative of a norm to which all human beings are made *subject*. Disciplinary power is not only constitutive of social reality, but in addition, in the process of naming and categorizing, works to limit experience and emerges as oppressive. Further than a force which dictates and mediates a field of options, Foucault's disciplinary power applies itself to the human body and soul, to

“immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. There are two meanings of the word *subject*: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.”<sup>11</sup>

Given the nature of modern epistemology, and its intense concern with naming and ordering reality, knowledge is thus implicated in a process of subjection, this directly tied to the way in which identity is construed and adopted in modernity. A paradigm of behaviour and identity which is delineated within discourse, and monitored by power, (as being either normal or pathological), imposes inherent limits upon modern reason and experience. Foucault links these ontological questions to a new form of power in modernity: bio-politics. Bio-politics is the way in which modern individuals and indeed whole nations are conceived of in terms of the need for economic productivity and political docility. The politics of modernity, as we shall see, is one based on *life*, not only in economic terms, but also within juridical, social, political, and personal spheres.

With Foucauldian power unfounded within a sovereign human subject or institution, and with the mutually reinforcing relationship which knowledge enjoys with power described as a process of subjection, Foucault appears at his most disconcerting. A serious question emerges: If power indeed flows between, rather than within, institutions and persons, how might subjects ever liberate themselves from such an

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<sup>11</sup>“The Subject and Power,” p. 212.

force? How might battles be fought, and concessions won by particular interest groups? In his "ethics" period, Foucault offers us theoretical guidelines to avoid a seemingly powerless situation on the part of the human being, and this link between Power/Knowledge relations, the subject, and the latter's ability to contest power relations, is central to this thesis. On this question of a seemingly nihilistic situation, he writes:

"It seems to me that power is 'always already there', that one is never 'outside' it, that there are no 'margins' for those who break with the system to gambol in. But this does not entail the necessity of accepting an inescapable form of domination or an absolute privilege on the side of the law. To say that one can never be 'outside' power does not mean that one is trapped and condemned to defeat no matter what."<sup>12</sup>

In his final, or "ethics", period Foucault offers us tools to begin conceiving of new ways to define power in the future. In the struggle against the epistemological limitations of modern discourse, and the subjecting constraints of disciplinary power, Foucault hints at the "possibility" of new systems that might emerge to take the place of the present knowledge and power structures which dominate modernity. While rejecting the "ancient right of sovereignty," or traditional humanist conceptions of struggle centred around the smashing of a present system and its replacement with a possible utopia, he looks "towards the possibility of a new form of right, one which must indeed be anti-disciplinarian, but at the same time liberated from the principle of sovereignty."<sup>13</sup>

This brings us to the third and final problem to be resolved in this dissertation, the question of whether Foucault's human subject is free to act in a specifically *political* way against bio-power. His later work intimates the possibility of an "ethos" which might guide a "strategy" against disciplinary power, and help establish an "anti-disciplinarian" conception of politics.<sup>14</sup> He offers us a "toolkit" of ideas from which to

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<sup>12</sup>Foucault, "Power and Strategies," in *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>13</sup>"Two Lectures," p. 108.

<sup>14</sup>*ibid*.



critique modern society, and hereby engage in more effective struggles towards overturning disciplinary impositions on the subject.<sup>15</sup> Foucault describes critique “as toolkit” to mean that

“(i) The theory to be constructed is not a system but an instrument, a logic of the specificity of power relations and the struggles around them; (ii) That this investigation can only be carried out step by step on the basis of reflection (which will necessarily be historical in some of its aspects) on given situations.”<sup>16</sup>

Through such critical “reflection” a new politics can be embarked upon; Foucault calls this resistance to power-knowledge relations, or bio-power in its political and economic form, a “strategy”. In rejecting power in a juridical sense, he critiques disciplinary power in terms of strategies through which it might be problematized and undermined, rather than as a system to be broken and destroyed completely: “Rather than analyzing power from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies.”<sup>17</sup>

With these words, a conscious project for Foucault emerges. In part this implies a rejection of a politics based on “liberation”, understood as bringing an end to particular forms of oppression in human experience. On the other hand, this “new politics” might best be described as centred around human subjectivity and as a rejection of the normalized ontological limits within which the modern subject is expected to find meaning. In place of current ideologies which centre their concerns around a negative freedom or the prospect of liberation, Foucault is interested in coming up with new ways of doing politics; “political analysis and criticism have in large measure still to be invented,”<sup>18</sup>

“so too have the strategies which will make it possible to modify the relations of force, to co-ordinate them in such

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<sup>15</sup>“Power and Strategies,” p. 145.

<sup>16</sup>ibid.

<sup>17</sup>“The Subject and Power,” p. 211.

<sup>18</sup>Foucault, “The History of Sexuality,” interview by Lucette Finas, in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 190.

a way that such a modification is possible and can be *inscribed in reality*...the problem is not so much that of defining a political 'position' (which is to choose from a pre-existing set of possibilities) but *to imagine and to bring into being new schemas of politicisation*...To the vast new techniques of power correlated with multinational economics and bureaucratic States, one must oppose a politicisation which will take new forms."<sup>19</sup>



His final works, then, concentrate on understanding the practices of "self-making" which human beings came to bear upon themselves as ethical agents in Ancient Greece and Rome, and which now serve his philosophic concerns in modernity. He uncovers ways in which subjects can combat imposed societal norms and remake themselves as Other. Just as the notion of *strategy* is extremely important when defining actions outside the body, or within groups, the question of self-reflection, and self-making, is of essential importance in this Ethics period. Ultimately, what we are left with by Foucault is an ever-lasting contestation, a perpetual struggle for hegemony, with both sides mutually dependent on one another for definition. In Foucault's words: "In effect, between a relationship of power and a strategy of struggle there is a reciprocal appeal, a perpetual linking and a perpetual reversal."<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note that this is a retrospective study of Foucault's work. When he passed away suddenly in 1984, his project on sexuality incomplete, Foucault had not exhausted his enormous intellectual potential; neither had he fully explained his understanding of contemporary politics. I wish to piece together the nature of this underlying and incomplete political project, and do this on the assumption that Michel Foucault has left us with enough material to, first, make coherent sense of his work, and second, to enable us to construct a political programme from his intellectual concerns. I believe that this political project can be put into real use in strategizing against the knowledges which are presently constitutive of human experience, and against what he perceived to be the central bio-political concerns of the modern state.

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<sup>19</sup>ibid. My emphasis.

<sup>20</sup>"The Subject and Power," p. 226.

In his work, I will argue, we see the distinct unfolding of a sustained political project: in the early phase of Foucault's career we find a general concern with discursive practices and the way in which knowledge applies itself to bodies and spaces; in his second phase, Foucault introduces a link between discourse (knowledge) and praxis (power), in the constitution of the human subject; in his final phase, with his concern for Ethics, Foucault explores ways in which subjects make themselves. Within these boundaries, Foucault's concerns around the subject and ways in which the subject is constituted will be explored.

While most Foucauldian scholars divide Foucault's work into the three broad periods as I have proposed in the paragraph above, what I have introduced as the central thesis for this dissertation does stray from what is contained in much of the secondary literature on Foucault. Simultaneously, it should be stressed that given the amount of interest his work has generated in the past decade, new books are constantly being published and it is extremely difficult to keep up to date while writing. In the following paragraphs I propose to introduce some of the more important texts that have been published on Foucault, both to give my reader some idea of what is available on his *oeuvre*, but more importantly, to justify my choice of using only primary sources for this dissertation.

There are two central reasons for choosing to work almost solely from Foucault's texts: first, most of the literature does not provide a *retrospective study* of his work which I believe is imperative in order to produce an informed and holistic understanding of his political project. I don't believe that Foucault can be fully understood without a full knowledge of his final period which focuses on ethics. In other words, what I propose as a central part of this dissertation's thesis is that Foucault set up a theory of the subject and its constitution in his first two periods, and then outlined a political project in order to take this subject into account in his third period. Foucault's work is thus only *introduced* in his works up until *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1). In line with this argument, any secondary literature published

before 1984 is deficient to varying degrees with an absence of his final books, interviews, and lectures. ✓

The second and more serious problem which the secondary literature presents is the formulation of very different problems to the one which I present in this dissertation. While there is general agreement over dividing Foucault's work into three broad areas, and many scholars do link the Foucauldian subject to power/knowledge relations, there has been little work done on tying Foucault's work on the subject directly to a politics of the self. This linking of the subject and its constitution within power-knowledge relations is rarely found in work on Foucault, as is the exploration of a politics inherent to Foucault's ethics. The latter, an exploration of the critical task of philosophy as a political practice, and tied to the transformation of social structures and practices, has attracted little *direct* attention in the literature; the only source which I have found to be very close to my thesis is James Bernauer's *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Towards an Ethics for Thought*. As far as my research has revealed, he is the only theorist who directly ties Foucault's work on ethics and a critical Post-Enlightenment conception of reason to a political practice, the task of transforming both the human body and social practices and institutions.

Mark Poster stands out as a contemporary theorist who does use Foucault's work towards political ends, but not to the same ends as I have presented the latter's work in this dissertation. In *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: In Search of a Context*, Poster affirms the three central periods in Foucault's work, but does not give credence to Foucault's *oeuvre* representing a coherent project around the subject. He posits Foucault's work as containing "three positions", in line with the three periods which I outline in this introduction as descriptive of Foucault's theoretical and methodological maturity, but links these with distinctly different ends from myself.<sup>21</sup> In *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism*, Poster seeks to link Foucault and Sartre's work on the subject in order to explore the obvious differences in their approaches, and

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<sup>21</sup>Mark Poster, *Critical Theory and Poststructuralism: In Search of a Context*, p. 54.

the intellectual traditions out of which each man emerged in pre- and post-1968 France. More importantly, Poster seeks to link Foucault's general project with that of the Frankfurt School and other European social theorists, especially Sartre. Ultimately, he seeks to comprehend a new "school" of social theory which might combine certain aspects of these various positions, and produce a critical theory which takes the late modern context into account. While Poster does link Foucault's work to a social critique, he does not invoke the same concerns which I believe are foremost in the latter's work, nor does he affirm Foucault's work as a coherent and unified project around the subject.

John Rajchman, on the other hand, explores Foucault's work on philosophy as critique, but does not directly link this to a political project around the subject. In his *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*, he presents a case for Foucault as a *skeptic*, and explores his work as an "endless questioning of constituted experience."<sup>22</sup> In this way, he argues very much as I do for the critical capacity of philosophy and the degree to which freedom is inherently a part of this critical experience. Where this work falls short in my opinion is Rajchman's inability to tie this critical task of thought to a politics of the self; in other words, Rajchman does not stipulate an inherently political task for thought, especially in relation to the subject. As with Poster, while he does explore questions which are close to politics, Rajchman does not make the direct and necessary link between the politics and the philosophy which he describes in his book.

Two authors who fall within the first category of problematic literature above are Alan Sheridan (*Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*) and Karlis Racevskis (*Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect*). Both of these books, published in 1980 and 1983, respectively, are surpassed in critical scope with the publishing of Foucault's late work, and thus are of little use in informing my central thesis *vis á vis* the political nature of Foucault's project. Racevskis' work is chiefly concerned with Foucault's

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<sup>22</sup>John Rajchman, *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*, pp. 2, 7.

first two periods. It investigates Foucault's archaeological and genealogical methods, linking these in an important way to "Foucault's critical project as an effective instrument of change."<sup>23</sup> In this way, he certainly recognizes the political quality inherent in Foucault's work, but ties this directly only to the methods which Foucault presents as critical of modern knowledge structures and social practices. Racevskis falls short in his work by not linking Foucault's work on philosophy as critique to the latter's central concerns on the constitution of the human subject. While Racevskis moves in the right direction, his work does not contain all of Foucault's theory, and thus presents an uncompleted picture in this particular book. He leaves us with an interesting and helpful thesis, but does not probe to the heart of Foucault's political concern.

In a similar way, Sheridan, in his early *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, concerns himself with key theoretical and methodological problems in Foucault's work, but does not have the necessary material available to present a cogent synopsis of Foucault's entire *oeuvre*. His work is primarily concerned with the Foucauldian relationship between knowledge and power, but also explores archaeology and genealogy as methods. Sheridan completes a book that is more a study of Foucault's individual texts up to *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1), rather than a critical thesis on a particular aspect of Foucault *oeuvre*. Ultimately, this book offers little support for my central thesis, and could not be sufficiently accommodated within literature I might refer to in the pages ahead.

I decided to work directly from Foucault's texts in order to provide proof for what I believe to be a controversial thesis, and also in order to prove a direct link between Foucauldian ethics and a political project centred on the modern human subject. While some authors explore the relationship between philosophy and history in Foucault's work (Clare O'Farrell, *Foucault: Historian or Philosopher?*), or the relationship between truth and Foucauldian power (Barry Cooper, *Michel Foucault, an*

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<sup>23</sup>Karlis Racevskis, *Michel Foucault and the Subversion of Intellect*, p. 19.

*Introduction to the Study of His Thought*), most theorists do not argue for a direct link between the constitution of the modern subject, philosophy, and a Foucauldian politics of the self. Most theorists do engage with the theories of archaeology and genealogy, but no-one except (in my experience) Bernauer directly links the constitution of the human subject to an Foucauldian ethics for philosophy which serves as both a political tool and a catalyst for change. This explains the decision I have taken *vis á vis* secondary texts and my sole use in this dissertation of primary Foucault texts, interviews, and articles. The only exception to this are those places in which I present critiques of his work by liberals and marxists.

In line with the allusion here to Part III of this dissertation, which provides the space for the introduction of a broadly liberal and marxist critique of Foucault's work, I think it important to explain why I have taken such a step and not used other works, which ultimately might have been more sympathetic to his *oeuvre*. In this dissertation, a key element of the way in which I present Foucault's work is a positioning of his theory of the subject against that of the humanist tradition. In the chapters which follow the word "humanist" itself will be more carefully defined by Foucault and myself; for now let it be understood as a particular conception of the human subject as vested with a grounded and uniform nature. This is in direct contradistinction to Foucault's understanding and description of the subject. As a result, and because I place the human subject at the centre of Foucault's political concerns, I felt it important to have critiques directed at his work which either rejected his conception of the subject or his definition of power. In this way, I sought to set up the sharp contradiction which exists between these two traditions, and in this way add more weight to Foucault's work when his position is (hopefully) vindicated against that of the humanists. While there might be criticisms of the way in which I present Foucault's theories and even the emphasis I put on his work being unified, I feel the central task for this dissertation remains to compare, contrast and defend Foucault's work against his theoretical enemies. In this way, his work as an *oeuvre*, in its coherence and unity,



might be presented as indicative of a new politics for late modernity, and affirmed as innately political.

In order to explore Foucault's conception of the subject, and to answer the central question guiding this paper, I have divided this dissertation into four main parts, each then further divided into chapters with the following sequence: Part I, "Knowledge", will investigate Foucault's first three books, *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*, in order to thresh out their major concerns. Of central concern will be a critical examination of the theory and method which is introduced in Foucault's early writing. Most important here is Foucault's introduction of archaeology, the method of excavating the foundation upon which knowledge rests.

Part II, "Power", will deal with Foucault's "middle period", the period in which he introduces his definition of power in *Discipline and Punish*, and *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1). In this section of the dissertation, I will primarily focus on the process of the *norm*, which is hinted at in *The Order of Things*, and which is expanded on in these later books. Probably most important in this phase, however, is Foucault's introduction of bio-power, his definition of the modern political technology which centres itself on the efficient and effective control, maximization, and utilization of life.

Part III, "Foucault's Critics", introduces two critiques of his work. My central concern in this section is to answer two questions posed to the heart of Foucault's work, squarely centred on his controversial conception of power, and the way in which he describes the intersection of modern power and knowledge. The first question relates to questions of being: given Foucault's conception of the constructed subject, how does he account for human truth and identity? Posing this question, I will use a valuable text by Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth".<sup>24</sup> The second critique relates to Foucault's conception of an uninvested power: given the way in which he defines power in *Discipline and Punish*, and *The History of Sexuality*

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<sup>24</sup>This article can be found in Taylor's *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*.

(Volume 1), how does Foucault account for political action and the possibility of revolution, something central to marxist thought? Martin Jay, in his *Marxism and Totality*, poses a powerful argument against Foucault's conception of power. Jay, and other prominent marxist writers who will be introduced in the section, accuse Foucault of denying human agency, as well as the innate human ability to overcome external power impositions.<sup>25</sup> Liberals and marxists alike present important challenges to Foucault's work, and yet I feel that his ideas stand up to such criticism.

The purpose of Part IV of this dissertation is to reply in Foucault's favour to the criticisms above, and to simultaneously outline Foucault's concerns in his final Ethics phase. It is here that we find a coherent and powerful political project within Foucault's work which can be used to inform and explain modern struggles. In conclusion, I will affirm Foucault's work as not only of essential value to contemporary philosophy, but also containing within it an inherently political project. If we accept his central thesis concerning the history and existence of modern Man, and his place within systems of thought, then it is difficult to reject his political vision. Once humanist political projects (primary examples being marxism and liberalism) are problematized at their core, at the very foundation upon which they stand, and are thus rejected, it is difficult not to place greater value on the academic and political work now emerging around the name of Foucault.

In this dissertation I wish neither to label nor categorize Michel Foucault, hereby restricting him. Rather, I wish to be true to his wish: "Do not ask me 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. All least spare us their morality when we write."<sup>26</sup> Simultaneously, however, given the power and relevance of his work for contemporary political problems, I feel that extensive work on his *oeuvre* is not only desirable, but imperative. I believe increasing numbers of scholars throughout the world would concur.

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<sup>25</sup>Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality*.

<sup>26</sup>*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 17.

**PART I:**  
**KNOWLEDGE**

*INTRODUCTION:*

**FOUCAULT'S CRITIQUE OF KANTIAN REASON**

These inquiries...have their theoretical coherence in the definition of the historically unique forms in which the generalities of our relations to things, to others, to ourselves, have been problematized. They have their practical coherence in the care brought to the process of putting historico-critical reflection to the test of concrete practices...*this task requires work on our limits [of thought], that is, a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty.*

Foucault, "What is Enlightenment"

On the basis of Foucault's early texts and related articles, Part I of this dissertation will explore his notion of the human subject problematized within thought systems and set up as a site of knowledge creation in the development of a modern science of Man, the human sciences. In the following three chapters, I seek to define the way in which Foucault describes the creation of the human subject through history and within discourse; this process implies the application of reason and rationalized "technologies" on the body and soul of the individual, rendering an ontological and epistemological "truth" of Man. Foucault's account of the practices which objectify and thus label human beings sought to show how the latter were part of the creation of individual identity or ontological being. In this way Foucault established both the notion of Man and of an innately human consciousness (a definable and stable human interior) as contingent and problematic historical constructions.

The problem of Man as an object of science and scientific investigation, and the creation of Man's subjectivity, or the rendering of the human being as *subject*, are co-extensive with, and mutually reinforcing of, one another. Knowledge of the human subject, and the creation of a hermeneutical space within this entity, are thus part of the same process which created Man with essential characteristics marking his existence and ontological self-understanding.

Closely linked to this, and indeed the basis of Foucault's "politics of the self", is the relationship between reason, consciousness, and subjectivity, and the point at which these three concepts merge in relations of subjection. A central objective of the following chapters will be to provide an account of Foucault's investigation into those bodies of knowledge (the human sciences) that have as their chief concern the human being, his desires and his inner world of meaning; with these discourses a particular conception of the human subject was invented with modernity, and thereby *Man* was born.<sup>1</sup> In Part I of this dissertation, and as a starting point for the proceeding investigations, I wish to describe the ways in which Foucault began tracing the history of the relationship between Truth, Power and the Self through an exploration of the birth of the medical and psycho-sciences. At this stage, we will be primarily concerned with the human body *objectified*, as described within "The Subject and Power". In other words, in this part of the dissertation, I wish to trace Foucault's historiography of how Man was brought within the realm of critical investigation, and realized within epistemology as a constant and discernible object.<sup>2</sup>

Two things are important to note here: first, that Foucault's first three books are in effect studies of the history of the creation of modern knowledge systems; second, that his investigations are closely linked with a particular conception of reason. In order to better frame these questions related to rational thought, its function, and its historical growth, in

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<sup>1</sup>I use the words "hermeneutical" or "hermeneutics" to describe investigations by modern knowledge into an human interior which is deemed constitutive of all human beings. Human ontological meaning and a hermeneutics of the human condition are thus interchangeable as essential theoretical constructs used in modern studies into the nature and consciousness of the human subject.

<sup>2</sup>Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," p. 208.

the introductory section of Part I, I would like to look at two important articles. First, Immanuel Kant's famous text on "What is Enlightenment"; second, Foucault's own article by the same name. The latter is actually a response to Kant, and outlines in clear terms where Foucault stands in relation to reason, and how he links reason to a political project which problematizes the liminal boundaries which border the modern sciences of Man, hereby stifling him.

In 1784, in response to the question "*Was ist Aufklärung?*", Kant described the relationship between man and reason as something peculiar to the modern age: the modern quest for Enlightenment implied the affirmation of reason, and thereby the pursuit of personal and thus universal truth.<sup>3</sup> For Kant, Enlightenment is a process of attaining autonomy as an individual; in addition, it is man's duty to use reason in a particular way so as to will a universal truth. In short, Enlightenment, as a particular set of obligations or tasks, requires the correct application of reason on the part of the individual in terms of willing both the categorical imperative for himself, and for *all men*. An important part of this process is the necessity for all individuals to think rationally (critically), as a personal credo and as a political ethos. Enlightenment thus implies a dual will to knowledge: first, as a tool of self-actualization, a way to break free of the inability to think critically for oneself; secondly, as a critical stance of reason which wills a political and moral reality for all men. On the one hand, Enlightenment represents an ontological process, a will to free oneself of ignorance and dependence on internal mis-truths; on the other, the Enlightenment inculcates a political ethos, a will to promulgate a system of moral and political law which is binding on all men by virtue of their general participation in the formation of such a system.

Two hundred years after Kant, Foucault responds to the same question with much of his predecessor's concern for the correct and meaningful application of the rational fac-

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<sup>3</sup>Kant writes "*Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*" in response to this question posed in the German periodical *Berlinische Monatschrift*. Kant finished his response on 30 September 1784, and it was first published on 12 December 1784. Interesting to note here is Foucault's (incorrect) reference (in his "What is Enlightenment?") to the article first being published in *November* 1784.

ulty, and yet reconceptualizes thought in an important way. Fascinating is the way in which Foucault uses this short article by Kant, and the important ideas presented therein, to produce an article which I believe occupies a seminal position within his *oeuvre*. I will argue that, like Kant, Foucault ties reason and the pursuit of truth very closely to his study of the advent of modern forms of subjectivization and subjection. However, unlike Kant Foucault, while he affirms reason, also problematizes thought as contingent, created within history, and open to change. This notion of thought as historically and discursively constructed, as well as the role of reason in the process of overturning problematic bodies of knowledge and their effects on human bodies, will emerge as central to his politics. Reason here must be understood as the ontological condition inherent to humankind, the ability to think critically with the use of the rational faculty. Thought, on the other hand, is the accumulation of knowledge structures as the result of a particular application of reason. Thought is thus the process to which reason is employed within a particular epoch, and leads to the formation of knowledge unique to that epoch. The Foucauldian notion of the politics of the human self is a problematizing of the relationship between truth and the constitution of human bodies as *subjected* subjects, a critical reading of modern ontology and the creation of identity. However, the ability for thought to rethink itself, or to work upon itself in a critical manner, opens up the opportunity for reworking modes of subjection which find their epicentre or birth within particular knowledge structures--the human and psycho-sciences. I will argue that it is precisely Foucault's ability to show us this possibility of transgressing, reformulating, and thus transcending present epistemological limits that informs the political project inherent to his work. Before we can move into this discussion, however, it is important to further investigate Kant's initial text, and Foucault's response to this.

## **KANT AND "ENLIGHTENMENT"**

Kant defined Enlightenment as a process of self-working, “man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.”<sup>4</sup> “Immaturity” in this sense is the inappropriate, (or inadequate), use of the rational faculty, that which for Kant defines human beings above the rest of nature, and which constitutes the critical centre of our ability to will universal laws. More importantly, “immaturity” refers to the condition of being unable to think for oneself as an independent agent, or “without the guidance of another.”<sup>5</sup> Immaturity is thus the inability to think for oneself and lead a critically examined life. In addition, underlying this “condition” is the emotional insecurity of being both lazy and cowardly. In Kant’s view immaturity is self-imposed, and requires courage to overturn: “Dogmas and formulas, those mechanical instruments for rational use (or rather misuse) of his natural endowments, are the ball and chain of [man’s] permanent immaturity.”<sup>6</sup> Kant, however, saves little sympathy for those who do not accept the challenge to think for themselves: he condemns the latter as “domesticated animals”, “docile creatures”, in the total political care of others who, for a price, will think on their behalf, and prevent these yoked beasts from “daring to take a single step without the leading-strings to which they are tied.”<sup>7</sup> Kant thus emphasized critical rationality as the necessary credo for modernity, a courage to will for oneself, outside the “convenience” of immaturity: *Sapere aude*, “have courage to use you *own* understanding,” dare to know!<sup>8</sup> *Rational courage is thus the ontological imperative of modernity.*

The process of Enlightenment, however, requires an essential element in addition to courage: the political necessity of *freedom*. The political project inherent in Kant’s work is a challenge to dogmatism on the part of state and governors: only upon a social foundation which reveres freedom as the most basic social ideal might a *rational* basis for political authority be built. As important as Kant’s challenge to the lazy and afraid in “*Was ist*

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<sup>4</sup>Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment,” in *Kant’s Political Writings*, p. 54.

<sup>5</sup>ibid.

<sup>6</sup>ibid., pp. 54-55.

<sup>7</sup>ibid., p. 54.

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

*Aufklärung?*” is the political message central to this text: his rejection of the absolutism and dogmatism inherent in the eighteenth century German monarchy. Having defined the parameters within which he understands and affirms the Enlightenment as both a positive and indeed a necessary event within history, Kant goes on to describe two areas of life in which the rational faculty must, of necessity, be used in two different, and yet mutually reinforcing, ways: the public and private use of reason. Kant gave a specific, though rather unfamiliar, and even paradoxical sense to the public/private distinction. For Kant, the *private* use of reason pertains to men working within bureaucracies, the civil service, or in service of the state, when they are “part of the [social or political] machine.”<sup>9</sup> “What I [sf. Kant] term the private use of reason is that which a person may make of it in a particular *civil* post or office with which he is entrusted.”<sup>10</sup> When men are responsible to others, and are delegated specific tasks which service or reinforce the state, they work as servants, and are subject to a law to which they must be obedient. The *public* use of reason, on the other hand, is the critical questioning of forms of government or morality when one is considered a member of the community of men, without direct responsibility to state or government: “by the public use of one’s own reason I [sf. Kant] mean that use which anyone may make of it *as a man of learning* addressing the entire *reading public*.”<sup>11</sup>

This begins to define the public use of reason: the place where men are able to question laws, decisions, and the very structures of governance themselves. In this, we see a clear distinction between two separate realms of thought, and yet the emergence of a clearly defined and mutually reinforcing relationship: obey within the private realm, and be assured the freedom to question unrestrained in the public.<sup>12</sup> Kant, however, questions the degree to which, or the manner in which, obedience is required. Public rationality is the

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<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 56.

<sup>10</sup>ibid., p. 55.

<sup>11</sup>ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Interesting to note here is Kant’s apparent inversion of the commonly accepted definition of the “private” versus “public” spheres in modernity. This might in some sense have been linked to his desire to protect and nurture the right to public criticism, and yet to not simultaneously offend the German monarch.

reaching of political "maturity" for Kant; paraphrasing him on this point, Foucault writes, "Humanity will reach maturity when it is no longer required to obey, but when men are told: 'Obey, and you will be able to reason as much as you like'."<sup>13</sup> Kant thus proposed a two-fold process: first, a check on sovereignty, and the ability to rule in an arbitrary fashion; second, the ensuring of rational laws, based on reason, that all citizens have the opportunity to promulgate.

Of most importance, it seems to me, is that Kant's text delineates both an *ontological* condition of reason, and the implications for its *political* application and practice. To reach a stage of consciousness which exists as commensurate with the understanding of one's innate ability to reason is to understand one's responsibility and challenge as a modern individual, someone who has inherited the Enlightenment tradition. Second, once the modern individual has affirmed this duty, he has the political ability to practice this reason in his actions. Consider the following:

"...once the germ on which nature has lavished most care--*man's inclination and duty to think freely*--has developed...it gradually reacts upon the mentality of the people, who thus gradually become increasingly able to *act freely*."<sup>14</sup>

This is the critical political side of Kant's text, and a veiled message to dogmatic rulers urging the space and freedom for political expression. For Kant, the Enlightenment is thus a two-fold process: first an interrogation of an ontological necessity--the will to reason; second, a political right, namely that of willing a political order in which men are free to reason freely, and thus ensure their personal freedom. On the one hand, a freedom of consciousness; on the other, a freedom of action.

## FOUCAULT, THOUGHT AND HISTORY

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<sup>13</sup>Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p. 36.

<sup>14</sup>Kant, "What is Enlightenment?," p. 59.

As an introduction to his own concerns, Foucault's elaborates on Kant's work in a deceptively important article given its size; an article, I believe, which captures Foucault's general project, and specifically his relationship to knowledge and the use of reason. Foucault affirms Kant's stance *vis-à-vis* the Enlightenment, and yet extends his argument in important ways. In the way that Foucault achieves this definition of enlightened reason and its bearing on our lives as moderns, he will define his own stance in relation to the historically-constituted technologies within which the modern subject is caught, and offer a glimpse at ways in which we might use a particular approach to reason in problematising and overturning this paradigm of subjection.

Crucial to Foucault's understanding of Kant's text is the distinction between a public and private use of reason. While Kant writes that in the private sphere reason should be subordinated to the wishes and needs of the greater and more important community which private reason serves, in public it must be affirmed and assured as a free and active agent; to think reasonably and for oneself is part of the Enlightenment's great responsibility for the modern. However, in investigating Kant's rendition of the responsibility of rationally willing moral conduct, and, through the categorical imperative, formulating moral principles for all men, Foucault seeks to distinguish two important factors bound up in this relationship between the individual and humanity as a collectivity. Foucault seeks to delineate an important difference between reason as a *political right*, a right which Kant sought to have affirmed and ensured by the sovereign Frederick, and reason as an *ethical tool*, a means of critiquing the world and systems of knowledge which are passed down to us. Kant states very clearly in his text that a state official in whatever capacity is bound to remain within generally accepted political boundaries while practicing in this "private" function. As a critical member of the general public, however, the free man of the Enlightenment not only has the freedom, but an important responsibility to further knowledge, to "comment publicly...on the inadequacies of current institutions."<sup>15</sup> This is the

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<sup>15</sup>ibid., 57.

application of reason upon thought, a theoretical paradigm which Foucault introduces as part of his investigation of Kant's text on Enlightenment, but which he will later extend into his genealogical method. This paradigm introduces the modern responsibility of reason in critiquing knowledge structures, the historical space in which they are created, and the limits within which thought is forced to operate as a result of this history. The political project inherent in this task is the challenge to overturn oppressive knowledge systems where they intersect with human bodies and render them *subjected*.

Foucault finds in Kant's text an important reflection on history and the way in which human beings perceive themselves and events around themselves: "The hypothesis I should like to propose is that this little text is located in a sense at the crossroads of critical reflection and reflection on history."<sup>16</sup> I believe this to be important to Foucault for two reasons. The first is that he is concerned with a critical analysis of thought in relation to the way in which modernity writes about, and conceives of, a truth of the human subject. The second is that Foucault would like to make manifest the way in which we "make" ourselves through such discourse, a discourse which the first point raises in terms of the historical contingency of thought. I believe that these two ideas bracket Foucault's own thought, and set the parameters for his entire *oeuvre*. In taking this particular stance towards reason as a critical tool to analyze the ontological condition of modern man, Foucault affirms both the Kantian tradition, within which I have placed him (at least as far as his approach to the use of reason is concerned), as well as the modern responsibility and duty to think critically on thought systems which are held as self-evident and unproblematic in modernity.

Two central ideas emerge from this sense of critical history proposed by Foucault. The first is the notion of the *limits of thought*, the constraints imposed upon what might or might not be said, and upon the way in which Man conceives of things, limits to thought which work as boundaries or parameters *enclosing* thought. I believe that Foucault's critique of discursive limits and their effects on the subject is the central principle guiding the

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<sup>16</sup>Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," p. 38.

texts we will be most interested in during the first part of this dissertation. In Foucault's early works *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*, we are taken through an archaeology of the epistemological and ontological limits of modern thought, the parameters within which thought and the subject are forced to conceive of truth. In the following chapters we will be particularly interested in the emergence of knowledge structures that, within such limits, define the nature or ontological condition of Man, and thus "create" him within discourse.

The second Foucauldian idea linked to critical history is the notion of modernity as *ethos*, a particular stance taken by the modern in relation to reason: the ability to challenge and critique the limits of thought as mentioned above.<sup>17</sup> The process of critique is dynamic, tied directly to the degree to which humankind can understand the historical foundation upon which knowledge rests. Foucault's work is thus firstly an archaeology of the limits imposed upon thought through history, and secondly, a genealogical investigation of the ways in which certain knowledge structures are imposed upon society, this again a historical inquiry. Foucault's ethics of thought delineates the responsibility and power of thought to *think differently*, and thereby to problematize historically constituted bodies-- whether social bodies (a political problem), knowledge bodies (an epistemological problem), and most importantly of all, human bodies or "souls" (an ontological problem)-- which are taken for granted by moderns, or accepted as normative and natural. Together, these three points define the triangle within which Foucault's thought operates, and constitute the core of his work: the "politics of ourselves" is the points at which the three problems above merge in a relationship of subjection, *and are recognized as such*.

What I have referred to as the "limits of thought" might be described as the liminal "frontiers" of knowledge, which exist both in terms of the way thought defines the parameters of truth within frameworks which are accepted as epistemologically sound, as well as the way in which people are limited in terms of experiences recognized. These epistemo-

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<sup>17</sup>ibid., p. 39.

logical limits to thought set the boundaries within which subjects are conceived in modernity, named in “The Subject and Power” by Foucault as the “objectifying sciences”, or the sciences of Man. Ontological limits to ways in which the human subject can be conceived is what Foucault calls the “dividing practices”, in which people are divided from one another and themselves according to ways in which they have been labeled or identified within the human sciences. In the three chapters which follow, I seek to outline the ways in which the notion of the “limit” plays itself out, both within knowledge structures, and within social practices and political institutions.

### MODERNITY AS ETHOS

The second central idea which emanates from “What is Enlightenment” is that of a particular ethos inherent in Foucault’s understanding of modernity. He takes this idea from the Kantian imperative, which finds credence in a particular stance that the modern, out of a sense of duty, is necessarily bound to commit himself to. Foucault comments that

“[t]hinking back on Kant’s text, I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity rather as an attitude than as a period of history. And by ‘attitude,’ I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ethos*.”<sup>18</sup>

Foucault’s thus understands modernity essentially as an “ethos”, an attitude towards reason and the way in which one might create the self within this age. Modernity, then, is not just a new epoch but a specific attitude, an ethos, or an approach to reason. Yet, in describing reason as the facilitator of a fight against our present quandary, Foucault takes care to add a specific tag to the type of reason which he envisages, and this he takes directly from Kant: reason must be *free*. Reason must exist to think for itself and against itself, outside of what Kant calls the private sphere.

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<sup>18</sup>ibid. My emphasis.

It is this ethics of critical thought, which entails a particular relationship between reason and thought, which I believe is the most crucial contribution that Foucault has made to philosophy. His work provides for an epistemological and ontological critique of modernity, centred around the constitution of the modern subject and yet suspicious of all truth formations which define our modern reality. In this way, he seeks to investigate the limits which enclose both the modern subject and its ability to think critically: "There is a history of the subject just as there is a history of reason; but we can never demand that the history of reason unfold as a first and founding act of the rationalist subject."<sup>19</sup> In this way, Foucault wishes to describe both the human subject and the way in which knowledge is constructed as open to historical inquiry and change. Foucault is interested in affirming a particular task for reason: that of being critical of modern thought or what can be equally understood as the various bodies of knowledge which inform our understanding of the world. This ability to critically question and overturn modern systems of knowledge are central to Foucault's political project, and this will be increasingly demonstrated in the chapters which follow.

Foucault insists on a description of modernity as an ethos or an "attitude," a particular stance both towards reason and, much more importantly, who we are as moderns.<sup>20</sup> Modernity as ethos is concerned with how it is we define ourselves, not only epistemologically, but politically and ontologically. Foucault wishes to bridge the gap between these three areas by showing how closely they combine together in creating consciousness for the human subject, and thus establishing a modern understanding of Man. Modernity as ethos is thus a process much more than a mere historical epoch, even though the historical factor is essential when attempting to understand this present within which we find ourselves, and the ways in which this "present" describes our being.

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<sup>19</sup>Foucault, "Critical Theory/Intellectual History," interview by Gérard Raulet, in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 23.

<sup>20</sup>Foucault, "What is Enlightenment," p. 39.

What follows in this dissertation, then, is an exploration of a Foucauldian stance towards reason, and his problematization of systems of thought in terms of their historical creation. Our “patient labour” is the desire to free ourselves of the epistemological and, as far as the human subject is concerned, the ontological constraints which formalized knowledge structures impose upon the modern subject.<sup>21</sup> Simultaneously, Foucault provides an affirmation of the Enlightenment project, and a critique of the way in which knowledge of the human subject, both in terms of his body and his being, has ossified around him in a process of subjection, in the process through which this entity is born as *Man*. Foucault is essentially a modern thinker, who remains within the Kantian tradition because of the emphasis he places upon human freedom; in addition, he affirms the Enlightenment responsibility to apply critical reason to systems of thought which might hinder or prevent this good, in “our impatience for liberty.”<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically though, while I have placed Foucault firmly within this thought lineage, he was also committed to a very different goal to that of Kant, ultimately seeking to overturn Kant’s categorical imperative in being highly suspicious of universal appeals to the good or the right. Foucault seeks to map the historical emergence of our modern concepts of justice and morality, showing these to be intrinsically caught up within complex relations between knowledge and power. Because of his description of the human sciences, Foucault is thus unwilling and unable to affirm the result of the Kantian imperative: a willing of universal law, justice and morality. Foucault will reject both a universal totalized conception of the good and any notion of a history informed by teleological growth. Instead, he will describe history as constituted in the same way as the human subject: through complex relations between knowledge and power.

While Foucault is interested in a different use for reason, and has a political project centred on quite different concerns from Kant, he applies the same approach to dogmatism

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<sup>21</sup>ibid., p. 50.

<sup>22</sup>ibid.

and irrationality that Kant does in “What is Enlightenment”, as the following quote indicates:

“A revolution may well put an end to autocratic despotism and to rapacious or power-seeking oppression, but it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking. Instead, new prejudices, like the ones they replaced, will serve as a leash to control the great unthinking mass.”<sup>23</sup>

While Kant is primarily concerned with a political freedom and the space necessary to adequately express oneself within the community of men, Foucault is more concerned with the knowledge structures underlying social and political practices; he sets out to show how knowledge intersects with power renders particular conceptions of the subject. Rather than affirming a rational process which works towards a “scientific” knowledge of Man, and which supports a stifling universality that is deemed applicable to all men, Foucault seeks to affirm an approach to reason as *critique*, the application of the rational faculty in continually pushing the limits of thought, and rendering the relationship between power and knowledge a political one, a politics of who we are as moderns centred on the constitution of the human subject.

The three chapters which follow will provide an account of the ways in which Foucault first began to explore knowledge as creative of a discourse on Man: the task of *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things* was to accomplish a critique of various bodies of knowledge which have been accorded the status of universal science, and yet whose roots and foundations are highly problematic and tentative in the history of ideas. This critique, and the work that is required in rendering a new description of modern knowledge, Foucault would call “work on our limits”, a critical examination of the boundaries within which modern knowledge and conceptions of the human self are enclosed. Foucault finds this paradigm problematic, and invokes as a central task of philosophy the “care brought to the process of historico-critical reflection,” that this dis-

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<sup>23</sup>Kant, “What is Enlightenment,” p. 55.

cipline provides.<sup>24</sup> Philosophy has the fundamental task of critical analysis of knowledge and thought systems, this handed down to the modern thought process by the Enlightenment. The modern imperative to think critically is directly related to our need to carefully problematize bodies of knowledge which have been accorded scientific status; this ethics of a critical thought process is work which Foucault describes as indicative only of “our impatience for liberty,” the desire to reject knowledge which constricts and oppresses the Enlightenment tradition.<sup>25</sup> It is the latter which stands alone as the ultimate affirmation of the need to ensure the expression and the freedom of thought, and is the very tradition which Foucault turns to in order to provide a *ethical* model for modern thought.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Foucault, “What is Enlightenment,” p. 50.

<sup>25</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>26</sup>*ibid.*



*Chapter One:*  
**THE DIVIDING PRACTICES**

The madman's voyage [upon the "Ships of Fools"] is at once a rigorous division and an absolute Passage. In one sense, it simply develops, across a half-real, half-imaginary geography, the madman's *liminal* position on the horizon of medieval concern--a position symbolized and made real at the same time by the madman's privilege of being *confined* within the city *gates*: his exclusion must enclose him; if he cannot and must not have another *prison* than the *threshold* itself, he is kept at the point of passage...A highly symbolic position, which will doubtless remain his until our own day, if we are willing to admit that what was formerly a visible fortress of order has now become the castle of our conscience.

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

...Goya's *Idiot* who shrieks and twists his shoulder to escape from the nothingness that imprisons him--is this the birth of the first man and his first movement towards liberty, or the last convulsion of the last dying man?

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*

In Michel Foucault's first major work, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), he describes a history of the insane individual brought within the concern or scope of science, what we might call the scientifically objectified individual. His book is thus both a history, subtitled *A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, as well as an exploration of madness, but with specific reference to the way in which *insanity* came to be constituted within modernity as a



definable, empirically known, and observable human condition. In this work, Foucault shows how “madness” came to be understood as a particular epistemological construct, and thus ontological condition, for the first time with the advent of modernity; *Madness and Civilization* might also be described as the history of how the mad were constituted through history as insane human subjects. This book will show that madness was problematized in two ways with the advent of modernity: first, *Madness and Civilization* describes the growth of an epistemological identity for insanity within particular discursive formations, addressed specifically to the problem of insanity, and which, under the rubric of psychology and psychiatry, were presented to society as *sciences*. Second, *Madness and Civilization* is also a study of the ways in which Europe restructured its social space from the seventeenth century in order to accommodate and deal with the problem of insanity.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault is interested in showing how the accumulation of knowledge around madness, and the subsequent establishment of insanity as the *medical condition* of madness, are unique and historical events. Furthermore, Foucault will show that this history is describable by studying the various practices which formed its existence, these both within discursive and social formations. The central task of this chapter, then, is to investigate Foucault’s description of the modern concern to restructure social and epistemological space *vis-à-vis* the insane.

### **MADNESS IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

Until the classical age of early modernity in the seventeenth century, madness had enjoyed a relationship of dialogue with reason. Madness was accepted as a natural part of human existence, and the mad were revered as connectors to an “otherworldly” realm, the sublime or Godly. The madman, in the work of Shakespeare and the great Elizabethan literary artists, was depicted as possessing a truth that might be revealed for the benefit of society at large. This truth was presented in the form of a riddle, hereby hinting at the great knowl-

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<sup>1</sup>This division Foucault refers to as the “dividing practices”, practices which delimit and demarcate social, ontological and epistemological spaces and structures. This concept is more fully explained in “The Subject and Power,” and the Introduction to this dissertation.

edge and power that these deranged men and women retained--the mad served as an exterior voice of wisdom, of genius and insight. By the end of the Middle Ages, in

“farces and *soties*, the character of the Madman, the Fool, or the Simpleton assumes more and more importance. He is no longer simply a ridiculous and familiar silhouette in the wings; he stands center stage as the guardian of truth...If folly leads each man into a blindness where he is lost, the madman, on the contrary, reminds each man of his truth...”<sup>2</sup>

The acceptance and reverence of madness by the Middle Ages was to change radically by the end of the seventeenth century with the advent of the Enlightenment. In pre-modernity, the mad were seen to possess valuable qualities from which the non-mad might learn; the privilege accorded to reason from the time of Descartes, and the Rationalists of Enlightenment philosophy, lead to a negative distinction being made between the reasonable and the unreasonable, and changed the relationship of madness and sanity forever. Far more importantly, however, was the passing of a *value judgement* on this distinction. Those deemed unreasonable or mad were now discarded as useless, immoral and unworthy of societal sympathy or support. With modernity, and in an unique event, for the first time the mad were separated from other “degenerates” or deviants and placed in special institutions that sought to correct their transgressions, these defined in Judeo-Christian moral terms. This was the beginning of a history which differentiated between madness and reason, and later upon which a psychological model was built for the first time, a paradigm upon which a normative understanding of Man as a subject in possession of a psyche could be built. Whether in terms of a general confinement within the *Hôpital Général* in 1657, or a humanitarian liberation of the insane in 1794 by Pinel and Tuke at Bicêtre, the history of madness is one concerned with knowledge of, and the social ordering of, a disorder, an Other. What concerns Foucault are the various social and intellectual practices which

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<sup>2</sup>Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, p. 14.

brought this distinction into being in the first place, and how these practices imposed themselves upon human subjectivity.

Foucault targets the eradication of leprosy, a widespread European scourge, as the turning point in the relationship between madness and sanity, the “zero point in the course of madness at which madness is [still] an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself,” the moment at which the relationship between reason and unreason began to change.<sup>3</sup> “As leprosy vanished, in part because of segregation, a void was created and the moral values attached to the leper had to find another scapegoat.”<sup>4</sup>

“Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost, from memory; these structures [of exclusion] remained. Often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor vagabonds, criminals, and ‘deranged minds’ would take the part played by the leper...With an altogether new meaning and in a very different culture, the forms would remain--essentially that major form of a rigorous division which is social exclusion but spiritual reintegration.”<sup>5</sup>

This process of exclusion seemed to rest not only upon the “social” or moral exclusion; Foucault strongly suggests that *economic* motives were clearly behind the exclusion of the mad. While in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault is less explicit than what follows in his later works, he makes the clear suggestion here that modern populations are subject to a rational and scientifically-imposed assessment of their health and physical utility, this *vis-à-vis* the capitalist economy which emerged in Europe from the seventeenth century. Accompanying this economic reordering of society, modified social systems ensured cohesiveness and efficiency in the managing of resources. Of principle importance in this process was the human being, objectified and imprinted with power relations which sought to render him or her of maximum use. In Foucault’s words: “Throughout Europe, con-

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<sup>3</sup>ibid., p. ix.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., p. vi. This quote is taken from the introduction to *Madness and Civilization*, written by José Barchilon.

<sup>5</sup>ibid., p. 7.

finement...constituted one of the answers the seventeenth century gave to an economic crisis that affected the entire Western world: reduction of wages, unemployment, scarcity of coin..."<sup>6</sup> In juxtaposition to madness as poetry or spiritual truth, from the seventeenth century madness was defined as an economic and moral problem--idleness, an essential symptom of madness in the eyes of this new age, was explained in moral terms to ensure the needs of an emerging capitalism. Foucault describes this process of rendering idleness a moral lapse as the result of an overlap between religious principles, and an emerging work ethic tied to capitalist production.

We find two important notions at work in seventeenth century Europe: first that of exclusion of those deemed dirty or impure, for medical reasons; and second, the notion of medical rehabilitation and social reintegration. These two concepts, exclusion and integration, are explored in *Madness and Civilization* as central questions. Foucault shows these principles, upon which modern psychology was built, as having worked to redefine modern man's relationship to himself as a rational animal and, more importantly, his relationship to the mad. Qualitatively, however, and a significant difference which separates pre-modern and modern conceptions of madness, is that the therapeutics of madness took on a very different form. Modern exclusion and treatment of the mad is to effect a moral, (rather than a physical), cure; a cure that involves impositions on the mind and soul of the mad, no longer seen as treatable on the *Narrenshiffen*, or with the holy sanctity of water, but through the gaze of the rational faculty. Madness known and defined will set in motion a chain of medical events and the writing of scientific texts which will remain with us up until the present day, and invent an entity central to our epistemic realm: *homo psychologicus*, man as the subject of psychology, a science based on the premiss of a discernible human interior *vis-à-vis* his emotions, desires, and needs. What were the forms of discourse that allowed, urged, and created this change? How was the madman as poetic genius transformed into a medical case study in the growth and propagation of psychology? Most im-

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<sup>6</sup>ibid., p. 49.

portantly, how, for the first time with modernity, was the creation of human interiority linked to ontological questions related to a differentiation between reason and insanity, its pathological and degenerate Other? These are central questions which Foucault seeks to answer in *Madness and Civilization*. As he alludes to in the preface to this book, he is not concerned with a history of medical practice with regards madness, but rather with discerning the events within the history of ideas which engendered, and were responsible for, ensuing social events and institutions.<sup>7</sup>

### ***HOMO PSYCHOLOGICUS: REASON AND TRUTH***

The central shift with which we are presently concerned is the way in which madness, as a “twin” or partner of reason, and its mysterious counter-part, came to be relegated to a lesser realm and *medicalized*. In short we wish “to define the moment of this conspiracy [of the confinement and medicalization of madness] before it was permanently established in the realm of truth...”<sup>8</sup> This notion of “truth” is a powerful metaphor throughout Foucault’s work, and central to his conceptual repertoire as he problematizes the way in which knowledge structures impose themselves on society, and the way in which knowledge and power intersect to *create subjects*, or define a subjective “essence” to which Man is tied.

“Truth” is defined by Foucault as a body of knowledge which is imposed on individuals and society because it is considered normative and desirable. As far as the epistemological and ontological divide which separates madness and reason, Foucault wished to move away from “the convenience of terminal truths,” and looked instead at “the act of scission” that defined this relationship.<sup>9</sup> In this way, he is not interested in the rules which psychotherapy as a science has imposed upon insanity, but rather with epistemological and social actions that between two mental experiences:

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<sup>7</sup>ibid., p. xi.

<sup>8</sup>ibid., p. ix.

<sup>9</sup>ibid., pp. ix, x.

“What is constitutive [of the space between madness and reason] is the action that divides madness, and not the science elaborated once this division is made and calm restored. *What is originative is the caesura that establishes the distance between reason and non-reason; reason’s subjugation of non-reason, wrestling from it its truth as madness, crime, or disease, derives explicitly from this point...we shall have to speak of this act of scission, of this distance set, of this void instituted between reason and what is not reason, without ever relying upon the fulfillment of what it claims to be.*”<sup>10</sup>

What Foucault is thus most interested in is the way in which a *truth* of madness is created within a space that has been established as the line of demarcation between them. This line exists as a *limit*, a boundary within thought and knowledge, what Foucault will call “the limits rather than the identity of [European] culture.”<sup>11</sup> In this way, epistemological boundaries merge with social divisions, and form the limits of thought and society which result in practices of human subjection--together these divisions form the “dividing practices”.

Throughout the history of madness and its alienation from reason, a pattern can be observed. Foucault points to two central events within this history, both of which seem foreign and unconnected, (perhaps even contradictory), to one another and yet which form part of a similar continuum of thought and action around insanity. The first major event which Foucault makes reference to is the establishment of the *Hôpital Général* in mid-seventeenth century Paris, as an institution centrally involved in the exclusion of madness. This hospital served as the formative historical event which led to the insane being incarcerated. The second event which Foucault refers to as important in the history of insanity’s silenced voice, is the creation of insane asylums by the great “humanitarians” Pinel and Tuke. These men are credited with liberating the mad from the immoral and unhealthy conditions in which they were found within institutions like the *Hôpital Général*. On the one hand, an incarceration, a limiting of freedom; on the other, a freeing of the captured.

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<sup>10</sup>ibid., pp. ix-x. My emphasis.

<sup>11</sup>ibid., p. xi.

Two events which seem markedly different and distanced from one another, and yet two events which Foucault places firmly within a medical tradition which seeks first to divide the mad from their sane counterparts, and second, to normalize these people within medical institutions.

From a pre-modern approach to madness as *delusion* to a modern definition of unreason or insanity as a *medical disorder*, certain notions seem to remain constant within, and definitive of, this process. The first is the approach to work and economic productivity as previously discussed; second, and the more important of these, is the reformulation of madness as a moral, and later, as a physical anomaly. This is the move from pre-modern conceptions of Reason and Madness which were separated by a spiritual divide, towards a modern and normative definition of Reason and Insanity, defined in pathological terms. From the seventeenth century, unreason was deemed as no longer having instructive value, was then described in the language of psychopathology, and was relegated apart from society and placed within institutions which were specifically established for the care and observation of such medical disorders. It is with this move that madness was forever denigrated beneath the sovereign presence of Reason, an event “[a]fter which, silence could reign, and madness disappear in the--always withdrawn--presence of unreason.”<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, unreason would be understood solely as a medical condition to be listened to (after the Freudian revolution in psychology), then objectified within discourse, and, in a process of ontological subjectification, purged from an “ill” mind.

### **THE MODERN THERAPY OF MADNESS**

Early modernity conceived of madness as a spiritual deficiency and a delusion of the mind. At this early point in the history of unreason, or insanity, it was not the internal soul or mind of a patient that became the target of a therapeutics or thermaturgical process, but rather the body as a manifestation of desire and unrealistic understandings of the world.

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<sup>12</sup>ibid., p. 115.

Within mental institutions like the *Hôpital Général*, “cures” were designed to mend a *morally* ill constitution, “a secret weakness, an essential lack of resistance.”<sup>13</sup> Still defined in terms of a *body* in need of therapy, early modern therapeutics sought a cure within the body, and ignored the violent rage which was its external manifestation; instead they concentrated on providing the necessary “resistance” to the body’s fibers so that the latter might stave off lunatic attacks.<sup>14</sup> In this way, a cure was sought which would “give the spirits or the fibers...a calm vigor, a strength no disorder [could] mobilize...”<sup>15</sup> It was believed that in strengthening apparently weak inner fibers, the patient would be cured of madness. After such treatment, “[m]ore than the image of vivacity and vigor, it is one of robustness that prevail[ed], enveloping the theme in a new resistance...A force...to reinforce nature itself.”<sup>16</sup> A series of ‘treatments’ were used to cure this physical disorder: the consumption of iron to “fortify” the body;<sup>17</sup> blood transfusions;<sup>18</sup> inoculations, particularly of scabies to flush out the body;<sup>19</sup> various immersion techniques, with water from the end of the eighteenth century again seen as an agent of cleanliness and purification;<sup>20</sup> and regulations of movement, to restore the madman’s conception of reality back to normalcy.<sup>21</sup>

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, given the relationship of Man to Nature, there was no sense of a psychological element to Man’s being. Foucault writes that the field of modern psychology was born only in the nineteenth century, with a therapeutics that moved away from cures of the body, to cures of the *soul*, “by inventing its famous ‘moral methods,’ [and bringing] madness and its cure into the domain of guilt.”<sup>22</sup> With modern psychology placing the cause and responsibility for insane behaviour on the pa-

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<sup>13</sup>ibid., p. 160.

<sup>14</sup>ibid.

<sup>15</sup>ibid.

<sup>16</sup>ibid.

<sup>17</sup>ibid., p. 161.

<sup>18</sup>ibid., p. 162.

<sup>19</sup>ibid., p. 164.

<sup>20</sup>ibid., p. 167.

<sup>21</sup>ibid., p. 172.

<sup>22</sup>ibid., p. 182.

tients themselves, this was to have profound effects on the human subject caught. The “discovery” of human interiority, and the linking of an external morality with an internal and responsible human will, formed the foundation of a science of the soul of man; this area of the human sciences sought to investigate man and his innermost, most intimate secrets, desires, and needs. Foucault describes this consciousness of an internal self as the emergence for the first time in history of Man conscious of himself as a *psychological subject*.

Knowledge of an essential human interior would serve as the basis of a modern knowledge of Man, universalized to encompass and explain all men. For Foucault, the modern dividing practices serve to divide human beings from one another in institutions of guilt, both those institutions made of bricks and mortar, and those which will delimit man’s experience and understanding of himself internally, his essence in psychological terms. Foucault makes an important distinction between psychology as a science of human emotion and feeling, and the merging with psychology of a morality which attaches responsibility for actions to the patient. No longer described as a physical illness, Foucault conceives modern madness as a condition which is sought within the moral fibre of the patient. Out of the “depth” which modern Man finds within his interior, a truth of himself in ontological terms emerges:

“The distinction between the physical and the moral becomes a practical concept in the medicine of the mind only when the problematics of madness shifts to an interrogation of the subject responsible. The purely moral space, which is then defined, gives the exact measurements of that psychological inwardness where modern man seeks both his depth and his truth.”<sup>23</sup>

This entirely new conception of madness which emerges with modernity, as well as the humanist entity which serves as the object of its discovery, and the resulting subject of this

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<sup>23</sup>ibid.

investigation, is what Foucault finds problematic and sought to problematize in his initial texts.

### FOUCAULT'S THEORY OF MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

With the "freeing" of madness from the bondage of the great institutions of confinement, of which the *Hôpital Général* was the epitomizing image, madness became couched in medical terms, now as "insanity". A new system of therapeutics was set in motion from the nineteenth century, a move from a therapeutics of *bodily* fibres to a concern with the various elements which embrace and define the *soul*. Until the emergence of modern psychology and the hermeneutical sciences (which concern themselves with understanding human meaning or consciousness), reason and unreason existed as flip sides of a similar coin: they reinforced one another in a relationship that was not necessarily hostile. In a reversal of this relationship, Foucault describes modern reason as dominating unreason and relegating it to a pathological and inferior position both epistemologically and ontologically. In other words, with modernity, madness

"will be entirely enclosed within a *pathology*. A *transformation* which later periods have received as a *positive acquisition*, the *accession*, if not of a truth, at least of what would make the recognition of the truth possible; but which in the eyes of history must appear as what it was: that is, the reduction of the classical experience of unreason to a strictly moral perception of madness, which would secretly serve as a nucleus for all the concepts that the nineteenth century would subsequently vindicate as *scientific, positive, and experimental*."<sup>24</sup>

Modern investigations into insanity, and the new knowledge structures which resulted from such investigations, lead to the constitution of a subject conscious of his or her psyche as the place from whence knowledge of the self might be garnered. The historical emergence of psychology as a human science can be linked to the second of the great events with cir-

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<sup>24</sup>*ibid.*, p. 197. My emphasis.

cumscribe the history of insanity: the “freeing” of the mad from the great houses of confinement.

The two men responsible for removing the mad from institutions of confinement, and who today are hailed as the forefathers of modern psychology, are Philippe Pinel and Samuel Tuke. These men became famous because not only did they change the institutional setting of modern mental therapeutics, but additionally they approached madness from a very different theoretical perspective: they engaged in a process of uncovering some “essential” level at which madness lurks, an internal cluster of relations from which madness springs forth. These historical developments within modern medicine of the mind can be defined by two central ideas: first, the move to *interiorize* the source of mental illness, rather than seeking physical disorders or moral lapses as causal factors; second, the discovery of *new techniques*, these centred on medical principles, which sought to cure madness and to protect the “healthy” population from the “depraved”.

If we take the above to distinguish modern practices around mental health, then the insane subject within this epoch is caught up within relations of reverse domination, this for the first time in the history of madness. Up until modernity, unreason was either an entity to be held in awe from afar, the link to another world, or a bestiality which was impossible to hold in check and which the sane had reason to fear. With modernity, however, both of these relations are reversed: madness is no longer seen as having a relationship to reason, but rather as a pathological anomaly that must be addressed in its essential malady; second, modern reason applied itself to this illness with new methods of treatment which cured through emotional constraint and manipulation. On the work farms of Pinel and Tuke, regardless of the differences in their respective approaches to treatment, three elements described a singular concern in their respective work: first, the insane patient was subjected to a rigorous work programme, in line with the moral and religious emphasis on economic activity as central to a sane and healthy life; second, the patient was to be constantly observed in his interactions with others; third, and perhaps most important, the

subject was to be held personally accountable for transgressions of the rules laid down at the respective asylums. Mental patients would equally have to accept responsibility for any punishment which ensued as a result of such deviations.

Not only were the mad made responsible for their illness and the internalization of reasonable modes of conduct, but additionally for unlearning the vice of madness (moral irrectitude). This process was intrinsically caught up in the emphasis put on work and the Christian responsibility to partake in the welfare of one's environment. Observation became a powerful tool of monitoring this situation, with the application of reason upon the actions of the insane, to monitor and check progress. Deviations from expectations were subject to punishment, with the subject responsible for the punishment, and the internalization of guilt, which ensued. No longer is madness held in reverence, no longer is this an entity of fear or awe, but rather is subjected to the cruel reign of Reason, its mediator and fateful Judge in the modern process of normalization.

This process of normalization centred on *restructuring the internal space* of the patient, in such a way that the individual came to be constituted as an insane subject through the medical discourse which concerned itself with his particular case, and *which rendered the patient aware of such a definition*. Responsibility for, and recognition of, the modern's constitution and definition as mad was closely linked to an interiorization of the anomalous condition which labeled the subject as having to necessarily undergo a process of rehabilitation. The process of assigning responsibility subjected the insane patient ontologically, and tied a particular form of consciousness to his or her condition: one of guilt through accepting responsibility for a discourse which constructed insanity in the first place.

The insane patient is thus rendered as *subject* to this discourse; subjected under the power of its knowledge to judge, rectify, and manipulate Being. In this way, guilt is imposed on the subject from without: the asylum and the doctor are the vehicles in a process of subjection and the manipulation of consciousness. Rather than punishing the transgressions of the madmen in his delirious frenzies, the asylum "organized that guilt...as a con-

sciousness of himself, and as a non-reciprocal relation to the keeper.”<sup>25</sup> As the patient came to understand himself as insane, his consciousness as Other next to the man of reason was created in light of his acceptance of norms applicable to all reasonable men--as a madman he had to relate and comply with these *external* limits, while still feeling alienated and constituted by the very act of this compliance. This was directly linked to the primary task of the asylums of both Pinel and Tuke, who assumed a pathology in the subjects before them, and engaged in a process of rectification, hereby modifying behaviour. This “process of rectification” was accorded a scientific status not because of its grounding in medical principles, but through a process of assimilation into a discourse that was rapidly emerging within the human sciences: that of psychology. The mad subject had arrived within the discourse of insanity, recorded through empirical observation, and prescribed with a particular series of treatments. Central to this project was a sense that there existed a “normal” type of nature or series of actions that was deemed to be moral, “right”, and socially acceptable, versus the anomalous behaviour displayed by the mad.

Unreason, or insanity, is thus constituted as a medical *condition*, an entity Other than Reason, and the target of the latter towards ensuring normalcy. This has profound effects for the constitution of the subject of Unreason, and the consolidation of a newly-emerging science of mental pathology. *Madness and Civilization* serves as an archaeology of the silence which pervades this relationship of Otherness as Reason has come to dominate Unreason within modern epistemology. In this text, Foucault provides a history of psychology and the birth of insanity as a medical condition, showing an obvious distaste for the negative dialectic which exists between modern reason and insanity. It should be noted, however, that it will only be in his later works when these ideas reach clarity, and are incorporated within a theoretical paradigm that takes cognizance of knowledge structures which are constitutive of modern social practices. At this early stage, Foucault seems

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<sup>25</sup>ibid., p. 247.

more interested, or able, to write a history of a particular field of knowledge which we today take for granted as self-evidently scientific and epistemologically unproblematic. ✓

The “dividing practices” work on two levels then: first, as a social division between segments of the population, the mad and the sane; secondly, as an ontological division that is experienced within the human subject, between a group of behaviours that are considered normative, and types of behaviours deemed anomalous, and which necessarily require rectifying or normalizing. *Madness and Civilization* is only an archaeology of a modern knowledge structure which is responsible for madness being defined as *insanity* from the late seventeenth century. It will be some time before Foucault begins exploring the relationship between these knowledge structures and social practices, this in his genealogical phase. I think it important to engage with some of the central methodological constructs found within *Madness and Civilization*, both as a book on its own, and with reference to later critiques which Foucault himself has brought to bear on this text. The investigation of both his methodological strengths and weaknesses will close this chapter, and serve two purposes: first, to provide a more thorough investigation into the method presented in *Madness and Civilization* and the ideas presented therein; second, to show these weaknesses for what they are, and to explain why Foucault found it important to address these and begin working on new theoretical models in his later work.

### **ARCHAEOLOGY AS METHOD AND THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE**

In the preface to *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault makes two seemingly trivial remarks which I believe to be crucial in understanding this text, and much of his later work. The first is his mentioning of “archaeology” as method; the second is his reference to the limit-experience, discussed in the Introduction to Part I, and a central concern within Foucault’s first book. I would like to deal with each of these ideas in turn, starting with his archaeological method. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault writes of his desire to present an exploration of madness as a pathological condition which has been created within the modern context. He is not, however, interested in the language of the science of psychiatry,

but rather in the lacunae which envelopes madness with the advent of modernity and which works to oppressively stifle the latter from speaking: "I have not tried to write the history of that language, but rather the archaeology of that silence."<sup>26</sup> This is perhaps the first time that Foucault ever uses the word "archaeology", and it would not be until the publishing in 1969 of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that this method was carefully explained. While *The Archaeology of Knowledge* is a complex and diffuse text, and it is difficult to find a single, all-encompassing passage in which Foucault clearly outlines his method, I believe the following passage serves our purpose here:

*"Archaeology defines the rules of formation of a group of statements. In this way it shows how a succession of events may, in the same order in which it is presented, become an object of discourse, be recorded, described, explained, elaborated into concepts, and provide the opportunity for a theoretical choice. Archaeology analyses the degree and form of permeability of a discourse: it provides the principle of its articulation over a chain of successive events; it defines the operators by which the events are transcribed into statements."*<sup>27</sup>

Of central importance here is the notion that archaeology works *below* the structure of texts. In opposition to hermeneutics, archaeology is concerned with the *conditions of existence* of particular statements, not with what is actually hidden in *meaning*. Where hermeneutical investigations within literature would principally seek to uncover a deep understanding which is caught below the characters of a text, archaeology does not concern itself with human intention and agency, but rather with objective rules of discursive formation which make truth statements possible. Foucault, in his early writings, is interested in understanding how particular things are said or written at a particular point in history. His thesis on discourse, in which he links knowledge to power (through his genealogies), is that thought is contingent, based on the construction and rules of formation which govern an *epistémé* at a particular point in history.

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<sup>26</sup>ibid., pp. x.

<sup>27</sup>Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 167. My emphasis.

Archaeology as method is intrinsically linked to the notion of the limit, the boundaries or parameters placed around thought, or from which thought operates. In *The Order of Things*, as we shall see, Foucault spends a great deal of time on this concept; for now let us investigate the way in which limits are placed on the relationship between Reason and Unreason, the way in which Madness became Insanity, with Reason the sole arbiter in this relationship, characterized as it is by domination and silence. It should be noted that the concept of limits is exactly the same as the concept operative in the paradigm of the dividing practices referred to in this chapter. The limits or boundaries that operate around knowledge or discourse might easily be used to describe the parameters which limit social action. "The dividing practices" divides human beings from one another, both socially and epistemologically; further, this process divides individuals within themselves, ontologically. It should be remembered, however, that *Madness and Civilization*, as is true of all three texts which constitute Foucault's first period, is primarily concerned with the formation of particular modern knowledges which alter discursive systems and thus the ontological and social conditions within which the modern subject operates. He does not, however, explore the ways in which knowledge and social institutions intersect with one another. In the discussion ahead, I wish first to investigate Foucault's critique of his work in *Madness and Civilization*, and then go on to look at the theoretical constructs introduced in this book *vis-à-vis* the limits of thought, or, alternatively, that which is considered truth within the modern context.

### **FOUCAULT'S CRITICISM OF *MADNESS AND CIVILIZATION***

Foucault, when looking back on his first major work, saw significant structural and theoretical weaknesses with *Madness and Civilization*. When questioned in an interview on his posing of "power" as a conceptual tool, he answered:

"...I'm struck by the difficulty I had in formulating it. When I think back now, I ask myself what else it was that I was talking about, in *Madness and Civilization* or *The Birth of the Clinic*, but power? Yet I'm perfectly aware that I

scarcely ever used the word and *never had such a field of analyses at my disposal.*"<sup>28</sup>

I think that it is important not to look for allusions to "power" in this first book, or to offer Foucault the benefit of the doubt. Regardless of whether his first three works were conceived around concerns other than power, I believe we can begin to trace significant theoretical concerns that will provide a foundation for his later work. The reason that I call this first period his Knowledge period, is because I believe Foucault's first three books were primarily concerned with the relationship between the way in which Man was newly conceived in modern discourse, and the creation of new histories, new medicines, and new forms of knowledge. This is a period in which Foucault problematized bodies and spaces, not with reference to a specific political project, but in relation to Man's conception of himself as a subject of psychology (*homo psychologus*), as a subject of medicine (*homo medicus*), and as a subject of knowledge itself. After Foucault had done an archaeology of the human sciences, he was then in an intellectual position to go beyond the creation of Truth, and look at the way in which truth circulates with power, and creates subjects. We will spend a considerable amount of time on these ideas in Chapter 3.

*Madness and Civilization* is an important text for this thesis because in it Foucault introduces his concern with the way in which modern subjects are constituted, in this case within a discourse which emerges in the eighteenth century with the mind of Man as its central interest. Through this process, human subjects came to know themselves as either mad or sane, rational or irrational, and thereby, either acceptable to society or otherwise. This interplay between sanity and madness is the crude dualism which Foucault refers to in the following passage. He is answering a question related to what appears to be a description of madness as *repressed* in *Madness and Civilization*, this compared to his subsequent

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<sup>28</sup>Foucault, "Truth and Power," interview by Alessandro Fontana and Pasquale Pasquino, in *The Foucault Reader*, p. 57. My emphasis.

thoughts when writing *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1), where he outlined a very different process when describing his Repressive Hypothesis: ✓

“...I was thinking of a whole series of binary oppositions which had each in its own way fed on the great opposition between reason and unreason that I had tried to re-constitute *à propos* of madness. But I don't think that will do...The technology of madness changed from negative to positive, from being binary to being complex and multiform. There came into being a vast technology of the psyche, which became a characteristic feature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”<sup>29</sup>

We have begun to explore certain central ideas in Foucault's project around the subject: the formation of objectifying discourses, the “dividing practices”; power; and games of truth, the formation of “true” knowledges through the intersection of knowledge and power. At this stage, Foucault remains singularly concerned with *knowledge*, and with the way in which institutions of knowledge interact with human experience and consciousness. To continue with our study of knowledge structures, and Foucault's early archaeologies into modern discursive formations, let us turn our attention to *The Birth of the Clinic*. This is an important text for our purposes because in it Foucault offers a more extensive definition of archaeology, and begins to bridge the gap between the formation of knowledge structures and the influence of knowledge in determining institutional and social practices.

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<sup>29</sup>Foucault, “The History of Sexuality,” interview by Lucette Finas, in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1977-1984*, p. 185.

## Chapter Two: THE SUBJECT OF DEATH

No doubt there is no society which does not practice some kind of 'noso-politics': the eighteenth century didn't invent this.<sup>1</sup> But it prescribed new rules, and above all transposed the practice onto an explicit, concerted level of analysis such as had been previously unknown. At this point the age is entered not so much of social medicine as of a considered noso-politics...The hospital, a therapeutic instrument for the patients who occupy it, contributes at the same time, through its clinical teaching and the quality of the medical knowledge acquired there, *to the improvement of the population's health as a whole.*

Michel Foucault, "The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century"

In *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), Foucault begins to bridge the gap between his work on the historical constitution of the insane subject, introduced in *Madness and Civilization*, and what will later be introduced in his Power phase, with investigations into the ways in which knowledge is distributed through social space. What is of great importance to Foucault in *The Birth of the Clinic* is to show how knowledge (in this case of the ill body) intersects with practices which are *political* in nature and which work to define modern

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<sup>1</sup>Webster describes nosology as "A systematic classification or description of diseases; the branch of medical science concerned with the classification of diseases." (*The Living Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language*, 1981 ed., s.v. "nosology.") Foucault relates this medical and scientific practice to the ordering and classification of society in medical terms. "Noso-politics" is a Foucauldian construct which describes the concern of modern medicine and governments with the health of the nation, as well as the individual.

subjects as either well or sick, normal or pathological. This book is thus an investigation into the birth of the modern subject of medicine, not only as an individual patient, but as a member of a *population* whose existence as part of a demographic mass has political and economic ramifications. On the one hand, Foucault will investigate a new medical perception of the individual in modernity; on the other, and more importantly for the purpose of this dissertation, Foucault will show in this book how a new politics of the body and its health (“noso-politics,” or what he will later call “bio-politics”) has come to create a subject of medicine, who holds the capacity to carry sickness that not only affects himself, but the group which surrounds him, and ultimately the state.

Two theoretical concepts are most important in *The Birth of the Clinic*: first, the notion of the *gaze*, a technique used for investigating at the body which Foucault describes as fundamentally different in modernity; second, Foucault’s ability to link discursive formations more closely with social institutions than he had done in his previous book. Linked to this second point, in *The Birth of the Clinic* Foucault begins to show how the modern subject of medicine came to be constituted through complex relations between discourse and social practices, and within particular “technologies” imposed upon the self. On the one hand Foucault continues his investigations into formations of knowledge as was the central focus of *Madness and Civilization*; on the other, and a significant theoretical advancement on Foucault’s part, we are introduced to the overlap between this knowledge and social practices and institutions. In the interaction which transpires between knowledge formations and social practice, the human being is constituted as a *subject*, with a particular consciousness of himself as an entity discernible within medical knowledge. As with *Madness and Civilization*, we can situate this book within a continuum of thought in works which have as their central focus the relationship between knowledge and subjectivity. It should be stressed, however, that while Foucault does begin to link discourse and society more closely from *The Birth of the Clinic*, he has not yet conceived of his later definition of power which is necessary to comprehensively do so.

According to Foucault, the invention of the modern clinic, as a space created for the practice of a modern form of investigative medicine, represents a fundamental shift from a medicine of purely empirical observation, to a science of medicine based on nosological *analysis*, a modern chart of pathological symptoms and signs: medicine and its problem was not altered, but the method of accumulating knowledge changed dramatically.<sup>2</sup> What emerged with modernity was a new interpretation of old presumptions in relation to the body, a new understanding of the organs and the way in which they interact. Within the confines of the clinic, knowledge of the human body was compiled through various medical processes and bound within a positive discourse which sought to explain the body in its universality. This process Foucault calls the “positive accumulation” of knowledge:<sup>3</sup>

“it was this constant gaze upon the patient, this age-old, yet ever renewed attention that enabled medicine not to disappear entirely with each new speculation, but to preserve itself, to assume little by little the figure of a truth that is definitive, if not completed, in short, to develop, between the revel of the noisy episodes of its history, in a continuous historicity.”<sup>4</sup>

A new method which developed a new knowledge. Between these two newly created entities, *The Birth of the Clinic* seeks to understand the creation of a new Man: Man aware of himself within medical discourse as a medicalized object. This entity emerged in modernity as an object of medical knowledge, and yet inextricably caught up in various knowledge and power relations which defined him as a medical *subject*.

*The Birth of the Clinic* is not so much concerned with the practice of medicine itself, as with the conditions necessary for establishing a new foundation for the *thought* and *practice* of a distinctly modern medicine. Foucault is primarily interested in the effects of a specifically modern medical knowledge that concerns itself with understanding the internal workings of the human body. *The Birth of the Clinic* is an important text in Foucault’s

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<sup>2</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p. xii.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 54-55.

work on subjectivity; it should be noted, however, that this chapter will seek to ask more questions than might be answered, seeking to elucidate a theoretical trajectory which is introduced in this Knowledge phase, but which will only be theoretically matured in Foucault's second period. The central concern which he poses in this text, and which I believe is important for us to investigate in this chapter, is the epistemological inventions that were necessary to permit a new form of thinking around the human body and disease.

In addition to epistemological concerns around the constitution of modern medical knowledge, Foucault addressed himself, in philosophic terms, to ways in which this new understanding of pathology and immunology linked up with Man's consciousness of himself as a *finite* being, and yet a being capable of projecting a universal positivity in relation to his existence as an object of knowledge. In short, Foucault is interested in this text in investigating the way in which a purely medical investigation of the body affected modern philosophic concerns connected with the human body and its consciousness. Coupled to the epistemological concerns mentioned in the previous paragraph, Foucault is equally interested in how a modern epistemological foundation for medicine set the parameters for a distinctly modern thought process around the *ontological* existence of man, and allowed for new definitions of his sense of identity and experiential potential. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault expressed a desire to explain the formation of the epistemological and ontological parameters within which a truth of the perfect modern man might be defined; secondly, he wished to explore what mechanisms allow for a comparison of this being with his pathological double.

How might Foucault link a modern *episteme* to illness, illness to death, and death to a newly-conceived ontological understanding of Man? To begin answering these questions, he writes that his book is

“an attempt to apply a method in the confused, under-structured, and ill-structured domain of the history of ideas. Its historical support is limited since it deals, on the whole, with the development and methods of medical observation over less than half a century. Yet it concerns one of those periods

that mark an ineradicable chronological threshold: the period in which illness, counter-nature, death, in short, the whole dark underside of disease came to light, at the same time illuminating and eliminating itself like night, in the deep, visible, solid, enclosed, but accessible space of the human body.”<sup>5</sup>

Central to *The Birth of the Clinic* is Foucault’s wish to explain the relationship between the uncovering of “depth” within the body and disease, and the relationship between death and a discovery of a human consciousness within the body. In opening up corpses, Man suddenly gained access to knowledge about the essence of disease, and the new-found ability to describe this positively, with scientific certainty; simultaneously, this medical exploration opened up the possibility for Man finding a hermeneutical space within himself that could be used to define his Being. Within the body, Man discovered his *nature*, both epistemologically (in medicine), and ontologically (in philosophy).

#### **KNOWLEDGE OF THE MEDICAL PATIENT**

*The Birth of the Clinic* opens with the description of medical procedures undertaken by two doctors, one in the eighteenth century, and one in the nineteenth century. They are held apart by a mere century, and yet are distinguished by a methodological difference which is, for Foucault, “both tiny and total.”<sup>6</sup> “Total” describes the level at which these two investigations are posed: both in terms of the theoretical depth of the investigation at hand, and in terms of the level, or depth, within the human corpse at which the investigation was directed and which facilitated the accumulation of medical knowledge. Between Pomme and Bayle, separated by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a fundamental schism in the level of medical perception occurred: “For us, it is total [the difference between the descriptions given], because each of Bayle’s words, with its qualitative precision, directs our gaze into a world of constant visibility, while Pomme (a pre-modern doctor), lacking any per-

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<sup>5</sup>ibid., p. 195.

<sup>6</sup>ibid., p. x.

ceptual base, speaks to us in the language of fantasy.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, with this particular example, Foucault wished to illustrate the enormous difference in medical perception that existed between a mere century. As medicine entered modernity, it fundamentally altered its perceptual and conceptual tools, and hereby redefined itself almost totally.

Foucault’s concern, however, was hardly with the world of Pomme, and scarcely with that of Bayle’s either; instead, what he sought to understand were the practices which enabled the modern doctor to render a positive medical knowledge of the human subject, and the space within which this entity was subsequently forced to negotiate within. In *The Birth of the Clinic*, he is interested in the fundamental schism in thought and practice that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century to bring the medicine practiced for thousands of years into the domain of uncertainty, and, in negating and rejecting this pre-modern medical discourse, ushered in a modern medicine, resplendent in its clarity and precision.

Two things are most important to note here: first, we need to investigate Foucault’s description of the relationship between the body of the doctor and that of the patient; second, we need to understand Foucault’s description of a new methodological tool (the “gaze”), which was fundamental in determining this relationship between doctor and patient. This modern doctor-patient relationship Foucault describes as

“caught up in an ever-greater proximity, bound together, the doctor by an ever-more attentive, more insistent, more penetrating gaze, the patient by all the silent, irreplaceable qualities that, in him, betray--that is, reveal and conceal--the clearly ordered forms of the disease.”<sup>8</sup>

The modern relationship between the doctor and patient is entirely different to that of the pre-modern, both in terms of how these two individuals relate to one another, and in terms of the way in which the patient and his or her ills are situated within pathology. The modern doctor acts as a mediator between the object of knowledge (the subject objectified), and

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<sup>7</sup>ibid.

<sup>8</sup>ibid., pp. 15-16.

the discourse against which information rendered in this modern doctor-patient relationship will be compared and analysed. The practice in itself was not something new; what did change with modernity, however,

“was the *very grid according to which this experience was given, was articulated into analysable elements, and found a discursive formulation*. Not only the names of diseases, not only the grouping of systems were not the same; but the fundamental perceptual codes that were applied to patients’ bodies, the field of objects to which observation addressed itself, the surfaces and depths traversed by the doctor’s gaze, the whole system of orientation of this gaze also varied.”<sup>9</sup>

Foucault writes that an explosion occurs within medical discourse in the early nineteenth century with the application of old, perhaps even ancient, techniques on the human body. However, the application of such techniques were conceived in an entirely new way with modernity, as was the way in which illness was defined and placed within medical epistemology. Through this process, medicine and its understanding of the body was altered, as well as the ontological conditions which these modern discoveries thrust upon the human subject. As a result of modern medicine, Man became aware of himself both as a subject of medical discourse and knowledge, and as objectively defined within scientific discourse which gave itself the central task of explaining and conceptualizing the human condition; within knowledge and discourse, an awareness of Man’s consciousness was born; he thus emerged as an ontologically definable being, with a particular conception of himself in medical and ontological terms.

### **THE ACCEPTANCE OF MODERN MEDICINE AS A SCIENCE**

Through the new technique of gazing *within* the body instead of merely *at* it, modern medical discourse aspired to being accepted as a *science*. The clinic set itself the task of absorbing knowledge of the human body and its ills; as a result, Foucault writes that this structure

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<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 54. My emphasis.

“was thought to be the element of [modern medicine’s] positive accumulation: it was this constant gaze upon the patient, this age-old, yet ever renewed attention that enabled medicine not to disappear entirely with each new speculation, but to preserve itself, to assume little by little the figure of a truth that is definitive, if not completed, in short, to develop, between the revel of the noisy episodes of its history, in a continuous historicity.”<sup>10</sup>

The clinic served as the locus for the development of a science of the body and its functioning, a site of knowledge creation, historical in nature, and, by virtue of this fact, contingent in form. According to Foucault, the establishment of the clinic as the site for modern medical practice was a profound event that, coupled with the epistemological developments within medicine, would change the profession forever: medicine became institutionalized, vested in the brick of hospitals and the body of the Doctor. This event heralded the dawn of the *expert*, a time when parochial medicine lost its legitimacy, (in fact was outlawed from practice), and institutions like the clinic and the hospital were vested with the responsibility of administering health. No longer would men have direct, personal relationships with their bodies, bodies they understood subjectively; no longer would they have access to local medicines and remain responsible for their everyday health: these tasks were discharged elsewhere, along with the accumulation of a corpus of knowledge which redefined the body and its cure within the sciences of immunology and pathology. Away from the common man, medicine as a positive science was being invented, thus wresting control that people had over their bodies and ailments away from them. The ontological consciousness people had of their bodies was to radically change once silence and professionalism enveloped the medical practice, when

“writing and secrecy were introduced, that is, the concentration of this knowledge in a privileged group, and the dissociation of the immediate relationship, which had neither obstacle nor limits between Gaze and Speech...*what was*

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<sup>10</sup>ibid., pp. 54-5.

*known was no longer communicated to others and put to practical use..."*<sup>11</sup>

According to Foucault, the clinic and its personnel played important roles in the lives of patients. The nineteenth century doctor within a recognized medical institution like the clinic attained a two-fold status: as a medical doctor, responsible for objective research; and as a *philosopher*, responsible for the daily needs and spiritual and otherwise ills of his brethren. This doctor as "paternal authority" served the individual or subjective needs of his patients who would turn to him for advice and counseling.<sup>12</sup> In this way, not only did the modern doctor play a purely medical role, but he was expected to intervene in the spiritual and emotional lives of his patients, to manipulate *minds*, as well as bodies; he practiced within a medical discourse which encouraged the doctor to

"make [himself] master of [his] patients and their affections; assuage their pains; calm their anxieties; anticipate their needs; bear with their whims; make the most of their characters and command their will, not as a cruel tyrant reigns over his slaves, but as a kind father who watches over the destiny of his children...so many forms in which the sovereignty of the gaze gradually establishes itself--*the eye that knows and decides, the eye that governs.*"<sup>13</sup>

It is this process of governance that is of most interest to us as far as *The Birth of the Clinic* is concerned. Foucault shows that the establishment of modern medicine had a much greater task than establishing a positive method and a universal body of knowledge around the individual human body. The chief concern of medical practitioners, and, as Foucault lucidly reveals, political and economic figures, was the eradication of social ill-health and the administration of populations in doing this. This process had a positive mandate, perhaps even more important than that of prevention; modern medicine became intrinsically interested in the medical condition of Man, both as an individual subject and as an objective

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<sup>11</sup>ibid., p. 55. My emphasis.

<sup>12</sup>ibid., p. 89.

<sup>13</sup>ibid., pp. 88. My emphasis.

population mass, projected in terms of its capacity for work, and the need to ensure maximum economic utility. Modern medicine, and the medical knowledge of the state, serves a political function:

“no longer...[solely] confined to a body of techniques for curing ills and of the knowledge that they require; it will also embrace a knowledge of *healthy man*, that is, a study of *non-sick man* and a definition of the *model man*. In the ordering of human existence it assumes a normative posture, which authorizes it not only to distribute advice as to healthy life, but also to dictate the standards for physical and moral relations of the individual and the society in which he lives...medicine will be what it must be, the knowledge of natural and *social man*...”<sup>14</sup>

Modern medicine, concerned as it is with populations and their health, becomes caught up in relations with the state, and its various political and economic responsibilities.

#### THE POLITICAL UTILITY OF MODERN MEDICINE

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault describes the medical gaze as having dual concern: first, with individual and ill bodies, caught up within the social spaces of the family and the clinic; second, with the *social body at large*--the body of the population--within institutional spaces: families, communities, hospitals, and schools. In short, medicine, as it emerged in the nineteenth century, began its work with consolidating an epistemological foundation for medical practice within the institution of the newly-conceived clinic, and then extended its interest in individual health to that of the population. Foucault writes that modern medicine has an interest in more than just *individual* health; it is “linked to the destiny of states”: modern medicine thus takes on a profoundly *political* function.<sup>15</sup> In concerning itself with the health of *populations*, the task of modern medicine is to allow for the

“formation of an accurate, exhaustive, permanent corpus of knowledge about the health of a population...a spontaneous and deeply rooted convergence between the requirements of

<sup>14</sup>ibid., pp. 34-35. My emphasis.

<sup>15</sup>ibid., p. 34.

*political ideology* and those of *medical technology*. In a concerted effort, doctors and statesmen demand, in a different vocabulary but for essentially identical reasons, the suppression of every obstacle to the constitution of this new space: the hospitals, which alter the special laws governing disease and which disturb those no less rigorous laws that define the relations between property and wealth, poverty and work..."<sup>16</sup>

This passage heralds Foucault's work in his Power period around the concept of a new type of politics conducted in the modern age: bio-politics, the concern with the health, welfare, utility and docility of populations. It is here that we find the heart of his political inquiry, his critique of modernity at its most radical and revealing.

*The Birth of the Clinic* is fundamental reading in Foucault's first period because it begins to investigate the overlap between discursive formations and social practices. In this book he shows how knowledge of the human body gathered within the clinic, a newly-defined social space for the accumulation of medical knowledge, is linked to the innately political concerns of social ill-health and disease encapsulated within the art of *government*; here Foucault outlines the modern state's concern with a population that functions at the peak of its potential and yet places minimum demands upon the state itself. Centrally, Foucault's work is interested in the ontological consequences of new bodies of knowledge which were conceived with the advent of modernity, in this case related to sickness and health. At the core of his work, Foucault is interested in investigating the "games of truth", as he calls them, that forces a human being to identify him- or herself with a particular persona, as sane or insane, or as a subject or object of medical discourse.

Besides the notion of bio-power which is tentatively introduced in this text, Foucault begins to elaborate on what he will later call the process of *normalization*, a measure against which behaviour can be registered and compared, a sort of human average which is established after extensive investigations into the bodies and minds of individuals. Through this process, knowledge is collected and collated in order to produce an "ideal

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<sup>16</sup>ibid., pp. 38-39.

condition": *the norm*. This is connected with Foucault's primary concerns in the next book for investigation in this dissertation: *The Order of Things*. Centrally, the modern human sciences seek to explain Man in his Truth and produce an epistemology of Man with which to explain and identify him. A normative position, or a norm, is thus created in the space between a pure science of Man (such as physiology), and a "science" which seeks to understand human consciousness (such as psychology).

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault will investigate the growth of the human sciences from the eighteenth century, and provide a theoretical base from which this body of knowledge can now be problematized. From the subject of insanity, to the subject of pathology, let us now concern ourselves with the subject of knowledge. In the following chapter, we will explore Foucault's description of the "birth of Man", how this entity came to be problematised and portrayed in modern discourse, and which fundamentally altered Man's relationship with himself as an object of knowledge. These are the central questions which concern *The Order of Things*, Foucault's third and perhaps most singularly brilliant work, the subject of the following chapter.

*Chapter Three:*  
**THE BIRTH OF MAN**

It is comforting...and a source of profound relief to think that man is only a recent invention, a figure not yet two centuries old, a new wrinkle in our knowledge, and that he will disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

In the preceding chapters of this dissertation, we have explored Foucault's archaeologies of illness and insanity within modernity, and the way in which these anomalies of the human body and mind have been investigated within specifically defined institutions of learning and inquiry: the medical clinic and the mental asylum. In Chapter Three of this dissertation, we will critically examine *The Order of Things* (1966), perhaps Foucault's most important text in relation to his work on the human subject. A primary task of this chapter will be uncovering Foucault's description of the knowledge systems which had as their central focus the human condition, the essential qualities and traits which, with modernity, have come to characterize Man as an epistemologically discernible entity. In addition, we wish to understand how it is that Foucault makes the assertions he does in the quote which heads this chapter. If Man is an "invention" and might be "replaced" by other forms of

knowledge with different concerns, then how is it that this process might come about? If we seek to encourage knowledge finding a “new form”, which would thus cause Man to “disappear”, then how is this process achieved?

The purpose of this chapter is thus two-fold: first to inquire into the modern theoretical and philosophical understanding of Man, which Foucault provides in *The Order of Things*; and second, to investigate the possibility of Man’s epistemological demise, the way in which Foucault describes how Man might cease to exist within knowledge structures, at least in his present form. Understood in light of these questions which I will pose to *The Order of Things*, it is easy to understand why this book occupies a central position for this dissertation. In it, Foucault writes an archaeology of the constitution of the human subject within discourse, (the birth of Man), and perhaps most importantly, suggests that this subject might disappear from history. In addition to the two broad areas outlined above (the constitution of the subject and the prospect of his demise), I wish to outline three central questions which will provide us with a philosophical and ontological understanding of the modern subject, and a working foundation from which to derive Foucault’s central political concerns in his later works. Ultimately, I seek to provide a detailed account of Foucault’s description of the modern subject, and the reasons he gives for this entity existing within an epistemological and ontological space which is open to significant change. Once we have a clear definition of the Foucauldian subject, and the possibilities of its demise, we will be in a good position to draw out the political implications of such a theoretical stance, which is the central task of this dissertation.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault is primarily concerned with an archaeology of the human sciences, the bodies of knowledge which appear self-evident within our conceptual frameworks and are thus accepted as valid sciences. He differentiates between two different types of “sciences”: on the one hand, what we might generally refer to as “pure” sciences (physics, mathematics, etc.), those bodies of scientific knowledge which Foucault refers to as “noble sciences, rigorous sciences, sciences of the necessary, all close to phi-

losophy.”<sup>1</sup> He does not have a problem with these because each has a tradition based on the research into, and the analysis of, concrete “laws of nature” which have lead to “the almost uninterrupted emergence of truth and pure reason.”<sup>2</sup> These are sciences of discovery and of certainty, vested with sound methods and postulates upon which an understanding of the natural world is built.

On the other hand, Foucault notes the emergence, with modernity, of a second body of knowledge, which also aspires to scientific status, but with which he does have a fundamental problem. These disciplines, concerned as they are with Man and his nature, are generally considered to rest on shaky methodological and philosophic ground, “too tinged with empirical thought, too exposed to the vagaries of chance or imagery, to age-old traditions and external events, for it to be supposed that their history could be anything other than irregular.”<sup>3</sup> Foucault offers these words as a rhetorical instrument rather than with serious application, as he attempts to set up his primary concern with this group of knowledge, the *human sciences*. He wishes to show that, while we generally take for granted that the human sciences are ungrounded in scientific certainty and truth, the models and theories of Man and his “nature” *have* acquired such a scientific status and, as a result of this, have had a profound effect on the modern individual. Foucault thus wishes to pose the question “What if, in fact, these groups of discursive formations did obey particular rules and regulatory principles which allowed them to forward a particular knowledge within history?” He asks: “[W]hat if empirical knowledge, at a given time and in a given culture, *did* possess a well-defined regularity?”<sup>4</sup>

*The Order of Things* is thus a book written to investigate not so much the *forms* of knowledge which made up the human sciences from the emergence of modernity, but rather the *internal rules* which governed this body of knowledge and which at least gave

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

them the *semblance* of being sciences. Rather than concerning himself with the human sciences in terms of the content of their investigations and subsequent treatises on Man, Foucault inquired into the rules which governed the emergence of the human sciences and their formation as bodies of knowledge with a particular and historically unique object in terms of their research. In addition, and equally important, Foucault sought to understand the *result* of such knowledge; how these knowledge structures, with Man as their object, produced a particular conception of his nature and consciousness.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault's "initial hypothesis" is that "the history of non-formal knowledge had itself a system," in other words, a system particularly relevant to itself and which can be traced historically.<sup>5</sup> Important to note is that *The Order of Things* concerns itself with uncovering the way in which epistemological systems, or structures, (which have as their specific concern knowledge of human being and the various ways and forms in which this entity exists), change over a period of time, as rules are reinvented, truths newly recovered, or old truths scrapped altogether. This book has as its central concern a description of changes in knowledge structures from the Renaissance through the Classical period and into Modernity. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, it should be stressed that we are not so much concerned with the changes in pre-modern knowledge systems, or how this process came to be. Instead, we will look solely at Foucault's description of modern knowledge of the human being, and the resultant constitution of Man in a process which he specifically links to modernity. ✓

In the way that Foucault introduces his two central premises in the Preface to *The Order of Things*, (first, that knowledge might have a particular structure and configuration at a particular time in history, and second, that this formation might in fact change over time and through history), a number of difficult questions emerge. First, if Foucault concerns himself with *ruptures* in thought, the historical breaks and caesuras that he believes have occurred since the sixteenth century, how does he explain such an unconventional hypoth-

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<sup>5</sup>ibid., p. x.

esis. Second, how does he explain Man being able to move beyond the epistemological constraints which place him firmly as the centre of knowledge? A third important question relates to the effects of any move to destroy our present epistemological framework and replace it with some other form of knowledge which is no longer anthropocentric. Foucault anticipates these very questions, and he begins *The Order of Things* by outlining three problems related to an archaeology of modern Man: first, that of causality; second, that of change; and third, the problem of the subject, the area of most interest to this dissertation. I wish to look at each of these in turn, and relate them to the work under way here.

### THE PROBLEM OF CAUSALITY

Causality, understood in this context as the factors responsible for change or the creation of, a particular phenomenon, is an extremely complex question to work on, and Foucault himself admits he has little to help matters. In fact, he admits to “embarrassment” in attempting to provide a guideline for his readers around the question of causality, or when attempting to investigate causal factors which influence *any* of the sciences; “embarrassment,” however,

“probably reaches its *highest* point in the case of the *empirical sciences*: 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 a moment to force a solution I felt incapable, I admit, of offering...”<sup>6</sup>

While Foucault does admit to being “incapable” of providing us with a causal history of the human sciences, he does, however, offer a method of exploring the forms of knowledge which affect modern Being, rather than exact answers to the origin and causation of these discursive formations. Thus, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault’s task is to uncover the *history of epistemological change*. While he does not offer an immediate understanding of

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<sup>6</sup>ibid., p. xiii. My emphasis.

what brings about change in thought, I believe these ideas became clearer to him later in his life. However, I simultaneously don't believe it is ever extremely important for Foucault to provide an explanation for the historical events or factors which one could point to as responsible for, or constitutive of, the human sciences. More important is whether or not Foucault can provide a coherent theoretical model to explain how such change might come about, evidence to back up his hypothesis that change itself is possible, particularly in relation to knowledge of the modern subject.

### THE PROBLEM OF CHANGE

The second question which Foucault raises in the introduction to *The Order of Things*, is that of the human capacity for action and revolt. This is a particularly important question, because it relates centrally to the possibility for, and efficacy of, any political project which I claim in this dissertation is contained within Foucault's work. The need to answer this question is made more acute because Foucault describes knowledge structures (and thus social structures which form as a result of discursive formations) to be determined *outside* of the agency and will of man.<sup>7</sup> Foucault takes cognizance of the arguments levelled at his work, however, and defends himself in the following manner:

“It has been said that this work denies the very possibility of change. Any yet my main concern has been with changes. In fact, two things in particular struck me: the suddenness and thoroughness with which certain sciences were sometimes reorganized; and the fact that at the same time similar changes occurred in apparently very different disciplines.”<sup>8</sup>

In this passage, Foucault defends his position in relation to the way in which he describes modern knowledge, and makes reference to the hypothesis which will emerge in *The Order of Things*, and will be strengthened in his later work: the ability for thought to reflect on itself and emerge with new propositions on the way that truth and knowledge are defined.

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<sup>7</sup>This problem of the relation between knowledge and Foucauldian power will be raised in Part II as central to the discussion there.

<sup>8</sup>*The Order of Things*, p. xii.

Thus knowledge might reflect on itself and reject itself at a particular point in history, hereby fundamentally reshuffling or overturning what was previously presumed to be “truthful”. Thought might emerge as having the ability to critique this enunciative epistemic substructure, and ultimately reverse what hitherto had been defined as a truth statement. With the questions of political change and human agency in mind, problems which ultimately concern themselves with the existence of human autonomy and freedom, we will explore ways in which this paradigm lies at the centre of Foucault’s political project.

### **THE PROBLEM OF THE SUBJECT**

The third problem Foucault raises in the Preface to *The Order of Things*, and the one of most interest to this dissertation, is that of the human subject. He takes pains to outline his understanding of this construct, this for the first time in his *oeuvre*, and an important moment. I would like to break Foucault’s concerns around the subject into three separate parts: first, the link between the subject, history, and science, and the *epistémé* which Foucault describes as constitutive of these three notions; second, the effect of this epistemological structure on the subject; third, how knowledge is constitutive of forms of human consciousness. These three levels operate at an increasingly more complex theoretical level, and in an increasingly unconventional way, and I have distinguished between them to show how Foucault ties the formation of the subject and his consciousness to particular knowledge formations.

For Foucault the problem of the subject is related to the formation of the human sciences as a particular set of discursive formations which have as their central concern the human being, and whose growth can be plotted in the history of ideas. In addition, these discourses of Man can be linked to the formation of particular bodies of knowledge which are socially and epistemologically accepted as *sciences*. Foucault seeks to problematize this relationship between knowledge, history, and the constitution of modern Man as a scientifically discernible entity. In other words, Foucault is interested in problematizing the commonly-held liberal assumption of human agency being responsible in the formation of

knowledge, instead linking the causal factors of this paradigm to a far more complex theory of knowledge involving the epistemic foundation upon which this knowledge rests.

*Epistémé* is the word Foucault uses to describe particular rules, enunciative and functional<sup>9</sup> in nature, which exist below systems of thought and bodies of knowledge, and which are responsible for the form which knowledge in a particular epoch adopts. These are what Foucault will refer to as “systems of regularities” in the quote below, as he problematizes the role of the human being as scientist, and as the central agent in the discovery of particular forms of knowledge. He writes:

“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.*”<sup>10</sup>

Foucault thus calls into question the degree to which a “history of theories, concepts, or themes” might be understood as existing within an autonomous space, or an area of knowledge which might be conceived as existing independently of prior constructions or conceptions of truth, and as the result of particular work on the part of scientists, who are socially accepted as discovering truth about the world. This is not a particularly unconventional concept, even though it is unique within Foucault’s work. He explores knowledge formations which acquire the status of “sciences”, “not from the point of view of the individuals who are speaking, nor from the point of view of the formal structures of what they are saying, but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of

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<sup>9</sup>cf. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Part III. The words “enunciative” and “functional” refer to the properties which Foucault gives to the various operational statements that exist below modern knowledge structures, and which determine the form which the latter takes; in other words, Foucault links the creation of truth not to Man as the central perceptive being in the universe, or to Man as the central agent in uncovering objective truth, but to the ruling statements of a particular epistemic era which determine the form which knowledge will take.

<sup>10</sup>ibid. pp. xiii-xiv.

such discourse...”<sup>11</sup> Foucault thus seeks to understand the “archaeological” structure of discourse which, by its very nature and construction, will determine the form and shape of knowledge which such a discourse enunciates as truth. Archaeology as method thus works below the surface of texts to understand the creative and historically constituted and thus vulnerable rules which determine a particular knowledge at a particular time in history.

In the second part of his problematization of the human subject, Foucault focuses on the role of the human being as scientist, usually regarded as performing normative functions within a laboratory or some other controlled environment, and who is thereby capable of establishing accurate and universal laws regarding the nature of things. Foucault rejects this, at least as far as the human sciences are concerned, and problematizes the usually accepted notion of the scientist as objective. Further, he questions the degree to which a scientist is even capable of engaging in practical and meaningful work which is groundbreaking in some sense. Foucault, in problematizing the very notion of science itself, expresses a desire “to know whether the subjects responsible for scientific discourse are not determined in their situation, their function, their perceptive capacity, and in their practical possibilities by conditions that dominate and even overwhelm them.”<sup>12</sup> In this, Foucault not only questions the status of knowledge and its legitimacy, but also calls into question the role of the scientist creative of, or responsible for, such work. Here we begin to see the most important contribution of Foucault to modern philosophy, and the essence of which this chapter seeks to address: the intersection of discourse or knowledge on the process of subjectivity or identity-building, and the way in which Foucault describes subjectivity and identity being *constructed* and existing as contingent within history.

Foucault rejects what he writes might “broadly” be referred to as “the phenomenological approach,” or any philosophy which places Man as the privileged centre of reason and agency in the realm of knowledge creation. This rejection of the proactive role of the

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<sup>11</sup>ibid., p. xiv.

<sup>12</sup>ibid.

subject in the formation of knowledge, and the *de facto* reversal of this relationship by Foucault, is his third and most unconventional and controversial position. Foucault rejects the subject as the centre of knowledge systems, or any philosophy “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*.”<sup>13</sup> It emerges that the subject for Foucault is very clearly not only not the agent within the history of ideas, but further, is in fact the *result* of such knowledge. Foucault thus rejects the scientist and his knowledge as independently existing entities, but rather understands both these entities as being determined *in their very existence* by underlying epistemic configurations, an archaeological foundation which structures knowledge in a particular way.

Discourse is not the result of objective investigations on the part of human agents, but rather of the formative bodies within which this latter entity is in fact subjectified. It is this historic emergence of a set of discursive practices producing knowledges of human subjectivity which Foucault describes as the creation of “Man”. Man is not only the result of knowledge, but oppressed by it; Man is not only not the agent responsible for the process of knowledge formation, but is paradoxically at a certain point “excluded” from the formation of his very own consciousness, something we will discuss in greater detail below. What should be stressed at this point, however, is that this third way in which Foucault problematizes the subject in relation to knowledge connects his interest in the constitution of the human subject, with the questions of change and human agency. If it is true that the subject is the result and not the causal agent in the construction of knowledge systems and his own consciousness, then how might this first be explained; and second, how might such an limiting or oppressive system be overcome? These will be the most challenging questions that Foucault’s work and this dissertation will be forced to answer in order to affirm the political project inherent in his *oeuvre*.

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<sup>13</sup>ibid. My emphasis.

Foucault's three central problems at this stage of *The Order of Things* serve only as an introduction to the major themes in this dissertation. What is important for our purposes is to understand Foucault's conception of the subject: an entity enmeshed in discursive formations both as *objective practitioner* in the process of collecting empirical data on the human condition, and as *subjective receptacle* of a discourse on Man which is imposed as truth. Within the complex tripartite division in Foucault's work between discourse, subjectivity and truth, I wish to provide a structure for this chapter, and look at three central problems.

First, I think it important to investigate the debate over whether Foucault might legitimately be called a "structuralist," and what this might imply for his overall project. Within this central problem I wish first to resolve the question presented above, but, more importantly, to describe the fundamental methodological difference, if any, between archaeology and structuralism. The structuralist tradition seems to reject the question of human agency and causality, and it is important to distinguish the difference between Foucault's archaeology and this earlier method. I also wish to explore whether or not archaeology is itself a systematic method much like structuralism.

The second investigation which is fundamental to this chapter is that which describes the process of Man having come to occupy a simultaneously privileged *and* subjected position within modern epistemology. Here we will uncover Foucault's central problematization of the subject, the way in which this being is objectified within knowledge. In this, and if he is correct in his formulations, Foucault reveals an interesting and perhaps irresolvable paradox within modern epistemology: Man as a *willing* agent in his own subjection.

Third, I wish to explore the way in which Foucault describes the "limits" of thought, an investigation into the parameters within which modern thought is forced to function, given the fact that the modern subject is the source and product of his own knowledge. Part of this investigation will be to discover how this paradox impinges itself

upon the way in which human subjects have been constituted, and the ways in which this epistemology of Man inhibits or restrains thought from thinking Other than itself.<sup>14</sup> In other words, if it has been established that Foucault provides a system for uncovering the foundation from which knowledge achieves meaning and cogency, and if it is established that Man in fact grew out of particular discursive practices, how might thought rethink itself as something different, something that takes into account the limitations placed upon the subject within the modern epistemological configuration?

### **FOUCAULT: A STRUCTURALIST?**

While Foucault rejects all philosophies caught within the humanist tradition (in which Man is placed at the centre of knowledge), and he would include structuralism as part of this genre, the question relating to a difference that might be distinguished between archaeology and structuralism is important. Throughout his career, Foucault categorically denied having any allegiance to the structuralist project. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, his work which preceded *The Order of Things*, he explains his methodological concerns at the time:

“My aim is to uncover the principles and consequences of an autochthonous transformation that is taking place in the field of historical knowledge. It may well be that this transformation, the problems that it raises, the tools that it uses, the concepts that emerge from it, and the results that it obtains are not entirely foreign to what is called structural analysis. *But this kind of analysis is not specifically used.*”<sup>15</sup>

While Foucault is surprisingly ambivalent in this passage, and seems to align structuralism and archaeology as similar methods with similar goals, I believe that these two systems are very different from one another, both methodologically in terms of the object of their investigations, as well as in their political consequences. First I will provide a general un-

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<sup>14</sup>Foucault links the human sciences, which have epistemologically described Man, to the ontological constitution of his Being. Thus modern knowledge is constitutive of Man's ontological understanding of himself--there is a direct connection between epistemological knowledge Man has of himself and the way in which this exists to create his consciousness or Being.

<sup>15</sup>*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 15. My emphasis.

derstanding of structuralism, not in an attempt to definitively describe this school of thought, itself subject to debate, but for the purposes of being able to compare what critics or commentators might refer to when calling Foucault as a philosopher of history a “structuralist”. After this, I will explain Foucault’s concerns in more detail and make the difference between archaeology as *method*, and structuralism as *system*, quite clear.

Born through the work of De Saussure (linguistics), Levi-Strauss (anthropology), and Lacan (psycho-analysis), structuralism at its core defines the task of elucidating an innate structure within a particular social system. Whether in terms of myth, language, or social structure, as examples, a structuralist approach would seek to define essential and underlying rules that determine the way in which a particular act is carried out. To make reference to Chomsky’s work in linguistics, the central premiss guiding his work is that an innate language capacity exists within the human subject, this the product of genetics and merely facilitated in its application through a process of socialization and nurturing. For Chomsky, the faculty of language is an inherent human quality, not only in terms of potential, but more radically, in terms of the capacity for grammatical construction being *naturally* prevalent in the human species: language is an essential and *implicit* human attribute. For the linguistic structuralist, there exists as an essential element of human nature a “mass of schematisms, innate governing principles, which guide our social and intellectual and individual behavior...there is *something biologically given*, unchangeable, a foundation for whatever it is that we do with our mental capacities.”<sup>16</sup> Chomsky links his work in linguistics with a particular political project of his own, a programme of intellectual and political action which seeks to actualize an essential human self through the implementation of an anarcho-syndicalist justice; Foucault rejects the very basis of Chomsky’s argument, placing him squarely within the humanist tradition as will become obvious in the quotes which follow. Foucault, in debate with Chomsky over the subjects of human nature, essential

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<sup>16</sup>Noam Chomsky, quoted in the Introduction, *The Foucault Reader*, p. 3. My emphasis.

truth, and justice on a Dutch television show, displays the fundamental traits of his theory that negate any possibility of his having embarked upon a structuralist project.<sup>17</sup>

Foucault fundamentally rejects any appeal to a totalizing sense of truth or governing structure that takes on a universally-acceptable moral position, and is based on an essential human nature. This stands at the very heart of all his work and is probably the point least understood by his critics. While Chomsky believes that a justice might be uncovered once the self and its needs are properly understood, Foucault takes up a very different position entirely. Compare the following:

Chomsky, on being asked about his interest in politics, expresses his interest in: “[trying] to create the vision of a future just society; that is to create, if you like, a humanistic social theory that is based, if possible, on some firm and humane concept of the human essence or human nature.”<sup>18</sup>

Foucault: “I will be a little bit Nietzschean about this...it seems to me that the idea of justice in itself is an idea which in effect has been invented and put to work in different types of societies as an instrument of a certain political and economic power or as a weapon against that power...one can't, however regrettable it may be, put these notions forward to justify a fight which should...overthrow the very fundamentals of our society.”<sup>19</sup>

In this latter statement, we see two essential remarks: first, that truth is something created and used as an element of control; two, that in fact the very notions for which we have been fighting up until this point are not only false, but useless in tackling the real problems at hand. We see the two most important elements of the critique against Foucault which we will have to explore later coming to the fore: there is no innate essence, truth is created; out of this, there exists no essential meaning in the lives of individuals *sans* that which they create for themselves as works of art.

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<sup>17</sup>The details of this debate, entitled “Human Nature: Justice versus Power,” can be found in *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind*, ed. Fons Elders.

<sup>18</sup>*ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup>Foucault, quoted in the Introduction, *The Foucault Reader*, p. 6.

Ironically, *The Order of Things* was initially going to be sub-titled *An Archaeology of Structuralism*. When looking at archaeology as method, and later at its merger with genealogical work, we must keep in mind that Foucault is not interested so much in uncovering how knowledge is *structured* the way it is, but rather is an attempt to, first, understand the way in which present knowledge structures affect our conception of reality today, and second, to *historicize knowledge as a contingent formation of statements that might be altered*, in other words, and this is the essential point, to place knowledge within *time*.<sup>20</sup> Archaeology is a method which reveals a structure, yet in no way affirms this structure as truth, except in its historicity. Foucault does not appeal to an innate semblance of order or systematicity, but rather reveals how an order was imposed on knowledge of Man at a particular time in history.

The power of Foucault's archaeology, especially for the purposes of this dissertation is twofold: first, archaeology allows us to understand the way in which the subject in its present epistemological definition was constituted; second, archaeology invites the prospect that this present *epistémé* might in fact be overturned as we move into a new epistemological understanding of the world, a new age of reason. *The Order of Things* is thus an historical investigation into the world of ideas, not to uncover and consolidate a foundation for knowledge which we have lost along the way or never conceived of, but rather to show the serious political and socio-economic effects, as well as the epistemological contingency, of such a structure. Instead of "structure", Foucault uses the word *epistémé*, to denote a particular body of knowledge, a particular group of statements which govern language at a particular time. In this way he does not negate science or the ability to move towards a progressively enlightened truth within the hard sciences; rather, he reveals the uncertainty and contingency of modern knowledge which reveres the human being as the perceptive and active center of knowledge creation. The method of uncovering the foundation of this knowledge system is archaeology.

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<sup>20</sup>For a highly descriptive analysis of the role of "time" in Foucault's archaeological method, see *The Order of Things*, p. 332.

Let us now move on to the more concrete and fundamental questions of how Man was “created” as an entity within modern discourse, and why this ontological construction disturbs Foucault. In other words, what is the link between the creation of modern subjectivity and the ontological and political subjection implicit in this process? Most important to understanding the way in which the modern subject is constituted within modern knowledge structures, are the “objectivizing sciences”, a modern body of “scientific” knowledge which radically reorganized Man’s epistemological understanding of himself at the end of the eighteenth century: the emergence, for the first time in the history of ideas, of the *human sciences*.

### THE BIRTH OF MAN IN MODERN KNOWLEDGE

The emergence of a new and modern structure for knowledge occurred at the turn of the nineteenth century. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault focuses on this epistemic “threshold” in order to understand what changed in some radical way with regards to human subjectivity and self-consciousness, as well as the degree of change compared to structures that existed prior to it.<sup>21</sup> He writes:

“For an archaeology of knowledge, this profound breach in the expanse of continuities, though it must be analyzed, and minutely so, cannot be ‘explained’ or even summed up in a 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...*knowledge takes up residence in a new space.*”<sup>22</sup>

The shift that occurs at the end of the eighteenth century relates directly to the level at which knowledge begins to work. According to Foucault, all things in Classical thought were ordered on a table and represented as they appeared to knowledge through time; the modern break occurs when knowledge begins inquiries into the “profound, interior, and essential

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<sup>21</sup>*The Order of Things*, p. xxiv.

<sup>22</sup>*ibid.*, p. 217. My emphasis.

space” of each of these entities.<sup>23</sup> Instead of a position or a place on a table, modern knowledge has a primary interest in distinguishing *function*; with the newly-emerging sciences concerned with wealth, language and biology, we see Western knowledge striving to understand a “space” within the human subject, or what is commonly known in modernity as human “interiority”.<sup>24</sup> This move was to have a profound effect: with the level of analysis and conditions of epistemological existence moving to a “deeper” level, things discover their *nature*. Modern identity is thus intrinsically caught up within an epistemological definition or tag attached to an entity, binding it to a particular type of action and function.

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault describes how knowledge of the human body changed fundamentally once corpses were opened and investigated in their dark, interior recesses.<sup>25</sup> As a result of the gaze of modern medical science, disease was defined in its truth, with empirical evidence used to describe the ways in which particular pathologies interacted with, and potentially destroyed, organs. In opening up the human corpse, physicians were able to come face to face with the human body’s empirical reality as well as its capacity for death, its finitude.<sup>26</sup> This knowledge was encoded within an emerging set of biological sciences, confident in their ability to diagnose illness of the human body, as well as other matters concerning human health generally. With this interest in the *organic* structure of things, the locus of investigation into the body changed: function came to play “an essential governing and determining role” in the process of naming organs within a nosological hierarchy.<sup>27</sup>

More importantly, on a philosophic level, the functions of the body, and the various organs which assisted in the primary operations of the body, were placed deep within the human frame; in investigating human illness, exterior symptoms were related to an inner

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<sup>23</sup>*ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>24</sup>*ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>25</sup>The investigation of human corpses is well documented by Foucault in Chapter 8 of *The Birth of the Clinic*, “Open up a Few Corpses.”

<sup>26</sup>*The Birth of the Clinic*, p. 198.

<sup>27</sup>*The Order of Things*, p. 228.

primary depth, in a process of reverse decipherment: doctors would have to “relate the visible to the invisible, to its deeper cause, as it were, then to rise upwards once more from that hidden architecture towards the more obvious signs displayed on the surfaces of bodies.”<sup>28</sup> Modernity thus heralds a fundamental rearrangement of Man’s conception of his body and its function; no longer a two-dimensional structure, the human body is found in its *depth* with modernity, and human consciousness finds its primary source of locution *within*. In discovering a depth within the body, Man as a being understood as separate from Nature, achieved a hermeneutical (or ontological) consciousness of himself for the first time in history.

The modern human condition is thus linked to a relationship between depth and human nature, the two working together in a duet which defines interior Being for modern humanity; these factors constitute Man, a living entity whose essential functionings, needs, and desires can be investigated, and their submerged causal reality established through empirically observed exterior signs and symptoms. In this process of discovering human interiority, it became necessary to “explore in depth the space that lies between their superficial organs and their most concealed ones, and between these latter and the broad functions that they perform.”<sup>29</sup> In the depth of his body, modern Man found both an understanding of his physiological functioning; of more importance to Foucault, Man found a philosophical basis for the origin of his nature.<sup>30</sup> Modern Man is thus born within a physical body, and yet constituted for the very first time as an entity with a valuable *interior*. Foucault writes that modern man’s “mode of being”<sup>31</sup> rotates on three central axes: the origin, the transcendental, and the empirical.<sup>32</sup> Within this triad, modern knowledge defines modern Being, and captures this within a positive language.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>ibid., p. 229.

<sup>29</sup>ibid., p. 230.

<sup>30</sup>ibid., p. 244.

<sup>31</sup>ibid., p. 328.

<sup>32</sup>While there are a further three concepts which Foucault introduces in *The Order of Things* as part of his discussion of modern epistemology, (“finitude”, “positivities”, and the

## THE "ORIGIN" OF HUMAN NATURE

In describing the modern *epistémé* and its particular concern with Man, Foucault is most concerned with the concept of a human "nature", or a point of origin which serves as a grounded reference point for investigating human subjects. Foucault defines "origin" as the point within the human subject at which scientific certainty or truth exists, the place from which Man "articulates himself";<sup>34</sup> it should be noted that this place of reference is not steadfast within knowledge, and is always vulnerable to an interrogating "return" of knowledge which violates its presence and positivity.<sup>35</sup> Foucault describes the concept of "the origin" "like the virtual tip of a cone in which all differences, all dispersions, all discontinuities would be knitted together so as to form no more than a single point of identity, the impalpable figure of the Same, yet possessing the power, nevertheless, to burst open upon itself and become Other."<sup>36</sup> This "point" might be referred to as Man's being, established as it is in the "obscure space" between thought as Reason, and its Other, that area of thought which thought has not yet captured or rendered in positive terms within epistemology.<sup>37</sup> If "origin" defines the point at which human nature is defined, Unthought will refer to that space outside which modern ontology is suspended, that which has not been revealed to Truth, and yet, by the very dualistic nature of modern epistemology, must exist as juxtaposed to Thought and that which is known to be real. The Unthought exists at the limits of thought, defining what is both known and that to still be discovered; in other words, it is the space within the world of Thought that has not yet been formalized. Man's origin is thus the accumulation and formalization of knowledge about himself which exists

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"retreat" of knowledge), these I believe to be secondary to the general discussion at hand here, and will be introduced as necessary.

<sup>33</sup>When I make reference to "essence" here, I refer to a nature of Man in modernity which is understood as concrete and stable; essential features of Man are those which we link intrinsically to his nature, his natural condition of Being. Its Other is deviance.

<sup>34</sup>*The Order of Things*, p. 330.

<sup>35</sup>The concept of a "return" of knowledge will be investigated further in the pages which follow. For now, it should be understood as the return of thought to an original truth position, and the process whereby this original position might be interrogated and changed or reversed if it is found to be lacking.

<sup>36</sup>*The Order of Things*, pp. 329-330.

<sup>37</sup>*ibid.*, p. 326.

to define his nature; origin is the point at which human nature exists within the human sciences in its *truth*.

A constant tension thus exists between reason or that *known*, on the one hand, and unreason or that which is *yet to be discovered*, on the other, a tension within thought which might always lead to “modification”, to “reflection”, and, most significantly, to “*transformation of the mode of being of that on which it reflects.*”<sup>38</sup> Crucially important is Foucault’s description of the ability for thought to alter both its relationship to itself, and the relationship which Man thus has with himself as an extension of this:

“What is essential is that thought, both for itself and in the density of its workings, should be both knowledge and a modification of what it knows, reflection and a transformation of the mode of being of that on which it reflects. Whatever it touches it immediately causes to move: it cannot discover the unthought, or at least move towards it, without immediately bringing the unthought nearer to itself--or even, perhaps, without pushing it further away, and *in any case without causing man’s own being to undergo a change by that very fact*, since it is deployed in the distance between them.”<sup>39</sup>

Modern thought thus constantly attempts to provide identity, this now established within the *depth* of the body of the object under review, and not merely a set of signs attached to the *surface* of body as was the case in the Classical age. Once identity is determined in terms of an epistemologically definable truth, and related to function and place within a system, the *nature* of a thing is determined. With modernity, for the first time in the history of humankind, Man was to appear as having his own essential identity, a bundle of attributes discovered in and by the human sciences which now constitute the *consciousness* of Man. This is an extremely important move for Foucault, and the core of his problematization both of Man himself as a created entity, as well as of the human sciences and the Truths which emerge out of this new body of knowledge.

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<sup>38</sup>ibid., p. 327.

<sup>39</sup>ibid. My emphasis.

## THE EMPIRICAL METHOD OF STUDYING MAN

I have devoted some time in this dissertation to the concept of the empirical, but I now wish to sketch in more detail the function within modern thought of empirical investigation. In addition, and of more importance to our discussion here, I wish to describe the relationship between empirical reflection and the formation of a *positive* knowledge structure which Foucault describes as underlying the human sciences. Modern knowledge extraction is based upon an emphasis on the *empirical*, a particular relationship between an expert and his or her patient by which knowledge is gleaned from the surface of the human body. This is underscored by the modern belief in interior depth and the relationship between hidden function and detectable exterior signs; in other words, those symptoms or signs emitted from a pathological mass deep within the body and which nonetheless show themselves as symptoms on the surface of the body, establish a relationship between a surface appearance and a deep nature. As we saw in *Birth of the Clinic*, an understanding of external signs being linked to internal mechanisms and processes is a fundamentally modern conception of the body. The empirical gaze is a method of capturing that which lies within the human form by applying various techniques, whether physical or oral, to the human body on its surface. By the very nature of the relationship between doctor and patient, and the emphasis placed on empirical observation as *scientific*, that which is extracted from bodies forms the basis of a system of knowledge which can now be deemed epistemologically sound.

Kant's practical critique propounded the ability for human reason to search out and attain universal truth and morality for all creatures; as a result of this revolution in modern philosophy, Man emerged as both that known (within the human sciences) as well as Supreme Judge of himself as a *species*. In this, we see the link between the empirical, the transcendental (as empirical knowledge is accorded universal status or validity), the origin discovered, and the "return" to origin, the ability for thought to return to the place of essence and rework an original position. Bound within an understanding of his consciousness as a finite or constant place of reference, Man is born with modernity as an entity with

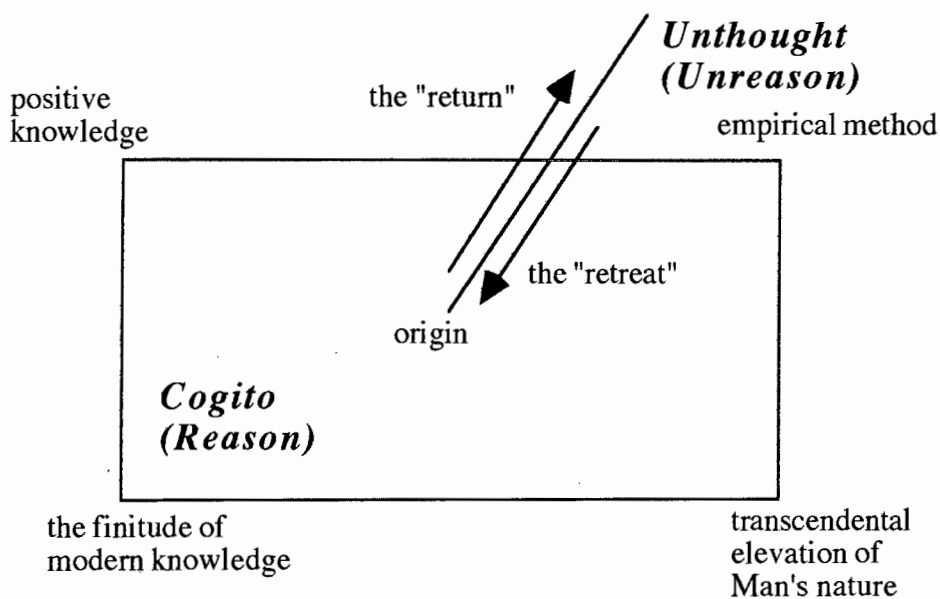
a nature that can be discovered, explained and further problematized; his relationship within himself is thus temporarily finite, and open to change in the future should the human sciences discover a new knowledge of the human condition.

## **A TRANSCENDENTAL THEORY OF MAN**

In the modern epistemology which surrounds Man, and determines his nature in terms of knowledge that is available to describe him, we find the emergence of a system or structure within which knowledge is obliged to work in order to attain the status of truth. This structure is given transcendental status for two reasons: first, in terms of its acceptance as universally valid for all beings; and second, because the human sciences are understood to employ scientific research methods which render truthful conclusions. The limits of this system are the borders which serve to contain thought within the above paradigm, as well as protect rationality from the Unthought. This is the space around knowledge which has yet to be conquered, examined and coopted, the place from which thought can act "from without" the pre-established realm of thought. The "quadrilateral" which Foucault describes in his work serves to protect thought from Other realities, and constantly attempts to normalize these misunderstood anomalies.<sup>40</sup> I would like to use this Foucauldian paradigm to investigate the way in which modern thought necessarily moves towards uncovering and normalizing the Other.

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<sup>40</sup>ibid., p. 335.



**FOUCAULT'S "QUADRILATERAL" OF MODERN THOUGHT, WHICH DESCRIBES THE BOUNDARIES WITHIN WHICH THIS THOUGHT OPERATES, ITS *LIMITS*.**

The core concepts here, as we have already discussed, are the "origin" or nature of the human species, the "empirical" method used in establishing such knowledge, and the "transcendental" formalization of such knowledge within discourse. Linked to these core ideas is knowledge deemed within modernity as "positive", and "finite"--in other words, that modern knowledge is shrouded in scientific certainty which can describe the human condition; second, that such knowledge is complete to the degree that it encloses a "nature" within itself: Man is caught up within a system of knowledge which defines his physical and ontological nature in its complete and unquestionable truth.

If it is true that Man enters the realm of knowledge for the first time with modernity, and that this system of knowledge is structured as in the diagram above, then this has grave implications for the way in which thought might impinge itself upon the lives of individuals and nations. Of particular importance is the modern understanding of Man as having a finite human nature which is epistemologically defined. This origin, once rendered within science as a nature of Man, is constantly interrogated towards ensuring that the truth of Man is maintained, reclaiming a greater share of this entity from the unknown, Unthought.

The Unthought is the dark, murky area of uncertainty which exists outside of the parameters of Thought, or that which is unknown or misunderstood by Reason. Foucault asks as a central question the effects of this thought process upon the human subject. In political terms, what is most important for this dissertation to describe is the relationship between what might be conceived of in thought, or truth, and the construction of the thought process of the knowing subject: in other words, what we seek to explore is Foucault's description of the critical point at which epistemology intersects with consciousness in determining identity and human subjectivity.

Man in modernity is caught up in an astonishing paradox: both object and subject of knowledge; based on this premiss, Foucault describes Man as willing his own subjection within thought. The danger involved is that the modern *epistémé*, given its structure, moves towards a common goal in all of its work: *sameness*.<sup>41</sup> Foucault writes that the modern *epistémé* is fundamentally concerned with depicting knowledge in relation to a norm or to a formalized conception within discourse of that which is deemed to be the true nature of a thing. This model naturally results in the emergence of a dialectic between that which is known as truth, and that which exists as Other to this truth; the latter might either be that which is unknown, (i.e., existing within the space of the Unthought), or that which exists in contradistinction to the norm, (i.e., that which exists as deviant). Modern knowledge is thus concerned with bridging and describing the gap between these two realities of knowledge, "with showing how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same."<sup>42</sup> It obsesses itself with a process of normalization in terms of the way in which a truth or central essence of a particular thing is discovered and then used to classify and describe all similar objects. This process of normalization Foucault describes as "a thought of the

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<sup>41</sup>"Sameness" as a concept might simply be defined as the process of comparing all knowledge to an original position which is deemed truthful. To the extent that such compared knowledge matches this original definition, such an object would be labeled normal. Deviance would be determined by the degree to which *difference* is established between an object for examination and its origin, the perfect specimen which is used to define that object in its truth.

<sup>42</sup>*The Order of Things*, p. 339.

Same” and the governing element of the modern thought process:<sup>43</sup> “modern thought is one that moves no longer towards the never-completed formation of Difference, but towards the ever-to-be accomplished unveiling of the Same.”<sup>44</sup> This dialectic between that known (the Same) and that to be discovered (the Other) is a form of subjection for the human individual, for the very fact that Reason is given precedence and authority in this relationship. As we have seen in *Madness and Civilization*, Reason (the origin) constantly attempts to discover and interrogate that unknown (the Unthought). The human sciences take as their premiss that Man can be empirically observed and graphed, and that this new body of discourse might serve to better understand Man as a living, working, speaking subject. Man is thus first objectified, as this chapter has sought to outline, and then subjectified when a norm or average is imposed on him.<sup>45</sup>

### **THE LIMITS OF MODERN THOUGHT**

The Foucauldian quadrilateral of modern thought describes the limits of the epistemological structure within which a finite conception of human nature is described, and the process whereby the human sciences have accorded a scientific status to this conception. In other words, knowledge of a single human being is readily comparable to knowledge of the species as captured within the original or primary understanding of this entity. It is the boundaries that enclose modern thought that most trouble Foucault, the process that ensures the epistemological ossification of human origin, or the reification in knowledge of those qualities related to human function and essence. Modern knowledge “ossifies” around a thing to the degree to which modern discourse solidifies around an object of investigation and subsumes this entity within a positive description of its nature. Foucault is disconcerted by the rise of a set of knowledge structures which have as a particular point of reference the human species, a set of discourses which work to categorize and place Man

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<sup>43</sup>ibid.

<sup>44</sup>ibid., p. 340. My emphasis.

<sup>45</sup>This process of subjectification will be explored in Part II of this dissertation.

within an epistemological space; essentially a group of knowledges which seek out and define consciousness. Indeed, the very task of *The Order of Things* was to show how fragile such a system is. While the central task of the human sciences is “bringing man’s consciousness back to its real conditions,” Foucault wishes to show that such “conditions” are established within history and discourse, and that these might be problematized and overturned. The death of Man which Foucault describes in *The Order of Things* entails work on the limits which enclose a thought process about Man.

However, Foucault offers a dismal picture if an alternative can not be found to our present systems of knowledge. If it can be shown that Foucault’s work depicts all of reality as pre-determined, then humankind is destined to a nihilistic despair. In fact, many of his critics make these very statements as we shall see in Part III. But, as I will argue in the ensuing chapters of this dissertation, innate to Foucault’s work is the prospect of rebellion and the ability to overturn knowledge impositions. We have explored the limits of thought given the structure of the modern *epistémé*; as a result of such boundaries to thought and the way in which human nature has been “invented” within discourse, there exists the ability for thought to critically examine itself. This self-criticism would take place from the Outside, from the region of the Unthought, that nebulous, critical space from which thought can gaze back upon itself and upset its very own structures. It is here that we find a radical political project within Foucault’s work, and hope for the future. Before we move on to a more detailed exploration of Foucault’s politics and his description of the possibility for overcoming the liminal frontiers which enclose and restrict modern thought and subjectivity, we need to investigate his second period. Here Foucault outlines a theory of power to explain the process whereby knowledge and power intersect in the process of subjectifying the human being, and hereby constitutes subjective consciousness.

## **CONCLUSION: UNTHOUGHT**

In Part I of this dissertation, we have explored the early stages of Foucault's work into the nature of structures which have worked to form the modern subject. *Madness and Civilization* explored the way in which people are divided from one another according to knowledge of their mental health; *The Birth of the Clinic* was written as an archaeology of modern medicine, and the historical emergence of the clinic as a place in which knowledge of the human body was used to constitute Man as a medical subject as well as an object within a population; *The Order of Things*, a fundamental text in which Foucault investigates modern knowledge, and traces his first work on the constitution of the modern subject, both as an entity within society and, more importantly, as an object positively described within discourse. I have labeled this initial period his Knowledge phase, because his central concern here is how human consciousness is constituted within discourse. Missing from Foucault's early work, however, was a clear theory outlining the way in which discourse informed social practice, the way in which knowledge found root within the social fabric or was internalized by human subjects as Truth. This investigation will be the subject matter of the second part of this thesis, where we find Foucault, from the early 1970's, outlining a unique theory of power, the way in which bodies of knowledge are interiorized in the constitution of Man as a human subject. This is what I would like to call his Power period, perhaps the most fundamental of Foucault's invaluable contributions to

contemporary philosophy, and intrinsic to his attempt to help modern subjects “think differently,” from the Unthought itself.

**PART II:**  
**POWER**

*INTRODUCTION:*  
**RESURRECTED KNOWLEDGE**

The plague-stricken town, traversed throughout with hierarchy, surveillance, observation, writing; the town immobilized by the functioning of an extensive power that bears in a distinct way over all individual bodies--this is the utopia of the perfectly governed city.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

If it is true that the leper gave rise to rituals of exclusion, which to a certain extent provided the model for and general form of the great Confinement, then the plague gave rise to disciplinary projects. Rather than the massive, binary division between one set of people and another, it called for multiple separations, individualizing distributions, an organization in depth of surveillance and control, an intensification and a ramification of power.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

In the first part of this dissertation, we explored ways in which the subject is objectified within knowledge systems; with the application of an empirical gaze upon the body of the modern subject, Man is born for Foucault, and a positive account of his consciousness inscribed within discourse. Notwithstanding the enthusiastic reception which Foucault's early texts enjoyed, his Knowledge period could not provide a conception of the way in which discourse moved within society, or the way in which knowledge impinged itself upon the human subject and populations at large. In his first period, Foucault only showed us how information was gathered *from* the subject, not imposed *upon* it. Part II of this dissertation will seek to define Foucault's definition of power, and to introduce his understanding of the way in which the modern *epistémé* has shifted the focus of state involvement with the lives of individuals away from ritual and the imposition of fear to ensure social order, towards the formulation of an entirely new technique of power centred around *normalization*. In this process of normalization, (or what I feel could better be termed *subjectification*), various practices are applied to the bodies and interiors of human subjects in a process of rectifying or rehabilitating various human functions or actions deemed economically or politically either inadequate or deviant.

Before we explore *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1), the central texts in this section, there is an important theoretical question which needs clarification. I refer here to Foucault's formulation of *genealogy* as method, and his new-found concerns around the way in which knowledge circulates in society. Here we will find more clarity on Foucault's central concerns during his second, or Power, period, and the link which he was able to forge between discourse on the one hand, and social institutions on the other. Out of this, a powerful and highly political critique of modernity will emerge, something which I believe is extremely difficult to dispute.

## **GENEALOGY AS METHOD**

*Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1) remain studies within history, attempts to thresh out the conditions which make possible a certain practice of thought

and action. Instead of a narrow definition of what is commonly known as discourse, Foucault describes knowledge as something which

“takes shape not only in theoretical texts or experimental instruments, but in a whole system of practices and institutions...It comprises...rules that are its own, and that thus characterize its existence, its functioning, and its history. Certain of these rules are specific to a single domain; others are shared by several...Finally, the development of this knowledge and its transformations brings into play *complex causal relations*...”<sup>1</sup>

In this, we see a new depth added to Foucault’s work as he begins to explore knowledge as intrinsically linked to *practice*, as action on bodies and space.

“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” stands as the definitive article by Foucault on genealogy, the new method which he introduced in the 1970’s.<sup>2</sup> He describes genealogy as “gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.”<sup>3</sup> Genealogy is a method linked to the study of various documents, to discourses which plot the flow of history, moulding reality, and hereby *creating* history. The fundamental difference between archaeology as method and genealogy as method is that while the former concerns itself with the rules of formation governing discourse, genealogy addresses itself to the interaction between knowledge and power relations, the way in which discursive practices work to create particular conditions within which people act. While archaeology describes the way in which people are forced to think truth, genealogy outlines the way in which truth is acted out, the way in which actions are deemed truthful or not, and the way in which people are forced to put truth (as epistemologically defined knowledge) into practice.

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<sup>1</sup>This is an extract from a pamphlet Foucault published on applying to fill the chair of philosophy at the Collège de France in November 1969. Quoted in Didier Eribon’s biography of Foucault, *Michel Foucault*, p. 216. My emphasis.

<sup>2</sup>Found in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, pp. 76-100.

<sup>3</sup>Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” p. 76.

In Foucault's genealogies, (and by this I mean all of his work after *The Order of Things*), the subject is intrinsically linked to social, political and economic practices; the knowledge conditions which interact with a particular conception of power force the subject to act in a particular way, in accordance with particular social rules and within particular social institutions (whether schools, the family, asylums, and prisons, or within a moral system related to their sexuality, etc.). Essentially this process limits actions or the perceived range of options within a field of choices, whether in epistemological, ontological, or political terms. We have moved from analyses concerned primarily with the limits of thought, to works which direct their attention to the limits of *action* imposed upon the modern subject. It should be understood that knowledge and the ability to make people act in a particular way (power) support one another; indeed, *they are intrinsic to the existence of one another*:

“These ‘power-knowledge relations’ are to be analysed...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 implication of power-knowledge and their historical transformations*...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.*”<sup>4</sup>

Power and knowledge intersect one another's path, and define the existence of one another in a mutually reinforcing manner. Foucault has always categorically rejected the subject as the central agent in the formation of knowledge, as outlined in the previous chapter. His second period sets out to show instead how particular relations of power and knowledge which “traverse” particular actions, (or “processes and struggles”), are the real causal factors behind the production of reality.

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<sup>4</sup>Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 27-28. My emphasis.

In *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes an archaeology of modern knowledge, particularly that section of knowledge which attempts to describe Man's being: the human sciences. With *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault refines and extends this method to include the way in which these formations of thought intersect with social action; in other words, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault presents his theory of power for the first time as a catalyst for activity in society. Genealogy is the exploration of the way in which knowledge structures find actuality through history. Of most importance is genealogy's primary objective: to show that modern action, just like modern thought, is contingent, and based on the false premiss of the universal and transcendental "origin" as we explored in the previous chapter. The origin can be described as the basis or fundamental premiss for action or thought, and works as an essential construct within modern knowledge; the notion of "original" truth or knowledge is at the heart of Michel Foucault's philosophic concerns which he wished to expose in all of its historical vagary and contingency:

"Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning [the origin]--numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by a historical eye. The analysis of descent [from an essential origin] permits the dissociation of the self, *its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis*, in liberating a profusion of lost events."<sup>5</sup>

In this, we see two important developments: first, that the subject and its identity, however these may be constructed, is created through history, and "synthesized" by a series of historical events; second, in his allusion to "lost events", Foucault makes reference to a number of discourses that might have been excluded or prohibited from the process of creating history, or of being allowed to shed light on human experience and reality. We are familiar with the first development, the subject as a constructed entity; I would like to expand on this second task of genealogical method, the "resurrection" of lost knowledge.

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<sup>5</sup>"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," p. 81. My emphasis.

Foucault's most interesting assertion in the quote above is the way in which he alludes to certain knowledges which exist and yet have no epistemological coherence in terms of their intellectual soundness; this knowledge exists as "differential", "incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it."<sup>10</sup> Foucault thus raises the ability to think and critique above unanimity and conformity, to a place where knowledge is respected at times for its immediate specificity. Ultimately, genealogical criticism works on two levels: first, exposing the contingency of systematized (or formally accepted) knowledge through an investigation of "local" knowledges; second, revealing through the restoration of the latter the way in which identity and being has been imposed upon individuals.

These two ideas form the theoretical core of Foucault's work; his genealogies serve as a support for his theory of power, which itself finds place alongside his archaeological excavation of knowledge. On the one hand, he reveals the underlying rules which govern discourse and which work to include or exclude particular knowledges; more importantly for his Power period, we find Foucault introducing a theory of power and normalization, the effects of dominant discursive practices upon the bodies of individuals, and the emergence of a new system of discipline and conduct which it is the task of this part of the dissertation to investigate. Let us move straight into that work, with a discussion of the important ideas discussed in *Discipline and Punish*. This fourth chapter is primarily concerned with genealogy used as a method to uncover either suppressed or marginalized knowledges as well as the forms of modern power and knowledge that exist co-extensive with one another and merge in a process of human subjection.

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<sup>10</sup>ibid.

*Chapter Four:*  
**NORMALIZATION**

This book [*Discipline and Punish*] is intended as a correlative history of the modern soul and of a new power to judge; a genealogy of the present scientifico-legal complex from which the power to punish derives its bases, justifications and rules, from which it extends its effects and by which it masks its exorbitant singularity.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

At this point I end a book that must serve as a historical background to various studies of the power of normalization and the formation of knowledge in modern society.

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

*Discipline and Punish* (1975) opens with the detailed description of the torturing to death of Damiens, a man accused and convicted in 1757 France of regicide. Mutilating punishment of this nature was the norm from the time of the Inquisition until the nineteenth century reform of the penal code throughout Europe and the United States. Pre-modern punishment existed as *spectacle*, and an important part of the functioning of the legal system for two reasons. The first was that the criminal was seen up to the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment as having committed a crime against the body of the king or queen. The matter was rectified and justice meted out fairly in the process of the regal body inflicting

equal pain to the body of the transgressor, hereby neutralizing the wrong and reasserting the divine and absolute authority of the throne.

“Besides its immediate victim, the crime attacks the sovereign: it attacks him personally, since the law represents the will of the sovereign; it attacks him physically, since the force of the law is the force of the prince...[punishment] requires that the king take revenge for an affront to his very person...The public execution, then, has a juridico-political function. It is a ceremonial by which a momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted.”<sup>1</sup>

Through punishment, sovereignty is reinstated; the sovereign’s power, viewed in Classical terms as a physical construct, is reaffirmed and acknowledged by spectators of the ceremony as all-powerful: “the punishment is carried out in such a way as to give a spectacle not of measure, but of imbalance and excess; in this liturgy of punishment, there must be an emphatic affirmation of power and of its intrinsic superiority.”<sup>2</sup>

The second political motive for the public spectacle of torture was to actively engage commoners in the application of sovereign law on the body of the condemned. This served to both legitimize the actions taken by the legal authorities and, more importantly, to co-opt the crowd as the final voice of the necessity and legality of the act to be committed. However, as the crowd became an accomplice to this horror, they too condoned any future and equal action on their own being should they be found guilty of similar crimes. The public, in condemning another to death, expressed their complicity in the act committed, but more fundamentally, asserted their loyalty and faith in the system that watched their actions as closely as those of the fated Damians. Thus,

“[n]ot only must people know, they must see with their own eyes. Because they must be made to be afraid; but also because *they must be the witnesses, the guarantors, of the punishment...*The right to be witnesses was one that they possessed and claimed; a hidden execution was a privileged

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 47, 48.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p. 49.

execution, and in such cases it was often suspected that it had not taken place with all its customary severity.”<sup>3</sup>

The irony of this passage is staggering and yet epitomizes pre-Enlightenment jurisprudence and criminal punishment: within the then-retributive system of justice, it was the body and its senses that were targeted.

The central task of this chapter is to explore the differences which Foucault delineates between the seemingly barbaric medieval system of which Damiens was a victim, and our own, conceived as principally humane; as such, I seek to address the following pages to Foucault’s genealogy of punishment. Far more importantly, however, I seek to explore the power-knowledge formations which Foucault describes as coextensive with, and fundamentally constitutive of, the modern penal paradigm. Foucault wished to show the gap which exists between the two systems, (one purely juridical, the other described with more difficulty as rehabilitative), a discontinuity within the order of thought as well as within social action and practice with regards modern penology. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault will seek to answer questions related to the causes as well as to the effects of modern disciplinary systems. The first part of this chapter will discuss changing conceptions of punishment from the Enlightenment; thereafter we will be in a position to investigate the implications of Foucault’s work in *Discipline and Punish*, both in terms of the introduction of his theory of power, as well as the effects thereof in the constitution of the human subject.

### **THE HUMAN BODY REDEFINED**

From the end of the eighteenth century, public spectacle ceased and heralded the age of private execution and a legislated justice system. The secular judge was appointed to sit over an independent and non-partial court-room, loyal not to a central throne but strictly to a legal code that was carefully established and rigorously applied. No longer was punishment

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<sup>3</sup>ibid., p. 58. My emphasis.

given the primary place within the legal system as it had previously: payment for one's crimes was pronounced only after a lengthy tribunal into the nature and reasons behind a deviant act; in this way, punishment is subordinated (at least initially) to the form and nature of the crime, and remains ancillary to the justice process until the crime and the criminal are precisely understood.

The effects of this change from medieval times are massive and permeate the entire penal system. From the Enlightenment, and what might be called the "liberal revolution", penalty concentrated its punitive efforts on the suspension of newly-entrenched rights, a disciplinary system Foucault describes as an "economy of suspended rights."<sup>4</sup> This process describes the degree to which the modern body has been reconceived in a radically new way. No longer the target of punishment, the human body serves as the vessel of that which the penal system seeks to deny the criminal; no longer an object of pain, the body in modernity "serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property."<sup>5</sup>

Here Foucault begins to emerge at his most brilliant in this text on punishment, as he outlines a particular "change of objective" on the part of the penal system.<sup>6</sup> He links this not only to a change in the juridical system as the autonomous structure it is usually perceived as, but rather in the type of power and knowledge relations which underscore its very existence. No longer is punishment linked only to changing the deviant behaviour of certain individuals or even entire groups within society, but rather with an organizing principle, that of the *norm*. Modern punishment took on an economic slant, and was not only concerned with the offense committed, or only with punishing the offence; instead, it sought primarily

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<sup>4</sup>ibid., p. 11.

<sup>5</sup>ibid.

<sup>6</sup>ibid., p. 16.

*“to supervise the individual, to neutralize his dangerous state of mind, to alter his criminal tendencies, and to continue even when this change has been achieved...the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain ‘political economy’ of the body...the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission.”*<sup>7</sup>

The body is still the focus of penal attention, but in a more subtle way. The prison reform movement of the nineteenth century heralded the age of a reasoned address of illegalities, an age of the “slackening of the hold on the body.”<sup>8</sup> The body was no longer addressed as an object for manipulation through pain and discomfort, but rather as an “instrument or intermediary,” and this as a result of crucial political events.<sup>9</sup>

The French Revolution brought with it the demise of centralized monarchy, and the birth of institutions of political rights and social liberties. Adjacent to, and reinforcing of, the emergence of a social contract, an emerging capitalist economy engendered the need for docile political subjects and for subjects who were economically utile. In turn, this redefined the way in which the justice system approached the body itself, in a move away from the waste and possible political turmoil associated with public torture, to a new-found emphasis on disciplining an anomalous body. The human body is thus the target of power-knowledge relations with particular functions. Modern power does not seek to *break* the body, as was Damians fate; while still maintaining “an immediate hold upon [the body],” power relations instead

“invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use...its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>ibid., pp. 18, 25. My emphasis.

<sup>8</sup>ibid., p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>ibid., pp. 25-26.

The cross-over between a political and economic subjection of the body occurs when it is sufficiently normalized or encapsulated within the economic system so as to prevent crime and simultaneously ensure political docility: “the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body.”<sup>11</sup> This “political investment of the [human] body” emerged as the focus of the modern legal system. A citizen who breaks the law is open to having the rights, liberties, and the protection which is normally guaranteed by the state, withdrawn. An “economy of suspended rights” is the driving force behind the modern legal system; with it came a far more sinister role--that of *correction*.<sup>12</sup>

The modern state has an intrinsic responsibility to ensure the security and prosperity of its citizens: “[prisoners] are punished by means of a punishment that has the function of making the offender ‘not only desirous, but also capable, of living within the law and of providing for his own needs’.”<sup>13</sup> The citizen is seen as only having transgressed temporarily given an altercation in his or her past which could now be patched over given the right rehabilitation and treatment. The underlying ethic here, however, is that any person is capable of reform and that the state has the responsibility in providing this service. Where the process of correction (above and beyond mere payment to society for crimes committed) emerges sinister, is in the practices used to intensely analyze individuals within the penal system--here background, upbringing, past activities, and past offences are carefully recorded. The justification used for this is that it is necessary to know all the relevant facts surrounding a particular case for the correct application of treatment. This “knowledge”, however, is intrinsically tied to the ability and capacity of the modern penal system to punish. While modern punishment might at first appear more humane or lenient, upon closer genealogical investigation

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18.

“one may map a displacement of its point of application; and through this displacement, a whole field of recent objects, a whole new system of truth and a mass of roles hitherto unknown in the exercise of criminal justice. A corpus of knowledge, techniques, ‘scientific’ discourses is formed and becomes entangled with the practice of the power to punish.”<sup>14</sup>

A body of knowledge is assembled to explain deviant actions, a discourse and a series of modern practices which Foucault calls the *disciplines*. Immediately linked to the disciplines are the human sciences which we explored in the first part of this dissertation. The modern penal structure, as a result of its overlap with “scientists” who are employed outside of the penal system, introduces a number of hitherto unknown influences on penology and criminology: “Throughout the penal procedure and the implementation of the sentence there swarms a whole series of subsidiary authorities.”<sup>15</sup> The modern judge is unable to pass sentence without careful analysis of a number of subsidiary psychological factors which human scientists provide in the courtroom; the knowledge and guidance of the psychologist, the doctor, and the sociologist is indispensable to the modern penal system. A collation of seemingly disparate discourses on the “human condition” takes place through a process of mutual collaboration between the human sciences and the courts; human nature and its Other, deviance, emerge as central problems linked in the penal system, and the science of criminology is born. With modernity, and a new agenda for the court system and its allies,

“[s]mall-scale legal systems and parallel judges have multiplied around the principal judgement: psychiatric or psychological experts, magistrates concerned with the implementation of sentences, educationalists, members of the prison service, all fragment the legal power to punish.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>ibid., pp. 22-23.

<sup>15</sup>ibid., p. 21.

<sup>16</sup>ibid.

To better understand this change in the effects of modern penality, Foucault traces the history of modern prisons. This “history” takes the specific form of a genealogy as it explores particular ideas and practices which are born within discourse and eventually come to affect social practices.

In 1789, the prison reform movement sought to regularize and systematize all legal procedures. A comprehensive legal code was instituted, with crimes and their accompanying penalties carefully coded and publicly distributed. The population was made aware of the way in which the law was to be conducted, and the system became self-governing. No longer did the legal system need reinforcement on the part of the general populace, nor was their consent needed as seen during the time of public display of justice. A police force emerged and the law became respected as a force both visible and invisible: the “primary objectives [of the power to punish were] to make of the punishment and repression of illegalities a regular function, coextensive with society; not to punish less, but to punish better...to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body.”<sup>17</sup> The object of punishment was to rectify wrongs so that they would presumably not occur again.

On a more fundamental level, however, Foucault shows the law as seeking to infiltrate all areas of the society and maintain peace and stability. Those who committed crimes were to be rehabilitated so that upon release would become self-governing in some sense, once they had undergone a programme of normalization and education in expected social conduct. What eventually emerged by the end of the nineteenth century was a strictly defined legal code and, alongside this, a strictly defined code of ethics, to be incorporated in the conduct of everyday life. This system exists as a negative dialectic, whereby any behaviour that is not in strict accordance with the normalized and defined ethics is declared a violation of the law. The degree of the infraction and the ability on the part of the individual to rectify the problem privately will ultimately decide whether the public legal body will

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<sup>17</sup>ibid., p. 82.

step in to begin a process of normalization. “The laws that define the crime and lay down the penalties must be perfectly clear, ‘so that each member of society may distinguish criminal actions from virtuous actions’.”<sup>18</sup> In this, we see the perfect merger within a single penal system of retribution as well as correction: modern penalty is a system of disciplines which operates throughout the social fabric, seeking to normalize and correct behaviour, hereby constantly working towards *sameness*.

### THE PANOPTIC SOCIETY

Foucault uses Jeremy Bentham’s “Panopticon” as a powerful metaphor in describing a disciplinary society. The Panopticon is a circular construction, of many floors in height and with a central observation tower in the middle courtyard area. Bentham initially planned it as the perfect prison, but it could be applied to any structure housing a large number of people. The power of the Panopticon is that any person occupying one of the peripheral cells can be seen without obstruction, while the reverse is not the case. The warden might or might not be present: a prisoner therefore has no idea of whether he is being observed at any given moment.

Over a period of time, the inmate becomes self-disciplining. With no ability to know whether the guard is present or not, there is no way of knowing whether the chance to escape is at hand and even the thought of such action becomes futile. The power relation becomes “automatic” and immediate, a situation in which the “inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.”<sup>19</sup> This idea is directly transferable to the citizen. With the functioning of the legal system after a certain point becoming opaque, and the individual never quite sure if he or she is being watched or observed, actions are carefully engaged within a “safe” perimeter. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault makes the point that, in the twentieth century, discipline no longer forces itself

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<sup>18</sup>ibid., p. 95.

<sup>19</sup>ibid., p. 201.

upon the human body. It rests *within* the self, a relation of subjection given knowledge of the self on a personal and societal level.

Where in *Madness and Civilization* Foucault writes on the knowledge structures which were set up from the eighteenth century to allow human scientists understand the human body in its objective workings, in *Discipline and Punish* he describes the work of social scientists to understand the *group*, the latter a massive interchange between individuals whose actions could be impinged upon through “correct training” and repetitive practice: “Discipline makes individuals.”<sup>20</sup> To continue in Foucault's words: “A sort of anatomico-chronological schema of behaviour is defined. The act is broken down into its elements; the position of the body, limbs, articulations is defined; to each movement are assigned a direction, an aptitude, a duration; their order of succession is prescribed. *Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power.*”<sup>21</sup> Where madness was defined in chemical terms in *Madness and Civilization*, and centered on individual delusions, *Discipline and Punish* explores modern observation of the group to better understand interactions between individuals.

The objective of punishment is clearly very different in the modern era; no longer addressed to the body, modern punishment centres on the *soul*, this interior space which has been created or “discovered” by the human sciences: “The expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations.”<sup>22</sup> The important shift which Foucault seeks to elucidate is a changing conception of the body and the lessening degree of overt power which the state now has over this entity. Where discipline had once taken the form of a coercive destruction of the body, with the French Revolution and Romanticism as it swept through

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<sup>20</sup>ibid., p. 170.

<sup>21</sup>ibid., p. 152. My emphasis.

<sup>22</sup>ibid., p. 16.

Europe in the eighteenth century, the political body was redefined in terms of a populace vested with inalienable rights and thus subject to a commonly-applicable legal code.

Human beings in the modern era are thus subject to two metanarratives: first, a juridical discourse which judges actions in a political sense, and works to create law-abiding subjects; second, and more importantly, the modern human being is subjected within a moral system which is deeply imbedded within the social fabric of society, working to ensure correct and beneficial conduct on the part of all citizens. This understanding of the mechanisms of the self and how best to “guide” these, Foucault calls the “political technologies of the body”, a “microphysics” of human coercion which

“presupposes that the power exercised on the body is conceived not as a property, but as a strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation’...one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess...a perpetual battle rather than a contract.”<sup>23</sup>

By the end of Foucault's second period, we are left with a rather bleak picture of the law-abiding and socially acceptable individual. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault illustrates how knowledge has gradually been accumulated by empirical observation and careful study of the individual. The discursive formations which emerge with modernity and have as their central concern Man's behaviour and his internal “nature” (i.e., the human sciences), are accepted as universally valid and applicable; the main thrust of Foucault's work is to render these assumptions problematic. More importantly, Foucault attempts to show the *effects* of such empirical sciences—the insidious modern relationship between knowledge and power. We have explored the knowledge and the effects of this in some detail; let us now spend some time discussing the Foucauldian notion of power.

## FOUCAULT'S DEFINITION OF POWER

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<sup>23</sup>ibid., p. 26.

Foucault defines Power as the ability to use knowledge towards a desired end, in a social setting. Crucial to his definition of power is the presence of *freedom*. Foucault wished to overturn juridical and political definitions of power which are dominantly defined in terms of the ability to control absolutely. His paradigm allows for a *resistance*; liberation, however, as a total freedom from imposing systems, does not enter the equation for Foucault. He describes power as present in all relationships however these may be defined and within parameters that need only be defined in terms of two parties each seeking specific objectives. In his words:

“The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome. Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of *government*...To govern, in this sense, is *to structure the possible field of action of others*.”<sup>24</sup>

Very important here is Foucault’s linking of power, as a modification of outcomes, to government. In this, he brings together what initially appears to be a purely social form of organization, and a purely political mechanism of control. However, and this is where Foucault is most unconventional in his definition of power, he links political and social practices to the ontological construction of the subject as an individual and within the group: “‘Government’ [does] not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather it designate[s] the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick.”<sup>25</sup> Within such a relationship, because Foucault assures either side of at least the nominal freedom to act, if either party is subjected to a point of being unable to question or resist this imposition, then Foucault would no longer define this as a power relationship but

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<sup>24</sup>“The Subject and Power,” p. 221.

<sup>25</sup>*ibid.* It must be understood that each of the examples which Foucault lists here are areas in which he is personally interested, and are directly related to his investigations into the self-consciousness which defines the personal identity of each of these groups, these the result of the social practices and mechanisms which lead them to be categorized as they are (i.e., as either sane or mad, healthy or sick, sexually normal or deviant, etc.).

rather one of *domination*. From a relationship which originally consisted of two subjects, what emerges, when one party no longer has the ability to move within the defined boundaries of that relationship, is *slavery*.

In addition, Foucault problematizes the theory of power as right or sovereignty, the ability to constrain or overwhelm.<sup>26</sup> He introduces a radically new conception of power as *constructive* of being, as a relation which strives towards goals pre-determined within knowledge structures. The empirical sciences create a discourse of Man in modernity which defines his essence, or origin, and it is against this background that actions can be deemed normal or anomalous and thus subject to correction. He writes:

“Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth...And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation...The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. *The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle.*”<sup>27</sup>

Implicit in this new formulation are two crucial elements which we need to discuss further: first, that human subjects are constituted within a matrix of power and knowledge relations, and yet who simultaneously exist as the vehicles or embodiment of this power; second, that power circulates and is not possessed in any real form, which ultimately leads Foucault to

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<sup>26</sup>In “Two Lectures,” Foucault defines a traditional conception of power as follows:

“in the case of the classic, juridical theory, power is taken to be a right, which one is able to possess like a commodity, and which one can in consequence transfer or alienate...Power is that concrete power which every individual holds, and whose partial or total cession enables political power or sovereignty to be established...Power is essentially that which represses...nature, the instincts, a class, individuals.” (pp. 88, 89-90)

<sup>27</sup>*ibid.*, p. 98.

reject a theory of liberation similar to that which liberals or marxists would endorse. We will explore this first point below; the latter will be discussed in Part III.

In considering a new conception of power as something that is not fixed or contained within bodies or structures, we need to understand Foucault's explanation of power as something that acts as a force, which creates movement, change, and flux; Foucault describes power as an energy which constantly attracts and repels. Power exists within a paradigm of strategies and resistance, across a field or "net-like organisation" laced with discursive practices and the individuals and things that come into contact with them.<sup>28</sup> It is at the point where modern knowledge and power intersect in a relation of subjection, that the battle for constitution of the human subject occurs. Foucault merges the ontological relationship of power and knowledge precisely at the point where such construction of human Being takes place. In Foucault's work, knowledge is not a passive, neutral, entity; similarly, power is not conceived as solely responsible for action. The two forces work together in constructing reality, and, as a result, Foucault writes that

"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 demand and its interests...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.*"<sup>29</sup>

Essentially, knowledge mediates the formulation of truth statements, and power mediates the way in which these statements are actualized in social practice. The two work in a mutually reinforcing relationship.

The Foucauldian subject, the centre of conscious modern knowledge, is first *objectified* within the empirical research conducted by the human sciences; this knowledge is

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27. My emphasis.

consolidated within discourse, providing a norm as introduced in *The Order of Things*. The human being is then *subjectified* in the process of applying knowledge to the interior or soul of the subject; this process is surrounded by a power relationship, between the subjected individual, and discursive practices. For the rest of our investigation into power relationships, I wish to investigate the way in which Foucault describes the modern disciplinary society, and the way in which a norm or aggregate is imposed upon the body of the individual and interiorized as acceptable and expected conduct. In the paragraphs which follow, I wish to link Foucault's first two periods: first, knowledge with power; and second, the human subject as a constructed entity within power-knowledge relations.

### A DESCRIPTION OF THE FOUCAULDIAN SUBJECT

With reference to the humanist subject, conscious of himself as possessing an interior cognitive space, or "soul", Foucault writes:

"Rather than seeing this soul as the reactivated remnants of an ideology, one would see it as the present correlative of a certain technology of power over the body. It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect...it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished...[it is born] out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint."<sup>30</sup>

The soul, as an intricate part of the humanist description of modern man, is shown by Foucault to not only be constructed, but linked in some fundamental sense to the power to punish, and specifically to the methods used to punish, "methods of punishment, supervision and constraint."<sup>31</sup> In describing a penal process interested in the manipulation of the human individual, Foucault makes a direct link to the process of identity and subjectification. In short, Foucault links a particular practice of power with the formation of interiority or consciousness. In *Discipline and Punish*, in the astonishing quote which follows and

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<sup>30</sup>ibid., p. 29.

<sup>31</sup>ibid.

others similar to it, Foucault describes the “soul” or what is traditionally conceived as the seat of humanity, human consciousness, or morality, to be directly linked in its formation to the intersection of modern systems of knowledge and power. While Foucault makes clear that this “soul” does exist, he simultaneously denies its plasticity, its innate existence, or its being independent of the social forces that bring it into existence:

“This real, non-corporal soul is not a substance; it is the element *in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge*, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power.”<sup>32</sup>

Foucault will describe this “soul” or inner place of reference as the foundation for all of the human sciences, all the various ideologies, religions, discourses and references to the soul as the seat of humanity. Knowledge provides the rationale for a depiction of the soul as a constant and verifiable reality, that which is responsible for that which is known as “human”.

Foucault destroys this illusion by describing anything remotely linked to human consciousness or reflexivity as constructed within a particular (modern) epistemological tradition which, in one of its many forms, is based on penalty and the correct training of individuals. Foucault refers below to the soul as a “reality-reference”, a source from which reality can be mapped and understood, both as an objective fact which exists outside of ourselves, and, perhaps most importantly, that which exists as a *subjective* place of reference for the individual: that “place” which provides us with *identity*. This is a description of the modern psyche, a place from which one’s own unique understanding of the world might authentically be interpreted.<sup>33</sup> The world is thus interpreted for the modern subject

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<sup>32</sup>ibid.

<sup>33</sup>I must make reference here to Charles Taylor, whose work within the liberal tradition has touched on many of the points raised here. Words like “authenticity” should therefore be credited to him and his influences.

from this particular point of reference, something which the modern has come to blindly accept as unproblematic. From this acceptance of “the soul”, understood by the modern individual as a place from which sense is made of the world, Foucault is convinced that “various concepts have been constructed and domains of analysis carved out: psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness etc.; on it have been built scientific techniques and discourses and the moral claims of humanism.”<sup>34</sup> Modern Man’s interior is thus a constituted, non-constant illusion, and yet, as we have already seen in *The Order of Things*, upon this construction a modern “science of Man” has been created.

Just as Foucault rejects the notion of a unified self, so he rejects what might be understood as an internal essence which in some way might be freed or liberated, as would be the case with marxism:

“[L]et there be no misunderstanding: it is not that a real man, the object of knowledge, philosophical reflection or technological intervention, has been substituted for the soul, the illusion of the theologians. The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, *is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself.*”<sup>35</sup>

Offering us no solace in a soul of Man, or even his liberation from whatever it is that might be inhibiting him from his true being, modern Man is offered two seemingly nihilistic choices by Foucault: either he is to accept his death, and is intellectually murdered as Foucault predicted at the conclusion of *The Order of Things*; or he is shown the prison within which he finds himself locked forever--deep within himself, from the place called the *soul*, Foucault shows modern Man as controlled within a humanist conception of himself and the world. Caught within a disciplinary matrix, which is itself supported by power-knowledge relations, Man is simultaneously a prisoner of his knowledge, and the *effects* of that knowledge. Thus, a “‘soul’ inhabits him and brings him to existence, which

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<sup>34</sup> *Discipline and Punish*, p. 29-30.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 30. My emphasis.

is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; *the soul is the prison of the body.*"<sup>36</sup>

In this, we see reference again to the constitution of the subject within knowledge relations. Normalization occurs when this new discourse on the right way to conduct oneself is introduced with modernity and holds all citizens accountable for their actions. As a genealogy, *Discipline and Punish* traces modern penalty as operating with a particular ontological conception of human consciousness: an "interiority" innate to the human subject which is conceived as *substance*. This soul, or depth, is open to scrutiny towards rendering within knowledge structures, as well as open to rectification in the case of delinquency. Normalization as a process serves the purpose both of correcting illicit behaviour, as well as ensuring that values and norms that emerge in a modern discourse on penalty are understood and internalized by all citizens:

"the art of punishing, in the régime of disciplinary power, is aimed neither at expiation, nor even precisely at repression...The perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*."<sup>37</sup>

As described in *The Order of Things*, modern epistemology, given its internal construction and the various rules governing the creation of truth statements, tends towards *sameness*, towards normalizing knowledge. A similar conception of the normalization of reality is outlined in this later work.

*Discipline and Punish* introduces two fundamentally important concepts in the genealogy of the modern subject: first, Foucault's conception of power as something diametrically opposed to traditional conceptions of this force; second, the notion of modern discipline and normalization, the work of the modern *episteme* towards Sameness, and the con-

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<sup>36</sup>ibid. My emphasis.

<sup>37</sup> ibid., pp. 182-3.

solidation within discourse of a particular way of being or conduct which serves as an aggregate against which Other behaviour is judged. This process of judging incorporates far more than just the courts, but all of the human sciences, concerned as they are with the human species and investigations into the interior of this creature. The subject is thus caught up within a complex set of relations, on the one hand objectified with the empirical sciences concerned with determining the essence or origin of the human interior; on the other, subject to a particular definition of power which incorporates these knowledges within a disciplinary code imposed on the individual. A process of normalization is carefully constructed to deal with anomalous cases, this a process of human subjectification.

From a genealogy of the disciplined individual, Foucault moved on to investigate the development of systems of governance for *populations*. *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1) introduces the powerful thesis of “bio-power”, a particular form of discipline. Bio-power describes the concerns which modern states have with the maintenance of political efficacy and economic productivity. It is an extension of systems of governance which centre themselves on individuals actions and utility, and the word which Foucault uses to theorize a conception of discipline on a national state level. Let us move into this study of the discipline of populations, in order to link modern systems of discipline, political and economic concerns of the modern state, and the ontological constitution of the human sciences (and thus Man) as a result of these processes.

*Chapter Five:*  
**THE SUBJECT OF LIFE**

Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct...*sexuality is the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a certain deployment deriving from a complex political technology.*

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1)

[B]io-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without *the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomenon of population to economic processes.* But this was not all it required; it also needed the growth of both these factors, their reinforcement as well as their availability and docility; it had to have methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general *without at the same time making them more difficult to govern.*

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1)

...how is it that in a society like ours, sexuality was not simply a means of reproducing the species, the family, and the individual? Not simply a means to obtain pleasure and enjoyment? How has sexuality come to be considered the privileged place where our deepest 'truth' is read and expressed... 'To know who you are, know what your sexuality is.' *Sex has always been the forum where both the future of our species and our 'truth' as human subjects are decided.*

Michel Foucault, interview

In *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1) (1976), Foucault furthers his study of modern systems of discipline as introduced in *Discipline and Punish*; in this later text, however, instead of investigating prison systems, he explores the concept of “sexuality”, and expands his interest away from the discipline of individual subjects to focus instead on *populations*. Closely linked to the political and economic problems posed by demographic growth, sexuality is also important to Foucault’s study in ontological terms. His work seeks to explain the growth of human interiority, with particular reference here to sexuality, as well as the connection between a specifically modern discourse on human “nature” and the effects of sexual desire on political and economic considerations. This chapter seeks to link the notion of human interiority (introduced in Part I of this dissertation) to particular political and social practices which work to divide subjects one from another, and also within themselves.

In Foucault’s introduction to his series on sex, desire, and population classification, he explains how a discourse of interiority became widely accepted in nineteenth century Europe, as research was encouraged within the newly-formed human sciences; at this time, and as a result of these investigations, human interiority or consciousness came to be widely accepted as descriptive of Man’s being. Linked to this idea of a human consciousness was the idea that Man had a sexual nature which in some sense has been denied actualization. Foucault, however, rejects a normalized approach to sexuality as a *repressed* part of the human physiology or consciousness, and instead describes a particular relationship between modern knowledge and power which produces the very notion of sexuality itself. Rather than a restriction on sex and discursive formations describing or including it, “far from undergoing a process of restriction,” modern sexuality

“on the contrary has been subjected to a *mechanism of increasing incitement*...the techniques of power exercised over

sex have not obeyed a principle of rigorous selection, but rather one of dissemination and implantation of polymorphous sexualities..."<sup>1</sup>

Instead of a repressive environment, Foucault shows that modernity has in fact not only "invented" (or epistemologically constructed) sexuality, but in doing so has established a discourse on its supposedly intrinsic "nature". This chapter will first seek to define the modern move to create the sexual entity, (or Man as a being with an ontologically significant "sexuality"), an intrinsic part of the human psyche; second, and more importantly, this chapter will seek to trace Foucault's description of a modern politics which centres its concerns around population: the point at which knowledge of the human capacity for reproduction, and attempts to contain this perceived political and economic problem for the modern state, merge in a relationship of subjection.

#### **THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF SEXUAL DESIRE**

Foucauldian power works not to repress sexuality, but instead to render to knowledge what exists as the multifarious ways in which sexuality exhibits itself. Rather than a repression or covering up of sex within discourse, modern power works in a *positive* way to render sexuality as something problematic, something worthy of being spoken about and explored. Indeed, an injunction emerges which not only encourages the subject to speak of his desires, but demands it in "a veritable discursive explosion" of research material in the human sciences.<sup>2</sup> While we identify too readily with a Victorian ethic which is perceived to have repressed sexual acts in modernity, Foucault describes knowledge and power as having in fact reinforced one another to produce a massive discourse about sexuality and human sexual impulses. Foucault is not so much concerned with social responses to this "bourgeoisie morality", as much as he is about a formal knowledge system which works, as we will see, to normalize a particular set of desires, "the multiplication of discourses

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1), p. 12. My emphasis.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p. 17.

concerning sex in the field of exercise of power itself: an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause *it* to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail.”<sup>3</sup> Foucault is thus not so much concerned with moral codes and “rules of decorum”, as he is with modernity’s interest in sex as an intrinsic part of human “nature”.<sup>4</sup>

Continuing with a central theme of *Discipline and Punish*, which emphasizes a uniquely modern disciplinary interest in the correct insertion of bodies within spaces to ensure economic efficiency and political control, in the realm of the sexual Foucault describes modern society as obsessed with a “will to know” *vis á vis* sexuality, obsessed with “the origin”, or the place from which threatening sexual desires spring. Because of the very nature of these internal forces or impulses, a careful knowledge of desire is necessary in order to describe them within knowledge, which in turn provides a *normative* account of sexuality. A modern knowledge of human sexuality is linked to the creation of a subject geared towards maximization of output and potential. Sex as the act of reproducing is political to precisely the degree to which it requires state support or intervention (child welfare, abortion services, family planning clinics, etc.). Because economic productivity is so intricately linked to demographic growth and additionally the degree to which state funds will be required to fund a pre- or post-work force, it is linked to a “public potential”, either latent or already used, and thus requires correct management: “it [has] to be taken charge of by analytical discourses.”<sup>5</sup>

In this precise ordering of the state’s population, Foucault describes the police as playing a central role; not, however, as a force which sought solely to bring an end to delinquency or “the repression of disorder, but an ordered maximization of collective and

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<sup>3</sup>ibid., p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>ibid.

<sup>5</sup>ibid., p. 24.

individual forces...”<sup>6</sup> In this way, individuals come to be seen as intrinsically valuable; a primary and formidable task of the modern state is utilizing its various available resources, labour of course being a primary part of this. However, in their work, public officials are helped by a well-established civil service, in particular, Foucault writes, the police. Part of the work of this surveillance body is the collection and collation of information on society, and keeping a close eye on the way in which individuals interact with one another. In this way, the police “consolidate and augment, through the wisdom of its regulations, the internal power of the state...the police must concern themselves with these means and make them serve the public welfare. And they can only obtain this result through the knowledge they have of those different assets.”<sup>7</sup>

As Foucault explores the notion of a population, (a group of individual subjects caught up within a social and political space which requires careful attention and guidance), he makes reference to a new economic system (industrial capitalism), and new political imperatives (the size of populations and newly-emerging forms of crime and delinquency) as causal factors for the development of demography as a modern science. Essential too, I believe, is the nature of the modern *epistémé* itself, concerned primarily with essence or the internal nature of a thing, and the way in which it interacts with similar social, economic, or political organs around itself. We have seen this type of interest emerging in relation to the mad, modern nosology, and delinquency; *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1) concerns itself with *desire*, and the concern of the state to exploit the result of such desires in a managed fashion: population control, the maximum use of a population’s energy, and, of course, the political will of increasing numbers.

The central focus of state intervention into the realm of the sexual is the question of demography. Modern state intervention into the growth of the bodies within the state Foucault calls “[o]ne of the great innovations in the techniques of power in the eighteenth

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<sup>6</sup>ibid., pp. 24-25.

<sup>7</sup>ibid., p. 25.

century...the emergence of 'population' as an economic and political problem."<sup>8</sup>

"Population" in this respect is both political and economic in nature. What concerns modern governments is not purely the number of people available as a work-force, but

"population as wealth, population as manpower or labour capacity, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded. Governments perceived that they were not dealing simply with subjects, or even with a 'people,' but with a 'population,' with its specific phenomena and its peculiar variables: birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, state of health, frequency of illnesses, patterns of diet and habitation...At the heart of this economic and political problem of population was sex: it was necessary to analyze the birthrate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices..."<sup>9</sup>

Foucault describes two primary forces at work in modern society: first, a concern with the population as a space which multiplies itself: this is the field of demography concerned with numbers and the economic and political implications thereof; secondly, and more importantly for this dissertation, is the creation of a subject aware of him or herself as a sexual being, a being who is capable of *reproduction* as a result of this desire, and is therefore subject to a normalizing discourse with regards these impulses. The first reveals Foucault's new concerns with governance, or "governmentality" in his words;<sup>10</sup> the sec-

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<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>10</sup>Foucault became increasingly interested in the concept of government and "governmentality" towards the end of his life, with studies into the "reason of government". In *The Foucault Effect*, he describes the latter as

“(1) The ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security. (2)...the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and...the development of a whole complex of *savoirs* [knowledges]. (3)...the result of the process, through which the state of justice of the Middle Ages, transformed into the administrative

ond is a more advanced conception of power in constituting the sexually active human subject. I wish first to conclude the foregoing investigation of Foucault's thoughts on the political and economic implications of demography and its place within a newly emerging system of discipline on a macro-scale; in the final section of this chapter, I will move on to the ontological and epistemological problems which Foucault reveals of the subject caught up within a limiting discourse and system of normalizing power which determines identity and being.

### THE HUMAN SUBJECT AND EUGENICS

The political question related to demography and population growth centres around *eugenics*, the maximization and improvement of the human species. We have already seen in-depth analysis in *Discipline and Punish* of new systems within factories, schools, prisons, etc., towards facilitating the creation of the economically efficient subject. However, Foucault does not offer a simplistic, reductionist theory here. He shows that a new emphasis on life and its forces was not an ethic applied alone by the ruling classes upon the working class. In fact, a concern with life concentrated itself within the ruling class first, with a new-found desire on their part to live and rule longer:

“It seems in fact that what was involved was not an asceticism, in any case not a renunciation of pleasure or a disqualification of the flesh, but on the contrary an intensification of the body, a problematization of health and its operational terms: it was a question of techniques for maximizing life. The primary concern was not repression of the sex of the classes to be exploited, but rather the body, vigor, longevity, progeniture, and descent of the classes that ‘ruled’.”<sup>11</sup>

Foucault describes a modern emphasis on “life” for all of the population, either towards ensuring more effective rule, or increased productivity. Foucault relates this not to class for-

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state during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, gradually becomes ‘governmentalized’.” (pp. 102-103)

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

mations, even though both classes were affected by its force, but to a new political and social system which emerged with modernity, as we explored in *Discipline and Punish*:

“Since the classical age, the West has undergone a very profound transformation of these mechanisms of power. ‘Deduction’ has tended to be no longer the major form of power but merely one element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them.”<sup>12</sup>

Given the nature of an entirely new conception of the political polity and the forces contained within it, since the advent of modernity, social forces at whatever level are equally caught up within a field of power which has as its emphasis life forces and their maximization. Foucault calls this a “life-administering power”, a force which seeks to make human beings utile, effective, and productive.<sup>13</sup>

Around this newly formulated conception of sovereignty, caught up within a political system focused on rights granted by a social contract, life is defined differently, affecting both the way in which an individual is conceived within the mass, as well as the understanding an entire population has of its existence and well-being. Foucault points to the problematization of the death penalty, or capital punishment, as elucidative of the first point, (the place of the individual within the state); as illustrative of the second, Foucault points to the modern ability to annihilate entire countries with the use of nuclear weapons.

For Foucault, death is completely redefined in modernity, as the subject is judged in terms of harm caused to society and possible future harm in terms of *intentions*, not prior actions alone. The emphasis in a trial which might include a judgement of death is not only upon the crime itself, but the extent to which an individual is capable of committing a similar offence in the future. Foucault ties this directly to the social contract, as well as the

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<sup>12</sup>ibid., p. 136.

<sup>13</sup>ibid.

modern emphasis on confession and a delving into the human psyche to determine the extent to which actions are motivated by the soul or interior desires: “capital punishment could not be maintained except by invoking less the enormity of the crime itself than the monstrosity of the criminal, his incorrigibility, and the safeguard of society. One had the right to kill those who represented a kind of biological danger to others.”<sup>14</sup>

As we have seen in *Discipline and Punish*, the modern subject is caught in a paradoxical relationship between discursive practices and a particular notion of power: on the one hand, the modern requirement to foster life on a macro scale; on the other, the need to kill those who, as individuals, threaten this group. Ultimately, the test becomes the degree to which society as a whole can ensure its citizens’ well-being, with the individual subject caught within this rubric. Juxtaposed to a classical conception of life and its ability to “take life or let live”, modernity replaces this paradigm with “a power to foster life or disallow it to the point to death.”<sup>15</sup> Just as the place and power of the classical sovereign changed in relation to justice, so in modernity do new rules and ethics circumscribe the way in which life is ordered, encouraged, managed, and disallowed.

But what of a macro-conception of life and its Other? Foucault offers a startling description of his ideas around the ability to kill on a mass scale. Where war was once fought to defend a sovereign and single body, war in modernity is fought to protect an entire population, and yet, ironically, threatens to destroy this body entirely:

“the power to expose a whole population to death is the underside of the power to guarantee an individual’s continued existence...But the existence in question is no longer the juridical existence of sovereignty; at stake is the *biological existence of a population*. If genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill; it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomenon of population.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>ibid., p. 138.

<sup>15</sup>ibid.

<sup>16</sup>ibid., p. 137. My emphasis.

In an incredible paradox, modernity condones the killing of hundreds and sometimes hundreds of thousands so that the larger group may live. Through this process, modern life takes on a dual problematic: first, life is that which might bankrupt the nation in coming to be, or that which, in dying, saves that same nation.

### FOUCAULT'S THEORY OF BIO-POWER

I want to move on and look at the more important ontological and epistemological questions attached to the Foucauldian notion of life in modernity, and the effects of this upon the constitution of a subject within these new discursive practices and relations of power. Foucault defines "bio-power," (or "bio-politics"), as a politics concerned with *life* and its forces.<sup>17</sup> He breaks the modern problematic of the body and its existence into two poles "around which the organization of power over life was deployed," "two poles of development linked together by a whole intermediary cluster of relations."<sup>18</sup> The first of these "poles" is the *disciplines*, as we explored in the previous chapter. This is a process which centres on individuals and their performance:

"One of these poles...centred on the body as a machine: its disciplining, the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls, all this was ensured by the procedures of power that characterized the *disciplines: an anatomo-politics of the human body*.<sup>19</sup>

On a macroscopic scale, Foucault outlines a political process connected to entire populations. This second "pole" focuses on the entire

"species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that cause

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 139, 140.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a bio-politics of the population.*"<sup>20</sup>

Foucault is primarily concerned with sketching the way in which modern discipline of the human body emerged. We have already investigated the first in *Discipline and Punish*; the second we explored above in Foucault's description of a new definition of "life" in modernity and a new set of sciences concerned with population numbers and their management. What remains to be investigated are the implications of bio-power on the subject, which is constituted as an empirical constant within discourse, and monitored not only in terms of his existence as a population figure, but more importantly in relation to his *desires*, and the *implications* thereof. In other words, what we seek to discover are the implications of bio-power on the subject of modern man, "an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question."<sup>21</sup>

The crux of Foucault's work in his Power period, and what emerges as most disconcerting as a result of this, is his emphasis on knowledge and power relationships which exist *exterior* to the subject, and yet find their birth and existence *within* him. It is through empirical research, as we have seen with *The Order of Things*, and through the establishment of an essence which is constant and definable over time, as well as the position of the subject as the vehicle of power relationships which reinforce this paradigm, that seems to suggest that Foucault offers an impossible political project. It leads to a sense that the subjected individual is powerless, bereft of agency or the capacity to act, against such an imposing system; the Foucauldian paradigm suggests that life is without meaning where this is *Man-made*, that reality is a construct governed by rules and statements that Foucault cannot ascribe causal factors for, which have come into existence two hundred years ago, and which his work does not seem sure can be overcome. In other words, in addition to a

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<sup>20</sup>ibid.

<sup>21</sup>ibid., p. 143.

sense of a lack of agency of the part of the subject, a reasonable argument can be made, it seems that his work presents a picture of despair, a reality of political quietism; in other words, Foucault can aptly be described, at least intellectually, as a nihilist. It is the task of Part III of this dissertation to present these arguments: I will use Charles Taylor to outline an argument against truth and freedom, and Martin Jay, among others, to argue from a marxist perspective against Foucault, the supposed nihilist.

## *CONCLUSION:* **BIO-POLITICS**

Foucault's "middle" period, or the years in which he theorized on the nature and effects of modern power, were essential in providing a theoretical coherence to his work on the human subject. After his books which primarily focused on knowledge, Foucault was forced to provide an explanation for ways in which discursive formations interacted with society and brought about changes in the daily lives of individuals. This he managed to achieve with *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1). In these books, he introduces a unique theory of power to modern philosophy, and provides his genealogical method of investigating the modern relationship of knowledge and power.

In this chapter, I have investigated both texts in terms of their genealogical content and, more importantly, in terms of their theoretical significance. At this point it should be understood that Foucault describes power as something which circulates within and between bodies, is not invested within individual sovereign bodies, and which does not exist as something which might be toppled in the passion of revolution. Power is the mediating force which governs all relationships for Foucault, and which determines the parameters within which knowledge of things is perceived and applied to bodies and spaces.

Important to note is the link between knowledge and power in ontological terms. Knowledge and power, intersecting and constitutive of one another as they are, are also constitutive of modern ontological consciousness. Given the close relationship between the

epistemic structure which determines the way in which truth might be conceived and described, and the ways in which the modern episteme dictates the ways in which the human sciences conduct investigations into human interiority, knowledge of the human subject and the way in which this is accepted by society at large, exist as constitutive of modern ontology.

The constitution of modern ontology is the most important concept for this dissertation to explore, for two reasons: first, an ontology of Man is central to Foucault's description of his birth within knowledge, and we need to critically examine the way in which he describes such a constitution occurring; and second, because Foucault suggests that Man as an epistemological problem might be surpassed, we need to understand the way in which he describes this process and still allows for the formation of identity and truth structures. Now that we have thoroughly explored the ways in which Foucault describes both the nature and form of modern knowledge and power, we might move on to explore some of the central critiques of his work. I have mentioned some of the central weaknesses in his formulations in both the periods which we have thus-far explored, but what remains to be done is a thorough investigation of critiques offered by very different and opposing traditions. The degree to which Foucault can successfully answer these critics will determine whether in fact his work is coherent and does contain a positive political project.

There are two central questions which might be addressed to Foucault's work: first, given the way in which he describes modern knowledge being constructed, how might he allow for a meaningful human truth. In other words, his work appears to deny the ability for human beings to establish constructive and stable truth structures, which in turn inhibits the formulation of coherent and meaningful identities. This is primarily a liberal critique, and we will use the work of Charles Taylor to pose this line of argument. The second, and more difficult question, relates to the degree to which Foucault's work allows for human agency, or political action. Posed predominantly by marxists, concerned as they are with the potential for revolutionary struggle, the argument here revolves around the seeming ni-

hilism contained in Foucault's work, the inability for the human subject to struggle in a positive way against power relations which are not vested within surmountable institutions or bodies.

Part III of this dissertation is thus primarily interested in introducing both of these arguments, exploring these, and then attempting to vindicate Foucault's theoretical position. I will also use the following two chapters as sites to further expand on his theory of the relationship between the human subject and power, as well as the ontological results of such a position. Now that I have provided a solid introduction to Foucault's work, let us turn our attention directly to the concerns of philosophical traditions which criticize his work. In this way I hope to focus the primary concerns of this dissertation: Foucault's ability to provide an alternative and meaningful description of, and programme for, modern politics.

**PART III:**  
**CRITIQUE**

*INTRODUCTION:*  
**FOUCAULT'S CRITICS**

For his part, Foucault has still not completely come to terms with the problem of subjectivity, in that he has been unable to theorize the production of meaning by subjects or account for resistance to domination.

Mark Poster, *Foucault, Marxism & History*

Given Foucault's theory of the constitution of the human subject, and the oppressive relationships which the latter experiences as a result of modern power/knowledge relations, Part III of this dissertation seeks to investigate important liberal and marxist critiques of his work. Both ideologies find Foucault's theory of power problematic, but for distinctly different reasons: in light of Foucault's theory of power which supposedly is constitutive of reality, liberals would generally concern themselves more with the ability of the Foucauldian subject to establish a meaningful truth or identity; marxists, on the other hand, would be far more concerned with the ability of the Foucauldian subject to challenge such power-knowledge relations politically. The first criticism is of more interest to us at this point, as we attempt to affirm what I have described as the political project inherent in Foucault's work. While I believe it only possible to give a full account of this political vi-

sion once we have explored his final two books, *The History of Sexuality* (Volumes 2 and 3), at this point we are in a position to investigate Charles Taylor's argument in relation to questions of truth and freedom as presented in his article "Foucault on Freedom and Truth". After we have explored a liberal critique of Foucault's *oeuvre*, I wish to look at the work of Martin Jay (*Marxism and Totality*) and other marxists, with specific reference to their concerns with human agency and the potential for revolt, which they find apparently absent in Foucault's work. Let us turn our attentions immediately to Taylor's criticisms.

*Chapter Six:*  
**AGENCY AND TRUTH**

‘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?

Charles Taylor, “On Freedom and Truth”

In Charles Taylor’s introduction to “Foucault on Freedom and Truth”, he offers Foucault’s work as alluding to “some notion of a good unrealized or repressed in history,” and yet, in doing so, falling into a terrible trap.<sup>1</sup> Following on this, a Foucauldian scholar would invariably think of the Repressive Hypothesis which we have explored in the previous chapter, in which Foucault rejects a repressed human “nature” as explanatory of the modern subject’s dilemma; Taylor correctly continues with the assertion that Foucault is not interested in the act of a “rescue”.<sup>2</sup> In “Foucault on Freedom and Truth”, a fairly lengthy and comprehensive article, it is obvious that Foucault’s work irritates or “disconcerts” Taylor.<sup>3</sup> Foucault exposes ills inherent in the modern project, and yet does not offer an alternative, a goal to strive for, or “some good we [sf. Taylor himself] can *affirm*.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Taylor, “Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” in *Philosophy of the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*

I will concede that it is true that Foucault does not offer *explicit* solutions to the problems he lays bare in his *oeuvre*; it might also be that this deserves criticism. Yet it is at a still deeper level that Taylor's critique seems to work: he seems, quite implicitly and almost surreptitiously, to portray Foucault as an anti-rationalist, a man willing to "bring *evils* to light" (note Taylor's emphasis), and yet also simultaneously unwilling or unable to provide any answers. If the latter case is true, Foucault is what Taylor probably suspected all along: yet another continental poet with little of importance to say between big words and complex texts, metaphors, images, and signs--the expected confused collage of Franco-European intellectual irrationalism. Either this, a pretentious position, or Foucault is willing to allow the situation which his work outlines to remain in place: Foucault is thus either a pretentious pseudo-academic, and indicative of the overdone style which Anglo-Saxon theorists have come to expect from the French since Sartre, or he takes the position of a nihilist, a sectarian pagan. Foucault the barbarian, with a genre already studded with filthy references to insane asylums, deranged criminality, and sexual desire; or Foucault the moral disgrace, the harlot, the corrupting menace to be exorcised if not physically, then at least intellectually. "The negation or overcoming of these evils" does not necessarily promote "a good", and Foucault "distances" himself from such a position.<sup>5</sup> Either all the world is sin, or things don't get any better than they are. Taylor's article thus opens with a number of interesting propositions and allusions, and sets the tone for a fairly expansive and deeply critical look at Foucault's work.

### TRUTH AND FREEDOM

The main thrust of Taylor's piece is a reading of Foucault's conception of power as "all-penetrating and much more insidious than previous forms" and yet simultaneously "as science, or fulfillment, even 'liberation'."<sup>6</sup> So we have a simultaneously negative and posi-

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<sup>5</sup>ibid.

<sup>6</sup>ibid.

tive reading of Foucauldian power by Taylor: simultaneously more intrepid than ever before while offering freedom or liberation in a positive sense. What Taylor goes on to say is the core of his argument. After correctly defining Foucauldian power as something “positive”, he outlines “two goods” “which need rescuing.”<sup>7</sup> The first of these is freedom; the second truth.<sup>8</sup> Taylor immediately ties these two notions to the Enlightenment ideals of which he is such a strong contender. We are now “back on familiar terrain” for Taylor, able to argue within familiar liberal paradigms, and a little safer now distanced from the howls of Foucault’s asylums.<sup>9</sup>

Taylor is shocked out of his temporary satisfaction, however, upon discovering that in fact Foucault is not interested in *rescuing* the above, fighting for a defensible Truth, or an inalienable Freedom, both indispensable to modern liberalism. Taylor writes:

“The idea of a liberating truth [for Foucault] 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.”<sup>10</sup>

In this quote Taylor implies two crucial things, which make up the core of his concerns with Foucault as I outlined in the introduction to this chapter. First, and explicit in the quote above, is the idea that truth does not exist for Foucault, or at the very least, truth does not adopt the form we usually conceive it in. Foucauldian truth seems to be, the passage states, something no longer located within a safe, universal point of reference and accessible to all, as a “horizon” towards which we might all equally strive. This idealism, Taylor suggests, disappears with Foucault’s work, and seems to be the primary source of his frustration. The second, more implicit, point in the text, and which emerges as a result of

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<sup>7</sup>ibid.

<sup>8</sup>ibid.

<sup>9</sup>ibid.

<sup>10</sup>ibid., pp. 152-153.

the text in its entirety, is that Foucault's work lacks the notion of human agency. What emerges at the end of such a critique is a description of Foucault's work which not only contains no essential definition of truth, and no horizon against which identity might be understood or created but, additionally, that denies the ability for the subject to free himself from this all-embracing power; ultimately, Taylor's article implicitly suggests, Foucault's work presents a nihilist picture of the world, in dire contrast to his own understanding. What I wish to explore in this chapter is the question of human agency alone. The question of nihilism is an extremely important one, an issue which we will return to briefly in a latter portion of this chapter, and again in a more formal way in the following chapter.

### **THE NATURE OF FOUCAULDIAN POWER**

Taylor's critique centres around a concern about the apparent absence of "truth" and human agency within Foucault's theory of power and his description of the way in which the relationship between knowledge and power has come to define modern disciplinary society. The way in which Foucault escapes such criticism is two-fold. First, Taylor does not take into account Foucault's whole project, the reason that I placed so much emphasis on the latter's knowledge period in this dissertation. The second is that he did not have access to Foucault's final two works in which the latter outlines a programme within which the individual can critically address modern power-knowledge relations in the constitution of the subject. I am not as concerned with using Foucault's last works against Taylor's critique at this point: first, that would be unfair scholastically (even though the article was re-published in 1986 with no additions); second, and more importantly, I don't feel it necessary to do so, and will use Foucault's last works in the final chapter of this paper when we address charges of nihilism against Foucault's *oeuvre*.

Taylor correctly understands Foucault's work to rotate on two axes: power, on the one hand, and the creation of truth on the other, on

"power/domination, and on disguise/illusion. He [sf. Foucault] 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 fulfillment, even 'liberation'. Foucault's work is thus partly an unmasking."<sup>11</sup>

In this quote Taylor is partly right, which we will discuss in more detail below. He goes on to describe what seems to him to be an "implicit" notion of freedom and truth which can be uncovered through Foucault's analyses.<sup>12</sup> While commending Foucault's description of modern disciplinary structures and its negative effects upon the human subject, Taylor remains convinced that beneath or adjacent to this theory must be the ability to affirm something *new*. He correctly assumes, however, that both these concepts are absent from Foucault's work; nonetheless, he does so only within a model that Foucault firmly rejects: a liberal, humanist assumption of a deep interior from which identity and a sense of purpose can emerge.

In this chapter, my critique of Taylor will revolve around three central points: first, that Taylor misunderstands Foucault's conception of power, particularly in terms of sovereignty, or is unwilling to give it credence; second, that Taylor does not understand the way in which Foucault has outlined "a way out" of power-knowledge relations; third, and most important, that Taylor does not understand Foucault's theory of the subject constituted within discursive formations--it is only at the level of the *epistémé* that Foucault's theory of the subject, knowledge, power, and the implications of all three of these, can be understood. By ignoring the texts which I have encompassed within Foucault's Knowledge period, Taylor sets himself parameters which are out of line with the essence of Foucault's project, and thus argues against the *implications* of knowledge systems and not at the root from which they spring. In addition, by not understanding Foucault's theory of discourse, Taylor is unable to see the full political and social aspects of the relationship

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<sup>11</sup>ibid., p. 152.

<sup>12</sup>ibid.

between knowledge and social action, and hereby misses Foucault's final work on ethics and a politics which works on the epistemological, and thus ontological, limits within which the modern subject is constructed and conceived. Taylor not only misses large parts of Foucault's intellectual theory, but as a result of this, fails to conceive of the innately political result of such work. In the rest of this chapter, I wish to bring these points more clearly to light, not only to show the theoretical weaknesses in Taylor's critique of Foucault, but also to bring the latter's work in this area more clearly to light. First, however, I wish to take a closer look at Taylor's critique.<sup>13</sup>

### **TAYLOR'S FIRST LINE OF ANALYSIS: MODERN INTERIORITY**

In the first part of his paper, Taylor lays out "three lines of analysis" with which to approach Foucault's thought.<sup>14</sup> In his first line of analysis, Taylor applauds Foucault for his work in *Discipline and Punish* to reveal the epistemological move from a Classical sense of order based on a cosmology, and the implications thereof on sovereignty and the way in which people were ruled, to a modern conception of "ordinary life", in which monarchical hierarchy is stripped away, and people find their place within society given their day-to-day activities. Taylor couples this with a new-found emphasis on interiority, with emotions being the keystone in determining one's degree of success, happiness, and sense of belonging, "a new notion of the good...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 forbears."<sup>15</sup>

Alongside both of these modern goods is a new emphasis on "ordinary life" and the affirmation of human existence, which Taylor calls "humanitarianism", connected to "the

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<sup>13</sup>I believe it important to note that Taylor's paper is based only on *Discipline and Punish*, *Power/Knowledge*, and *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1). Given what I have set out as a central thesis for this paper, regarding the close and essential relationship between Foucault's first period and those which follow it, Taylor's preparation for the critique presented in this article is immediately placed upon shaky ground. It should be noted too that this article was re-printed in 1986, without revisions.

<sup>14</sup>"Foucault on Freedom and Truth," p. 153.

<sup>15</sup>*ibid.*, p. 155.

modern identity, the sense we have of ourselves as free, self-defining subjects, whose understanding of their own essence or of their paradigm purposes is drawn from 'within', and no longer from a supposed cosmic order in which they are set."<sup>16</sup> "Ordinary life" is what we live on a daily basis towards fulfilling this internal reality, and affirming our place within the modern order. In modernity, the good life is no longer defined as one filled with contemplation of a higher order, but rather is the ability to *actualize* the self through actions which have been accepted as "true" for the self. The "good life" can also be perceived in modernity as the space in which one practices the innate freedom to choose. Within a society based on rights, freedom is defined in terms of the degree to which this will to choose is ensured. It appears, however, as if "the Enlightenment valuation" is not part of Foucault's concern, (he takes "a stance of neutrality"), and this for Taylor is alarming.<sup>17</sup>

Contained in Foucault's work

"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 'bio-mass'."<sup>18</sup>

And so we move into the second of Taylor's concerns, which mount as we go along. At this point, Foucault seems to propose an alternative, even while remaining uninterested in the Enlightenment-inspired ideals which Taylor holds in high regard.

### **TAYLOR'S SECOND LINE OF ANALYSIS: POWER**

Taylor's second line of analysis focuses on Foucault's definition of power. This formulation Taylor describes as "(a)...not concerned with law but with normalization,"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>ibid.

<sup>17</sup>"Foucault on Freedom and Truth," p. 156.

<sup>18</sup>ibid., pp. 156-157.

<sup>19</sup>ibid., p. 158.

“(b)...*productive*,”<sup>20</sup> and “(c)...not wielded by a *subject*.”<sup>21</sup> Taylor is of course right on all three counts; these three conceptions are the core of Foucault’s theory of power as we have already seen. How, then, does Taylor respond?

He invokes the critiques of both Schiller and the Frankfurt School in a “central theme” of critical theory, that of the contrast between nature and instrumental reason.<sup>22</sup> Foucauldian power seems to run concurrent with this, in that human reason is applied to some internal substance in a way to alter it negatively. However, Taylor writes that Foucault adds to this formulation, or “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 [not through some means of consensus or coercion between subjects] 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 [for Foucault] really takes place...and takes on the dimensions of a mass phenomenon.”<sup>23</sup>

Taylor praises Foucault’s account thus far, even commending it as “more detailed and more convincing than what they (sf. The Frankfurt School) came up with themselves.”<sup>24</sup> However, while Taylor is prepared to go along with Foucault to this point, he is to reject Foucault’s place of rest, for while Taylor would seek liberty from such an imposition, Foucault offers no such hope; the latter “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.”<sup>25</sup> Thus far, Foucault has disappointed Taylor on two

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<sup>20</sup>ibid., p. 159.

<sup>21</sup>ibid.

<sup>22</sup>ibid.

<sup>23</sup>ibid., p. 160.

<sup>24</sup>ibid.

<sup>25</sup>ibid.

counts: first, he rejects the freedom inherent in the values and ordinary life passed down to us from the Enlightenment; second, Foucault refuses a liberation from the imposition of modern disciplines on the subject. To this point, Taylor agrees with Foucault's analysis, indeed applauds his thorough rendition of the negative effects of the changes in society since the Enlightenment, but is stymied when he seeks some consensus with Foucault on how to resolve these problems.

### **TAYLOR'S THIRD LINE OF ANALYSIS: HUMAN NATURE**

In his third and final line of analysis, Taylor returns to the Romantic notion of an inner nature which must be fulfilled, in an attempt to formulate some positive notion of human nature or essence within Foucault's work. His discussion revolves around Foucault's analysis of sexuality in modernity as illustrated in *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1). Ironically, in his desire to affirm an innate human quality related to love, compassion, and desire, an "inner nature which must be articulated in our nature as sexual beings," Taylor outlines a theory of human nature which Foucault rejects outright in his Repressive Hypothesis.<sup>26</sup>

Taylor writes that while this essential human nature might have been "distorted" or impaired from reaching actualization or fruition as a result of modern society, "the capitalist work-ethic, or the disciplines of a bureaucratic society," there does exist a true way to express and to feel emotion; despite the pressures upon us in modernity, there exists as a universal fact "an authentic way for each of us to love," and this authenticity must be in some sense freed or liberated.<sup>27</sup> Foucault, however, denies this chance to feel objectively and, more importantly than this, denies the opportunity for liberation of these essential and innately human desires:

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<sup>26</sup>ibid., p. 161.

<sup>27</sup>ibid.

“whatever the distorting agent [of our “inner nature”], 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 a thoroughgoing illusion.”<sup>28</sup>

Taylor goes on to outline Foucault’s work on the role of early Christianity (particularly Augustinianism) in defining an inner being, or essence. He correctly links an inner human self with truth structures which first dictate that modern human beings subject themselves to a process of confession, thus feeding a knowledge structure intent on knowing the human condition thoroughly; simultaneously, they submit themselves to individual inquiry through a process which is linked to subjectification and normalization.

What particularly frustrates Taylor is the seeming tautology of the situation:

“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 tabus 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 tabus 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.”<sup>29</sup>

After three lines of analysis, with Taylor and Foucault seemingly close in their critique of modernity, they fail to reach consensus in three crucial areas: first, Foucault is not prepared to affirm the humanist tradition and the good life described by the Enlightenment; second, Foucault will not affirm the chance for liberation from external impositions on the self which hinder its actualization, in line with a Romantic notion of self-fulfillment; third, and perhaps most startling, Foucault rejects a humanist conception of the self as something

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<sup>28</sup>ibid.

<sup>29</sup>ibid., p. 162.

stable and constant and does not allow for the affirmation of this entity. Ultimately Foucault seems to present a paradigm of modernity in which we have strayed from the initially intended path, and yet are powerless, to either act against this force, and, worse still, are unable or incapacitated, given the nature of modern power, to redefine the good life, to put ourselves back on track. Here Taylor has reached a point at which Foucault's work both frustrates and disconcerts him beyond redemption, "where he [sf. Foucault] adopts a Nietzschean-derived stance of neutrality between the different historical system [sic] of power, and thus seems to neutralize the evaluations which arise out of his analyses."<sup>30</sup> In other words, for Taylor, Foucault puts forward a solid and commendable critique of modernity, but is unable to affirm solutions to these "evaluations", these wrongs which somehow must, (and for Taylor can) be put right.<sup>31</sup> I wish to go on and explore Taylor's response to Foucault's work, and the reason why he ultimately rejects a Foucauldian definition of power in modernity. From there I will go on to outline the weaknesses in Taylor's argument, and, hopefully, will be able to vindicate Foucault's position.

Taylor's critique is threefold: first, he does not accept Foucault's notion of power relations "without a subject;"<sup>32</sup> second, Taylor rejects power "without 'freedom' or 'truth';"<sup>33</sup> third, an extension of point two, and the concept that most bothers Taylor is the Foucauldian notion of "truth as subordinated to power."<sup>34</sup> What we have in essence is a gradual move away from all of the liberal conceptions that Taylor holds true and which increasingly baffle and frustrate him when reading Foucault's work. The central concern here is the way in which Foucault constructs a paradigm within which power moves, uninvested within an individual or institution and which thus negates the possibility of liberation. Further to this is Foucault's concept of power as constitutive of truth, which denies

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<sup>30</sup>ibid., p. 163.

<sup>31</sup>ibid.

<sup>32</sup>ibid., p. 167.

<sup>33</sup>ibid., p. 174. See the quote which heads this chapter.

<sup>34</sup>ibid., p. 177.

the human ability to provide corner-stones to mark morality or ethics. Taylor doesn't extend his argument, as he might, to accuse Foucault of nihilism, but this is certainly implicit in his argument. While Taylor is certainly sympathetic to, and grateful for, Foucault's critiques of modernity, the two men do not appear able to reach consensus on a position, and Taylor ultimately rejects Foucault's work, hoping that the latter's forthcoming books would clear up certain discrepancies.<sup>35</sup> Let us look at where Taylor goes astray, as far as I am concerned, in his critique of Foucault. Instead of answering each of his points in turn, I would like to approach all three head-on, because I believe they are fundamentally connected to one another.

### A CRITIQUE OF TAYLOR

The single-most weakness of Taylor's argument is that he ignores Foucault's Knowledge period. With a single brief mention of *The Order of Things* in name alone, Taylor fails to see the essential connection for Foucault between knowledge and power. In fact, it is *discursive* practices which lie at the heart of Foucault's intellectual interests, and not power. The latter is only introduced in order to show how knowledge is mediated within society as we have previously discussed. Central for Foucault is the notion that modern epistemology is underpinned by a particular type of *epistémé*, this directed towards rendering objects in their true essence and establishing, alongside these entities, those that are deemed anomalous.

It is out of this body of knowledge, then, that the modern subject emerges. As a result, Foucault rejects all notions of an essential or grounded self, in dire contrast to Taylor, who writes:

“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 under-

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<sup>35</sup>ibid., p. 183.

standings: 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...*"<sup>36</sup>

Foucault would reject this liberal perspective just as he rejected a similar structuralist position which Chomsky put forward. Human interiority and epistemological truth are both created in discourse and in history, and are thus *contingent*.

I stress the word "contingent" because not only does this imply that modernity and its self-knowledge is fleeting, or at least tentative and susceptible to being undermined, but that knowledge within modernity does offer certain guidelines within which human subjects operate. There is a paradigm within which to move, there is a reality which exists; the notions of identity, truth, and self-understanding *do exist* for Foucault. The emphasis, however, should be on the fact that these truths, which people can choose to accept or reject, *have been created through history*, so they are not Truths in a stable or atemporal sense. This does not necessarily invoke a counter-argument of relativism: we might attach labels to objects (an essential part of the language process), and yet problematize the essential *qualities* of each of these, realizing that the "truth" attached to each of them in terms of these identifying labels is constituted through time and might be replaced by a future and different exercise of thought.

I do not want to preempt the forthcoming section of this dissertation, but if knowledge structures are indeed the spaces in which reality is constructed, and if these spaces are indeed driven by a particular set of rules which determine what might and might not be thought, then this implies limits which might equally be challenged and overcome. We are back to concepts raised in *The Order of Things*: the "limits" of thought; the "origin" of ontological labels which define human identity; and the "unthought" (as a space outside of that which is defined as truth) from which criticism might be directed. Taylor is thus unable to

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<sup>36</sup>*ibid.*, p. 181. My emphasis. Note how close Taylor's formulation of human nature is to that of Noam Chomsky's, as quoted in Chapter 3.

come to terms with the basis of Foucault's project. I think the following quote emphasizes this well, and I would like to use it as a springboard to look more closely at where Taylor strays from this:

"...truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, 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."<sup>37</sup>

Foucault describes truth as something which exists and yet is contingent within time and space; in time as determined by history, and space as determined by epistemic configurations which structure knowledge within a particular period of history:

"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."<sup>38</sup>

In this passage, we find four vital clues to what constitutes Foucault's most pressing philosophical concerns. First, the fact that truth is "of this world" contradicts all traditional conceptions of truth or morality as something timeless, transcendental or objectively (scientifically for marxists) embedded in nature, whether human or otherwise. Second, Foucault shows here that knowledge is something that constitutes truth, and forms the foundation from which various practices are put into operation which distinguish truth from falsehood. Knowledge, then, is constitutive of reality as well as being grounded in reality. Third, the subject, or Man, is similarly a creature created within knowledge formations, and constituted within the subjectifying disciplines, or through the process of normaliza-

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<sup>37</sup>Foucault, "Truth and Power" in *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 72-73. My emphasis.

<sup>38</sup>*ibid.*, p. 73. My emphasis.

tion. There is no such thing as internal essence for Foucault: it is a direct product of an epistemological configuration which is particular to modernity. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, because truth is created, and the subject remains for Foucault a product of this knowledge, there is no escape into an alternative reality; nor is there any innate truth to be uncovered as Taylor would so desperately like to see. For Foucault, liberation as a concept is a non-sequitur (or a non-possibility), if this is defined in terms of the uncovering of some deeper truth or hidden reality which is either as yet unknown or has until now been quashed or repressed in some way. Foucault has lucidly illustrated this point in *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1) under his discussion of the Repressive Hypothesis. What is extremely important to note, however, and this will be more clearly defined in our discussion of Foucault's overall political project, is that we are not faced with a situation of hopelessness. Humankind is not to despair at the indulgence of Foucault's theories as outlined above. While he has not explicitly provided a programme for overturning present knowledge systems, at the heart of his project is the theoretical *possibility* of doing so.

#### **FOUCAULT'S HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

Taylor strays in his argument by not encompassing Foucault's earlier works in his article. The core of the latter's project is a problematization of the production of truth statements, of the way in which we accept knowledge as progressive and scientific, especially in relation to the human sciences and knowledge of Man. Taylor takes for granted that human essence exists, and that through this an objective order of "goods" can be established for all human beings; Taylor takes for granted that justice and progress exist beyond space and time. Taylor and Foucault will continue at loggerheads unless a central question is addressed: that of the subject and its nature. It is thus not surprising that Foucault, as he does in "The Subject and Power", explicitly states his central concern as being the constitution of the subject within the "objectifying sciences". "[T]he fog emanating from Paris" might clear

for Taylor if he thought more deeply on Foucault's *total* project.<sup>39</sup> The latter's work on the human subject is coherent and is powerful when read as a continuum, a factor which I believe critical in examining the work of Foucault.

From Taylor, we have a critique centred primarily on his conception of the way in which power and the subject interact. If we extend this argument to look primarily at the nature of power for Foucault, we might be confronted with a question of political quietism, a Foucauldian project which seems to deny political activity. If we distance ourselves from Foucault's theory and attempt to discuss the implications thereof for *resistance*, we might find a problem in understanding the ability for human subjects to challenge oppressive power-knowledge relations. In the following chapter, I wish to introduce a broadly marxist critique, using a number of theorists who might accept his theory as *theory*, but reject it in *practice*. I want to look specifically at the question of whether Foucault's definition of the subject and power allows for a political resistance against imposing power-knowledge relations; I will place this critique not so much in the lap of a particular theorist (I will mention central criticisms), but rather focus on the concepts introduced in this debate, and attempt to describe how Foucault's paradigm does in fact find restitution from such criticisms. Following on this, I will use Part IV of this dissertation to illustrate the way in which Foucault describes a particular type of ethical practice, to my mind innately political, which will vindicate his position.

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<sup>39</sup>"Foucault on Freedom and Truth," p. 173.

*Chapter Seven:*

**POWER AND POLITICAL WILL**

Devoid of subject and strategic direction, Foucault's discourses offer no exit from the dominations and subjugations of successive regimes of power. They construct a history without a center, beyond meaning save that of the constant motion of the revolving door in which all of humanity is forever trapped in the repetitive linkage of discourse/power/knowledge.

Brian Palmer, *Descent into Discourse*

The central focus of this chapter will be the supposed inability for political action on the part of the Foucauldian subject. In the previous chapter, we explored Taylor's concerns about the degree to which the Foucauldian subject can establish an ontological truth of the world by which to form an identity (this is a question primarily connected to *truth*); this argument can be extended to look at the *political* implications of a Foucauldian definition of power which apparently denies human agency, or the ability to act in a situation of coercion. There have been a number of critiques along these lines, especially from marxists who would like to hold on to some totalizing theory of history, consciousness, and the

end of class oppression through revolution.<sup>1</sup> Their concerns are closely tied to theoretical totalities, and are directly challenged by Foucault's rejection of teleology or objective truth. Most important is the marxist concern with the supposed effect of Foucault's work to encourage *political quietism*, a rejection of all forms of political activity, or a theoretical impossibility for meaningful human agency. I would first like to use this chapter as a site to outline these concerns, in many ways similar to Taylor's above; the central question raised in this chapter--as to whether Foucault's work carries the capacity for political action--will be carried forward to Section IV and answered there.

Martin Jay, in his *Marxism and Totality*, writes that while originally the "political implications of post-structuralism [where he fits Foucault] were themselves not very clear,"

"...its nihilistic or anarchistic impulses soon came to the fore. Criticizing the search for origins (arches) implied, anarchically, the impossibility of plenitude in the future as well...if post-structuralism revealed a nihilist or anarchist potential, as well as a neo-Marxist one, it also paradoxically contained the seeds of a quietistic politics as well."<sup>2</sup>

Not only, then, does Foucault offer a paradigm which prohibits or denies the ontological ability of human beings to overcome economic and social alienation in the classical marxist sense of the word, but his theory also denies their ability to work against these modern forces of power and knowledge in order to recapture their true being, or more humane way of living, presumably through revolutionary struggle. The foremost theoretical quandary which Foucault's work presents for liberals is his rejection of a grounded, objective self and a negation of the possibility to attain a true freedom, or to liberate an authentic human interior. For the marxists, Foucault will deny the ability for a people or class to liberate

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<sup>1</sup>I am primarily interested in using the following articles and texts for this section, pulling out pieces at random to suit the discussion: Peter Dews, "The *Nouvelle Philosophie* and Foucault" in *Economy and Society*, 1979 (Vol. 8); Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*; Jurgen Habermas, "Modernity: An Incomplete Project" in *The Anti-Aesthetic* (ed. Hal Forster); Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*; Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality*; Brian Palmer, *Descent into Discourse*.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, pp. 516, 517.

themselves through the overthrow of a sovereign power; marxism at its core is thus fatefully (perhaps fatally) challenged when Foucault rejects a theory of political “liberation”, or the opportunity for “true” political and economic freedom resulting from violent revolt.

Jay and other marxists are primarily concerned with Foucault’s supposed inability to provide for a theory of revolt and liberation, particularly in light of his seemingly nihilistic definition of power. Regardless of their specific approach to marxism, marxists are primarily concerned with the ability of the proletariat to overthrow an innately oppressive capitalist system, or at least with conceptualizing of society as being made up of two distinct groups, vying for access to resources and political power. For marxists, this theoretical necessity seems impossible within Foucault’s work because “[p]ower is never locatable but is relentlessly complex and overlapping, *residing always in the determinations of discourse*, which spins itself in a never-ending and analytically and politically impenetrable Lacanian circularity.”<sup>3</sup> Palmer recognizes, and is frustrated by, Foucault’s description of reality as constructed by the relationship between discursive formations and power relations. Foucauldian power is not located within a single body or institution, as would be the understanding within a marxist critique; instead power circulates continually through various structures, creating them in history while simultaneously using them as vehicles for its own perpetuation. This theoretical impasse, involving the political implications of Foucault’s work, is directly related to his definition of power. If we understand the marxist concerns introduced by Jay and Palmer to particularly centre around the prospect of a *liberation* from Foucauldian power, then I wish to explore this in the following paragraphs in order to explain Foucault’s position.

### **THE QUESTION OF A “LIBERATION” FROM POWER**

Foucault clearly outlines the importance of strategies of power, and counter-strategies of the subject, which ensure that power is never a figment of *domination*, at least in the classi-

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<sup>3</sup>Brian Palmer, *Descent into Discourse*, p. 170.

cal sense of the word. Power seeks to modulate *conduct*, rather than impose a particular type of relationship or mode of action which excludes any place for freedom:

“one may call power strategy the totality of the means put into operation to implement power effectively or to maintain it. One may also speak of a strategy proper to power relations insofar as they constitute modes of action upon possible action, the action of others...Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. *Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal.*”<sup>4</sup>

In this quote, we see two crucial factors: first, that power relates itself to actions on the part of individuals, and makes its object a transformation of the way in which human subjects conduct or perceive themselves; second, that these relations of power find themselves deeply enmeshed within struggles which encompass strategic confrontations, a situation of battle, not so much for domination, or the snuffing out of freedom, but for the imposition of a particular way of Being. Simply, power for Foucault is the process of rendering a particular conception of the world hegemonic, a foisting of a particular knowledge upon bodies and their actions. It is a process not of crushing, breaking, or doing violence to bodies, so much as it is a process of subtle *transformation*, the process of influencing the interiorization of a particular set of actions or beliefs upon the Other.

Foucault not only affirms his conception of power as a process which takes place between things, but in fact as crucial to the running of a society. He describes power as

“a way in which certain actions might structure the field of another possible actions. What therefore would be proper to a relationship of power is that it be a mode of action upon actions. That is to say, power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, *not reconstituted ‘above’ society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of...*A society without power relations would only be an abstraction...[Therefore] *I would say that the*

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<sup>4</sup>“The Subject and Power,” p. 225. My emphasis.

*analysis, elaboration, and bringing into question of power relations and the 'agonism' between power relations and the intransitivity of freedom is a permanent political task inherent in all social existence."*<sup>5</sup>

Foucault links power to the circulation of truth, the latter something which is created in history and upon contingent knowledge formations. The critique of knowledge acquires an innately political nature once this paradigm is understood. Foucault does not negate the need for political and social challenges being posed to power/knowledge relations as he outlines them. In fact, he implicitly affirms such a position in the quote above. What he is unable to accept, and which puts Foucault and the marxists on a dialectical path, is the notion of an overriding source of imposing oppression, what Foucault refers to as power relations constituted "'above' society"; Foucault rejects the destruction of such a force to bring about the "dream" of some utopia.<sup>6</sup> For Foucault, the marxist critique centred around class relations, or oppression linked innately to the accumulation of capital by a small group of individuals to the detriment of the rest of society, is profoundly simplistic. In order to more fully explain his position on the nature of disciplinary power, and the reasons that he gives to reject a liberation from this force, in the following paragraphs I wish to look at the "forms of resistance"<sup>7</sup> which Foucault writes are indicative of modern political activity, and which are primarily centred around the subject, in "opposition...to the power of administration over the ways people live": "they are struggles against the 'government of individualization.'"<sup>8</sup>

Foucault comes to loggerheads with the marxists because he problematizes two notions which are essential to their project: first, he rejects a totalizing theory of modern oppression as well as a "liberation" from this; second, he provides a far more complex understanding of the way in which modern domination or oppression takes place, this centred

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<sup>5</sup>ibid., pp. 222-223. My emphasis.

<sup>6</sup>ibid., p. 222.

<sup>7</sup>ibid., p. 211.

<sup>8</sup>ibid., pp. 211, 212.

around the question of *identity*, rather than class. In “The Subject and Power” Foucault outlines six characteristics of these “series of oppositions” that define struggles in modernity.<sup>9</sup> First, he writes that modern struggles are “transversal”, (or international), in nature, no longer “limited to one country”—these struggles define for Foucault an opposition to a *particular practice of power* in modernity, rather than objective factors which exist on a global scale;<sup>10</sup> second, these struggles are aimed against the “effects” of such practices upon the lives of individuals, rather than at a particular group which is unilaterally responsible for all systems of oppression; third, these struggles are “immediate”, “they do not look for the ‘chief enemy’.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, and this follows from the second point above, modern struggles do not strive towards neutralizing power relations within a revolutionary paradigm; fourth, these are struggles innately caught up with questions surrounding the constitution and “status” of the individual, the way in which the subject is defined next to and against his community, or an alternative source of identity: the way in which an individual is “tie[d] to his own identity in a constraining way.”<sup>12</sup> This relates directly to Foucault’s understanding of the way in which epistemology works to define identity next to a perfect model of the Self or the Same, and thus restores subjects to this original position (the “origin”) through a political and social process of normalization; fifth, these struggles are waged against the “privileges of knowledge”, not only in their epistemological sense, as above, but in terms of the way knowledge circulates, and is given status in the hands of particular individuals—those deemed qualified as “experts”, (for example, the doctor or the psychiatrist as an expert who holds privileged knowledge in a specialized ~~field~~ as we saw in *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Madness and Civilization*); sixth, these struggles work to positively acknowledge an individual’s status as perhaps different from the norm, in other words, *to affirm individuality*.

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<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 211.

<sup>10</sup>ibid.

<sup>11</sup>ibid.

<sup>12</sup>ibid., p. 212.

Foucault defines modern struggles in relation to *forms of knowledge*, and a *form of power* which distributes this knowledge across a social space. In opposing the way in which certain knowledge is privileged, and the way in which certain *individuals* are privileged in holding and applying such forms of knowledge, Foucault simultaneously elucidates a struggle against a particular form of power, as this reveals itself in a practice upon bodies within social spaces. However,

“there is nothing ‘scientific’ in this (that is, a dogmatic belief in the value of scientific knowledge), but neither is it a skeptical or relativistic refusal of all verified truth. What is questioned is the way in which knowledge circulates and functions, its relations to power...*the main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much ‘such and such’ an institution of power, or group, or elite, or class, but rather a technique, a form of power.*”<sup>13</sup>

Simply, what Foucault rejects in marxism, and the central point around which they fail to reach consensus or common vision, is the notion of class as a single causal factor delineating oppression or exploitation in modernity. Where Jay seeks to affirm a totality which defines modern society in terms of its ills, and in terms of its solution, Foucault would reject these efforts, and show instead that regardless of a particular economic system which exists as exploitative, unless we critically address the way in which the subject is conceived (and constituted) in modern discourse and practice, we have not the core issue which surrounds this oppression: that of human *ontological* oppression. Thus, these modern struggles (which Foucault describes as primarily centred around subjectivity, or the ontological status of the subject) are not limited to one country, just as “they are not confined to a particular political or economic form of government.”<sup>14</sup>

Jay correctly defines the “post-structuralist category” as a group of people who, regardless of theoretical, political or personal disagreements, are bound by “their unremitting

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<sup>13</sup>ibid. My emphasis.

<sup>14</sup>ibid., p. 211.

hostility towards totality.”<sup>15</sup> His primary concern with Foucault is the latter’s (apparently incongruous) conception of power, which renders a marxist project sterile. Foucault rejects totality, but now on political terms, this in an effort “to escape from the predominantly linguistic preoccupations of many post-structuralists into an analysis of power that exposed the dangers of totalism in political as well as intellectual terms.”<sup>16</sup> Put simply, Foucault rejects marxism in practice, and only uses the work of Marx as a theoretical tool in describing modern labour relations.

### **FOUCAULT, THE SUBJECT, AND TRUTH**

I would like to conclude this section with a discussion of Foucault’s understanding of truth, and then move on into the final chapter of this thesis. Whether an epistemological or a teleological conception of unity and progression, truth defines a course of action which concurs with history and nature. In relation to power, Jay correctly describes Foucault’s work in the following manner:

“There was no way to overcome power, Foucault argued, because it did not emanate from a central source which could be challenged and overthrown. The traditional concept of sovereignty was fallacious in assuming that a single locus of power could be identified. A microphysics of power, probing its multiple and diverse manifestations, would show otherwise. Marxism, therefore, was deluded in believing that a revolutionary seizure of power or a change in the mode of production would radically alter the nature of society.”<sup>17</sup>

Like Taylor, Jay interestingly enough makes a similar point that Foucault “invites comparison with the classical Frankfurt School’s analysis of the ‘administered society’.”<sup>18</sup> He goes on, however, to express his understanding of this paradigm for Foucault, as “the fully realized disciplinary society that Marcuse, from his more Hegelian perspective, had called

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<sup>15</sup>*Marxism and Totality*, p. 515.

<sup>16</sup>*ibid.*, p. 516.

<sup>17</sup>*ibid.*, p. 525.

<sup>18</sup>*ibid.*, p. 526.

completely one-dimensional.”<sup>19</sup> While Foucault acknowledges that “total discipline could never be achieved,”<sup>20</sup> given his theory of power and resistance, Jay does not display confidence in the ability of the subject to do “battle for bodies and pleasure.”<sup>21</sup>

For Jay, Foucault’s theory offers little in the way of hope or constructive challenge to power, for the very reason that the battle seems ongoing: “[Foucault’s] insistence on the inevitability of power in the coercive sense suggested that resistance could never hope to diminish in very significant ways the grip of domination.”<sup>22</sup> In terms of this line of critique, I disagree strongly with Jay, who obviously does not understand Foucault’s conception of power as positive rather than “coercive”, the latter couched in terms of the traditional model of sovereignty which we have discussed in depth as being exactly what Foucault rejects. Like Taylor, the two theorists diverge intellectually when Jay displays his inability to understand Foucault’s chief concern with subjectivity and truth in modernity, and not with rendering a totalizing picture of society and its innate system of oppression. Regardless of Jay’s inability to understand the Foucauldian conception of power, the question of political quietism in Foucault’s work is an important one. I wish to use Part IV of this dissertation to answer the question of political agency from Foucault’s perspective; ultimately I wish to affirm his position, and vindicate his work from such criticism in substantive terms and not just in terms of a debate on the nature of the subject and the power which Foucault believes constitutes this entity. I ask my reader to consider the following quote, which picks up on some of the concerns raised in the previous sentence, and show both a weakness with Foucault’s work and that of the marxists posing such a question.

“Foucault was clearly outraged at certain forms of that domination [sf. within power relations], but is was never very clear from what normative vantagepoint, aside from his own personal preferences. If the humanist notion of a subject

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<sup>19</sup>ibid., p. 528.

<sup>20</sup>ibid., p. 527.

<sup>21</sup>ibid., p. 528.

<sup>22</sup>ibid.

whose true needs could be repressed was merely a myth, in whose name did Foucault so heatedly criticize the blight of increasing panoptic normalization? If there were no truth, but only 'truth effects' expressing certain power relations, then how could one be confident that his call for a 'general economy of pleasure not based on sexual norms' would not lead to a new form of oppressive power...If truth was merely an effect of power, what was the place within the network of power relations that allowed him to see through the illusions of his age?"<sup>23</sup>

I would like to concentrate on the last two questions raised here by Jay. First, what is the nature of truth for Foucault, and if he is not to be accused of over-relativism or super-subjectivity, how does he explain the ability to speak of truth at all?; second, if Foucault criticizes reason in modernity, how does he himself apply his own mind to the present around him? In more simple words, how does Foucault, if critical of knowledge systems in modernity, think critically on the world around himself towards constituting a different reality in the future.

The theoretical rift which exists between Foucault and the marxist tradition is primarily based upon the status of the individual subject, and more importantly I think, whether or not this subject can engage in political activity *vis á vis* Foucault's description of the power-knowledge relations which constitute this entity. To answer these queries, in the final section of this dissertation, I wish to explore the politics which Foucault offers in his work, especially the way in which Foucault describes the status and effects of modern truth, and how the human subject might engage in critique. Put simply, I seek to describe how it is that Foucault affirms the human subject's ability to reason critically, and in this way transform both the epistemological and ontological constraints which a modern theory of Man forces upon itself. I leave it to Section IV to discuss Foucault's final two books, the relationship which he paints between truth and politics, and his work on self-

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*

reflexivity and political activity in light of his understanding of power-knowledge relations, and their imposition on the human subject.

*CONCLUSION:*  
**IN DEFENCE OF FOUCAULT**

Part III of this dissertation has served a two-fold purpose: while primarily concerned with introducing two important criticisms of Foucault's work, I have also used this section as an opportunity to expose more general cleavages between Foucault's theories and those of the humanist liberals and marxists, used here as examples of a much larger tradition. Not merely a site to elucidate a criticism of Foucault's work, it has been important to expose in clear detail the important and far-reaching contradictions in thought between the humanists, who place great emphasis on a vested human self and the ability to actualize this entity in one way or another, and Foucault, who categorically rejects such a position, and in fact uses all of his intellectual time and energy to dispute this. In addition, it has been very important to draw a sharp distinction in the theories of power and liberation which separate these two theoretical camps. The liberals and marxists place great emphasis on a vested and sovereign conception of power, which equally carries the potential for revolution and liberation from an oppression of whatever form; Foucault again fundamentally rejects such a position.

It is not my desire to necessarily investigate the positions which are taken by either the liberals or the marxists; instead what is important is to provide an alternative body of theoretical material which might be used to critique modern social and human relations. Similarly, in the section which follows I do not wish to necessarily prove Foucault's theory

“above” that of the others; rather, I wish to tackle the substantive and legitimate questions which I have introduced in the section, and pose these directly to Foucault’s work as philosophical and not ideological queries. Ultimately, I wish to test the strength of Foucault’s theory first, and not attempt to discredit a contesting tradition. This might occur as a consequence of the study underway here, but this is not my immediate intention.

The central question which remains outstanding is as follows: given Foucault’s description of the subject and power, how might the former critically address the position in which he finds himself, and embark on a politics which is in some sense resistant to power-knowledge relations as Foucault describes them? We are primarily concerned with a political question here, posed so succinctly by the marxists. Regardless of whether Foucault does not affirm the possibility of a liberation of the human subject, we would seek clarity as how he accounts for his “politics of the self”. Further, we would seek to know what such a politics entails, and whether it provide hope for the Foucauldian subject in the future? If it can be shown that Foucault indeed provides for a degree of agency and a critical response to the forces which are apparently constitutive of the human subject, then his theory and my thesis will be vindicated. Let us move straight into these lengthy and complex investigations, with a critical look at Foucault’s *Ethics*, the final period which he was still engaged with at the time of his death in 1984.

**PART IV:**  
**ETHICS**

*INTRODUCTION:*

**THE RE-CREATION OF SELVES**

I was saying just now that philosophy was a way of reflecting on our relationship to truth. It should also be added that it is a way of interrogating ourselves: if this is the relationship that we have with truth, how must we behave? I believe that a considerable and varied amount of work has been done and is still being done that alters both our relation to truth and our way of behaving. And this has taken place in a complex situation, between a whole series of investigations and a whole set of social movements. It's the very life of philosophy.

Michel Foucault, interview 1980

In Section III of this dissertation, we explored important criticisms brought to bear on Foucault's *oeuvre* by liberal and marxist thinkers. These concerns are primarily linked to theoretical understandings of power, human subjectivity and truth, both ontologically, in terms of conflicting descriptions of Being and the way in which identity and meaning is construed; and politically, in terms of the way in which a subject might overcome power/knowledge impositions. In the previous two chapters, I introduced and resolved questions related to Foucault's conception of the subject and identity, or truth, but have yet to explore the parallels he draws between truth and politics, and the way in which political activity might be affirmed in his work. This is the central problem posed in this disserta-

tion for resolution. In the following chapters, we will turn to Foucault's final two complete and published books, *The History of Sexuality* (Volumes 2 and 3), in an attempt to bring closure to this paper and show Foucault's work to be coherent

Michel Foucault's final work, contained in the final two volumes which he was able to complete and publish, as well as a wide selection of articles, lectures, and interviews, make up a compendium of studies into sexuality and the political consequences of this construct. In these books, Foucault will link sexuality, as an ancient ethical problem, to modern bio-politics, and the ensuing disciplines within which the human being is subjected as a result of this political agenda. More importantly, Foucault explores ancient Stoic "techniques of the self" which might be brought to bear on the modern self towards overcoming the oppressive effects of power and knowledge relations. He describes these techniques as "those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, *but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being*, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria."<sup>1</sup> This is Foucault's most fascinating, and perhaps his most original and scholastically brilliant, work. However, much of the *History of Sexuality* (Volumes 2 and 3) are complex genealogies of sexuality and its problematization during Greek, Early Roman, and Early Christian times, and I do not want to delve too deeply here. Instead, Part IV of this dissertation will focus on a relationship to the self which is inspired by Ancient Greco-Roman philosophy and which Foucault seemingly wants to resurrect in modernity as a *practice*.

In the proceeding chapter, I explore Volumes 2 and 3 of Foucault's trilogy on sexuality simultaneously. The reason for this is that Foucault does not provide material that is very different in one book or the other. The final part of this dissertation seeks not to critique two books with different concerns, but rather to describe ethical and philosophical

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), pp. 11, 10-11. My emphasis.

constructs that were part of ancient concerns around sexuality and which Foucault seeks to apply in the modern context. In the chapters ahead I seek to bring closure to Foucault's *oeuvre*, successfully linking his ethics for thought with the constitution of the modern human subject within power-knowledge relations. Foucault thus presents philosophy and reason as innately *political* tasks which have the ability to undermine epistemological, and thus ontological, constraints on the subject.

*Chapter Eight:*  
**CARE OF THE SELF**

My problem is the relation of self to self and of telling the truth...the relation between 'telling the truth' and forms of reflexivity, of self upon self.

Michel Foucault, interview.

My aim is not to write the social history of prohibition but the political history of the production of 'truth.'

Michel Foucault, interview

If I wanted to pose and drape myself in a slightly fictional style, I would say that this has always been my problem: the effects of power and the production of 'truth'...My problem is the politics of truth.

Michel Foucault, interview

In his final period, Foucault is primarily interested in ethics, this understood as a practice on the body, and the exploration of forms of comportment which are tied to a particular code of living. In the *History of Sexuality* (Volumes 2 and 3) (1984), Foucault looks back to the Greeks for a model which might serve modern philosophical criticism. In the Stoics he finds the notion of the *agon*, the internal struggle against desire. He writes: "For the Stoics, it was primarily a matter of preparing oneself for possible privations by discovering

how easy it was, finally, to dispense with everything to which habit, opinion, education, attention to reputation, and the taste for ostentation have attached us.”<sup>1</sup> He adopts this for his own work, but with an important difference.

The Stoics were centrally concerned with overcoming internal emotions or desire in an attempt to master the self. “To master the self” meant to bring emotion into line with reason, or to render Desire subject to Reason; the former was thus denigrated in light of the trustworthy and useful latter. However, while Foucault certainly affirms reason as a central and essential feature of human existence in modernity, he is not prepared to place trust in this part of our beings at the expense of desire. Foucault uses the basic premise of the *agon*, then, while seeking a very different end. This critical examination of the self which the *agon* entails

“is not established so much in the form of a judicial relationship in which the accused faces the judge; it is more like *an act of inspection* in which the inspector aims to evaluate a piece of work, an accomplished task...*This inspection is a test of power and a guarantee of freedom: a way of always making sure that one will not become attached to that which does not come under our control.*”<sup>2</sup>

The subject is thus challenged to contest pre-established and unquestioned truths in order to gain a greater awareness of self. The *agon* involves a deep *caring* of the self, not in the Greek tradition so much (which strove to better the self towards civic participation), but rather within a process towards *knowing* the self. When the subject reaches this position it might be said that he enjoys a freedom to think as an individual and remain in a constant and critical dialogue with accepted norms and values. This self-knowledge involves discovering which truths are imposed upon the self, and deciding how one would incorporate such impositions within the self, or attempt to alter them in some way. In Foucault's words:

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 3), p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 62, 64. My emphasis.

“One cannot care for self without knowledge. The care for self is of course *knowledge of self*--that is the Socratic-Platonic aspect--but it is also the knowledge of a certain number of rules of conduct or of principles which are at the same time truths and regulations. To care for self is to fit one's self out with these truths. *This is where ethics is linked to the game of truth.*”<sup>3</sup>

While Foucault does not affirm an *authentic* self, he does give credence to a process of self-making, or a struggle for subjective truth towards establishing a personal set of ethics. Foucauldian ethics consists primarily of a critical and suspicious stance taken *vis-à-vis* “games of truth”, or the point at which power and knowledge intersect in the creation of an epistemological or ontological truth statement which is imposed upon the subject. It is this chapter's central task to investigate the relationship which Foucault describes between modern truth and subjectivity. Once this is understood, we will be in a position to explore the link between Foucault's critique of such truth and his “politics of the self”.

The notion of “games of truth” is of vital importance in Foucault's work. While he would not wish to label himself as such, Foucault fits within the Poststructuralist philosophic tradition, which rejects universal truth statements. For Foucault, freedom is sought and gained in the process of questioning totalizing and inherently oppressive discourses. Freedom, and the ethics practiced as a result of such freedom is intricately tied to a working on the self as an art form, an entity which is understood to be *transformable*. In this way,

“the experience of self that forms itself in this possession [of a self-formed relationship with self] is not simply that of a force overcome, or a rule exercised over a power that is on the point of rebelling; it is the experience of a pleasure that one takes in oneself. The individual who has finally succeeded in gaining access to himself is, for himself, an object of pleasure.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984,” in *The Final Foucault*, p. 5. My emphasis.

<sup>4</sup>*The History of Sexuality* (Volume 3), p. 66.

The free subject for Foucault is the person who has been able to question that which has been imposed, and work on the self towards creating something new or different.

This practice is ethical in that the subject practices a personal credo which seeks to clarify a subjective truth. This is a constant struggle, a resistance, which takes place on a continuous basis. Foucault calls this process “practices of the self”, which involves the critical application of reason on knowledge systems (and resultant truths) which have emerged in modernity as constitutive of subjectivity.<sup>5</sup> In his words,

“criticism--understood as analysis of the historical conditions which bear on the creation of links to truth, to rules, and to the self--does not mark out impassable boundaries or describe closed systems; *it brings to light transformable singularities. These transformations could not take place except by means of a working of thought upon itself; that is the principle of the history of thought as critical activity.*”<sup>6</sup>

This is an innately political task on the part of reason and reinforces Foucault’s description of the self as created through history. I wish to explore how Foucault links his genealogies of ancient desire and the ways in which such desire was philosophically problematized. Foucault will use this model to produce a modern and innately political ethics which might be brought to bear on the knowledge structures which constitute identity and experience in modernity. Important to remember is that Foucault describes the human self as a mere construction within discourse and history. As far as an innate human essence is concerned, Foucault

“refused [to] first of all set up a theory of the subject...What I wanted to know was how the subject constituted himself, in such and such a determined form, as a mad subject or as a normal subject, through a certain number of practices which were games of truth, applications of power, etc. I had to reject a certain *apriori* theory of the subject in order to make this analysis of the relationships which can exist between the

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<sup>5</sup>*The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), p. 30.

<sup>6</sup>Foucault, “Preface to *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2,*” in *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 335-336.

constitution of the subject or different forms of the subject and games of truth, practices of power and so forth.”<sup>7</sup>

Foucault thus rejects a “truth” of the self, wishing instead to problematize how it is such truth is constructed within a discourse and through a history.

The *History of Sexuality* trilogy serves as a genealogy of desire, and investigates the way in which human beings have been constructed as desiring objects, and subjectified within socially acceptable and modulated norms. Foucault asks the following questions in order to intellectually position himself before studying modern ontological systems and their affects on human subjects: “[H]ow, why and in what forms was sexuality constituted as a moral domain? Why this ethical concern that was so persistent despite its varying forms and intensity? Why this ‘problematization’?”<sup>8</sup> In other words, Foucault seeks to answer how it was that sexuality came to exist as of intellectual, moral, social and political interest. He is interested in what took place in societies, going as far back as the Greeks, around the notion of sexuality and the act of engaging in sex, to define a role *proper* to such acts.

### GRECO-ROMAN DESIRE

Foucault writes that, in antiquity, emphasis was not placed on aligning oneself with a strict moral code, but rather on an ethical practice which could induce a desired change in the self. Ultimately, desire was conceptualized as a problem of *aphrodisia*, the appetites, and the way in which these would necessarily have to be controlled in order to ensure a healthy, balanced life. However, this was far more related to a process of self-formation than denial (as would be common within Christian practice since St. Augustine), much more “oriented toward practices of the self and the question of *askésis*<sup>9</sup> than toward codifications of con-

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<sup>7</sup>“The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” p. 10.

<sup>8</sup>Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup>In *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), Foucault describes *askésis* as “an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.” (p. 9)

ducts and the strict definition of what is permitted and what is forbidden.”<sup>10</sup> Foucault makes a clear distinction here between two radically opposed spiritual practices. On the one hand, those (Christian) practices which have as their focal point the actualization of a saintly state, or a morality, the practicing of a strictly-defined dogma; on the other, a Greco-Roman relationship to the body which was not so much concerned with morality as with a personal self-mastery, or an *ethics*:

“The [Greco-Roman] accent was placed on the relationship with the self that enabled a person to keep from being carried away by the appetites and pleasures, to maintain a mastery and superiority over them, to keep his senses in a state of tranquillity, to remain free from interior bondage to the passions, and to achieve a mode of being that could be defined by the full enjoyment of oneself, or the perfect supremacy of oneself over oneself.”<sup>11</sup>

Foucault shows in *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2) that desire was certainly problematized by these early civilizations, but through a very different process and with a different intention. While St. Augustine and early Christianity would introduce themes of austerity and self-denial similar to the Greek tradition, with a view of the world similar to the cosmology of the middle ages--or at least a pantheistic conception of the world and those who ruled it--Stoics sought the good life above and beyond what Taylor calls “ordinary life”. The ancient sense of “the good life” was a striving for the immortal by a select few. Running through the various schools of philosophic thought at the time were themes of moderation, contemplation, and pacification of desires. The latter could be problematized, not in terms of a social theme and morality that would be imposed later in history, but as a theme of the self, part of the process of a conscious self-making, or *aské-sis*.

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<sup>10</sup>*The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), p. 30.

<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*, p. 31.

What formed a moral problem for the ancients was not the source of one's desire, nor the way in which it was carried out,

“not exactly the act itself (considered in its different modalities), or desire (viewed from the standpoint of its origin or its aims), or even pleasure...it was more the dynamics that joined all three in a circular fashion...The ethical question that was raised was not: what desires? which acts? which pleasures? but rather: with what force is one transported ‘by the pleasures and desires’?”<sup>12</sup>

The Greeks thus problematized *aphrodisia* (the desires) and simultaneously affirmed a self-working through the process of *askesis* (or asceticism), but not in the Christian sense of the word. It was more of a self-imposed discipline than a rigidly defined and external moral credo. They conceived of themselves as moral agents, and their moral reflection was centred on the degree to which the pleasures “transported” or moved the self either towards or away from true connection with the “good life”.<sup>13</sup> Foucault goes on to describe the ways in which different types of sexual activities were dealt with in the ancient world: homosexuality, adultery, sleeping with servants etc.<sup>14</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation I don't feel it important to delve too deeply here, but rather, now that we have a basic introduction to the central themes of these later works, I wish to go on and see how Foucault relates this to the present.

The Foucauldian triad of knowledge-power-ethics relations serves as the core of his work into the systems of truth production and their application in modern society. In his final works, Foucault investigates these notions within the realm of sexuality, problematizing the word itself, and coming to show how the word has historically been constructed as a *concept*. Foucault's genealogies investigating sexuality are aimed at understanding the “experience of the sexuality,”

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<sup>12</sup>ibid., p. 43.

<sup>13</sup>ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 3), Parts 4-6.

*“where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture...to analyze the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves, a certain relationship that allows them to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen...the idea was to investigate how individuals were led to practice, on themselves and others, a hermeneutics of desire, a hermeneutics of which their sexual behaviour was doubtless the occasion, but certainly not the exclusive domain.”<sup>15</sup>*

The genealogy presented in the *History of Sexuality* trilogy focuses on the experience of sexuality, as this has come to have meaning for us in modernity as a concept which springs forth from an inner self, but only in order to problematize the role of desire, and the way in which the modern has come to be recognized in himself an interior space which can be explored and defined scientifically. “...I felt obliged to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self and the forming of oneself as a subject, taking as my domain of reference and field of investigation what might be called ‘the history of desiring man’.”<sup>16</sup>

#### A “THEORETICAL SHIFT”

“Sexuality” is a complex theoretical construct, and I would like to explore this notion further and link it to ancient ethical practices which Foucault is interested in resurrecting in modernity. I have thus far described two periods in Foucault’s work, each reinforcing one another to render a critique of modernity which centres around commonly-held (but problematic) notions of the subject. The central problem for Foucault is the humanist tradition, which does not only include the liberal tradition, but has been used by a number of different ideologies as a prop.<sup>17</sup> He wished to problematize the types of “truth” that emerge out

<sup>15</sup>The *History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), pp. 4, 5. My emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Consider the following quite, as a matter of interest:

of such a paradigm, once a seemingly coherent and sustainable theory of the subject is established. In the first two parts of this dissertation, we covered two periods of Foucault's theory of the modern subject: first, his work concerned with the production of knowledge around the subject (in particular those human sciences which have as their central concern the exploration of "human nature"), and second, his work which dealt with the implementation of these knowledges within the social fabric through power relations.

Towards the end of his life, Foucault describes his work as having undergone a "theoretical shift", "in order to analyze what is termed 'the subject.' It seemed appropriate to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself *qua* subject."<sup>18</sup> What we are left with is a genealogy of the truth surrounding the modern subject, the way in which we conceive of this entity, the way in which statements are rendered true not only in an archaeological sense, but within the network of power relations which run through society. Foucault's project, overall, then, is

"the effort to isolate some of the elements which might be useful for a history of truth. Not a history that would be concerned with what might be true in the fields of learning, but an analysis of the 'games of truth,' *the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted*

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"Through...different practices--psychological, medical, penitential, educational—a certain idea or model of humanity was developed, and now this idea of man has become normative, self-evident, and is supposed to be universal. Humanism may not be universal but may be quite relative to a certain situation. What we call humanism has been used by Marxists, liberals, Nazis, Catholics. This does not mean that we have to get rid of what we call human rights or freedom, but that we can't say that freedom or human rights has to be limited to certain frontiers...What I am afraid of about humanism 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: the Left, the Center, the Right." (From "Truth, Power, Self: An Interview" in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, p. 15. My emphasis.)

<sup>18</sup>*The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), p. 6.

*experience; that is, as something that can and must be thought.*"<sup>19</sup>

The work in his final period is the intersection between a genealogy of desire which is continued from his work started in *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1), and his investigations into ways in which sexuality was problematized in the ancient Roman and Greek empires; additionally, and more importantly for our purposes, Foucault's final work introduces his interest in exploring the notion of *truth* and the subject, the ways in which truth is both accepted by the subject, but also how truth might be problematized and overturned by the philosophically critical subject. Philosophy for Foucault is ultimately a criticism, a suspicious application of reason on thought. It is here that his politics around the self emerges, as he presents the ability for the modern subject to critique and problematize present truth formations and relations, and reconstruct the self on lines other than the norm.

I would like to delve deeper into Foucault's work on truth, by introducing the new ideas he presents in the final two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. The most central of these is the notion of an "aesthetics of the self" which is not based upon an essential human core from which objective human meaning might be derived. I would like to investigate how Foucault explains this process theoretically, and what it entails. This can only be properly understood, however, in addressing two fundamental aspects of Foucault's work: first, his understanding of truth, meaning, or identity (this is the ontological question relating to the subject as defined by Taylor); second, given the accusations of political quietism directed at his work by the marxists, we need to describe Foucault's understanding of the production of the subject within power relations--these questions direct themselves simultaneously to the ways in which power and knowledge intersect to produce a subject, as well as to the political options and alternatives open to this constituted subject which Foucault provides in his final publications.

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<sup>19</sup>ibid., pp. 6-7. My emphasis.

## ETHICAL SELF-MAKING AND TRUTH

Foucault recognizes his project, especially as presented within this final works, as an innately politically one. It involves a critique of the relationship between knowledge and practice, and specifically of the relationship between truth and the constitution of the subject. Ultimately, Foucault wished to problematize a limiting truth of Man which is imposed through power-knowledge relations. He writes:

“I conceived of a rather odd project: not the evolution of sexual behaviour but the projection of a history of the link between the obligation to tell the truth and the prohibitions against sexuality. I asked: How had the subject been compelled to decipher himself in regard to what was forbidden? *It is a question of the relation between asceticism and truth.*”<sup>20</sup>

This space between truth on the one hand, and prohibitions on the other is exactly where a problematization occurs. The politics of how one responds to this paradigm is what interests Foucault, not only in terms of the subject and his sexuality, but in the relationship of the self to any set of moral codes or socially reinforced behaviour. In other words, Foucault is interested in how it is that the subject is brought to bear a particular practice upon his own body, to effect various changes to the self. Similarly, he is interested in the degree to which the subject can effectively challenge socially imposed norms, through this process of *askésis*, or self-making.

It is important to discuss Foucault’s conception of truth, especially in relation to the humanist conception of “desiring man”, this the theoretical and epistemological result of a modern discourse on Man, which emphasises essence and origin as we have seen in *The Order of Things*. Foucault’s project is not so much a rejection of truth, as it is a problematization of those forms of knowledge and their social practice which we take for granted, which are accepted as natural, ahistorical, or scientifically certain. Truth, as explored pre-

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<sup>20</sup>Foucault, “Technologies of the Self,” in *Technologies of the Self*, p. 17. My emphasis.

viously in “The Subject and Power”, is intrinsically linked to the production and circulation of knowledge, with specific reference to the birth of Man as a known entity. Foucault states his theoretical objective as having been

“to sketch out a history of the different ways in our culture that humans develop knowledge about themselves: economics, biology, psychiatry, medicine, and penology. *The main point is not to accept this knowledge at face value but to analyze the so-called sciences as very specific ‘truth games’ related to specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves.*”<sup>21</sup>

He is interested in defining the way in which the subject is constituted within knowledge, as an *object* of knowledge, and secondly, the way in which this knowledge is internalized in the process of *subjectification*. In other words, how is it that modern subjects understand themselves, both within knowledge (epistemologically), and as conscious beings (ontologically)? We have seen in *The Order of Things* that Foucault rejects the notion of a grounded, unified subject; in this book, he shows that knowledge of this entity emerged at a particular time in history, and is thus contingent and subject to transformation.

In his “ethics” period, Foucault investigates the ways in which subjects come to problematize or accept identities which have been forced upon them, and begins to outline the innately political activity which results from thought (or philosophy) being critical of self-evident and accepted knowledge structures. When asked in a late interview (January 1984) whether his work at the time still revolved around the relationship between subjectivity and truth, Foucault replied:

“I have tried to discover how the human subject entered into games of truth, whether they be games of truth which take on the form of science or which refer to a scientific model, or games of truth like those which can be found in institutions or practices of control. That is the theme of my book *The Order of Things*, where I’ve tried to see how, in scien-

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<sup>21</sup>“Technologies of the Self,” pp. 17-18. My emphasis.

tific creation, the human subject will be defined as an individual who talks, who works, who lives.”<sup>22</sup>

In the extremely informative interview from which the above is taken, Foucault outlines quite clearly the way in which he links reason as a critical tool with a certain practice upon the self, an ethics, this an inherently political project and which, I believe, will answer the criticism levelled at his work by the marxists in Part III of this dissertation. Once we have understood the way in which Foucault defines truth, the relationship between knowledge and power, and the way in which the latter circulates, we can begin to look at Foucault’s work as a totality: an ethics of thought. Let us move right into the way in which Foucault defines this ethics, and the way in which this interacts with power relations as he has previously described them.

“Ethics” is an apt word to describe Foucault’s final period, precisely for the reason that it delineates the boundaries within which his thought works. With the subject and its relationship to knowledge and power as the central theme running throughout his work, in his final period Foucault turns from investigations into how these two forces intersect in the subject’s constitution, to an exploration of ways in which the subject forms itself in relation to these. From here, Foucault can concentrate on the subject as constitutive of its own self against the impositions of knowledge and power. Ultimately, his project works to describe and problematize the frontiers of truth, the limits within which modern thought operates, both in modern epistemology’s ability to know and construct truthful statements, the way in which particular actions within society are deemed truthful or normal, and also the way in which the subject ingests these norms and interiorizes them to form some understanding of the self. Foucault writes that he shifted his theoretical focus away from knowledge and power to investigate *ethics*, to examine “the forms of discursive practices that articulated the human sciences. A theoretical shift had also been required in order to analyze what is often

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<sup>22</sup>“The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” p. 1.

described as the manifestations of 'power'; it led me [sf. Foucault] to examine, rather, the manifold relations, the open strategies, and the rational techniques that articulated the exercise of powers."<sup>23</sup>

This new investigation Foucault describes as having as its focus "what is termed 'the subject.'"<sup>24</sup> Foucault is interested in truth and the way in which this is constructed within society, with particular reference to the human subject. The way in which he concludes these investigations is, in my opinion, innately political. The ethics which he offers entails a questioning of the constituted subject in terms of its particular construction in modernity as the centre of knowledge, and the ability for thought to re-examine its own history and composition in a radically critical way. In this way, Foucault can conclude that there exist a number of possible ways of living, of conceiving of politics and indeed of human consciousness:

"It is experience which is the rationalization of a process, itself provisional, which results in a subject, or rather, in subjects. I [sf. Foucault] will call subjectivization the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of the subject, or more precisely, of the subjectivity which is of course *only one of the given possibilities of organization of a self-consciousness.*"<sup>25</sup>

This process is innately political for Foucault, because in allowing ourselves to think differently, or to conceive of another reality, we both question present forms of knowledge and truths which are imposed upon us as normative and necessary, as well as provide the foundation within our minds to think Other than our present reality, to construe new political systems and ways of being. In this way, philosophy exists as a political tool for Foucault to the degree that thought can both critique and reject present truths, as well as in-

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<sup>23</sup> *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, "The Return of Morality," interview by Gilles Barbadette and André Scala, in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 253. My emphasis.

vent new realities for the future. Philosophy then is always “a way of reflecting on our relationship to truth...”<sup>26</sup>

“...It should also be added that it is a way of interrogating ourselves: if this is the relationship that we have with truth, how must we behave? I [sf. Foucault] believe that a considerable and varied amount of work has been done and is still being done that alters both our relation to truth and our way of behaving. And this has take place in a complex situation, between a whole series of investigations and a whole set of social movements. It’s the very life of philosophy.”<sup>27</sup>

Two things contained in the above two quotes strike me as of fundamental importance to Foucault’s overall project: first, the relationship which the modern subject enjoys with his rational faculty, or the ability which Foucault affirms for the modern to think critically of the world around himself; second, the tremendous freedom to bring about change which seems to be enjoyed by the subject conscious of such an ability. Both these factors, combined in a freedom of thought to think Other than itself, delimits Foucault’s politics, which we will investigate in more detail in the following chapter. In his description of reason as a critical and *political* tool, and the inherent freedom which this paradigm includes, Foucault provides the basis for vindicating his conceptions of both the human subject and power *vis á vis* the marxist critiques presented in Part III.

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<sup>26</sup>Foucault, “The Masked Philosopher,” interview by Christian Delacampagne, in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 330.

<sup>27</sup>*ibid.*

*Chapter Nine:*  
**AN ETHICS FOR THOUGHT**

From a strictly philosophical point of view the morality of Greek antiquity and contemporary morality have nothing in common. On the other hand, if one considers these respective moralities in terms of what they prescribe, intimate, and advise, they are extraordinarily close. It is important to point out the proximity and the difference, and, through their interplay, to show how the same advice given by ancient morality can function differently in a contemporary style of morality.

Michel Foucault, interview

*The History of Sexuality* (Volumes 2 and 3) serve in the first place as genealogies of desiring man, or a “hermeneutics of desire”, in Foucault’s words.<sup>1</sup> In addition, and I think this is the most crucial point I would like to make in the final part of this dissertation, is that Foucault implies a type of action upon the self which works towards effecting an ontological transformation within it, and an altered self-consciousness. Epistemologically, we have seen how Foucault rejects the notion of a centred, ahistorical subject, as well as any semblance of an “interior” source of desire which could be called innately “human”. In turn, and through this process, he obviously denies an ontological position for Man: being does not exist in any fixed sense, but is created through the interplay between knowledge and

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), p. 5.

power. What I wish to argue, however, is that this situation does not lead to a state of nihilism, ontologically or politically, for the very reason that Foucault uses ancient philosophy to outline an *askésis*, a practice upon the self *in light of power-knowledge relations*. Instead of an ontology appropriate to modern man, however, he offers an ethics for thought with which to critically examine and modulate action. In this chapter, I seek to show that Foucault's work protects the three revered goods of the Enlightenment (freedom, truth, and reason); simultaneously, however, his ethics contains a political project which rejects a unified humanist conception of the subject and yet remains coherent and positive in its prospects for future change.

In his work thus far, we have seen Foucault interested in the ways in which the subject is constituted. This process began with his exploration of knowledge structures which provide an epistemological understanding of the subject, as we saw in Part I. In the second phase of his work, Foucault began to explore ways in which social practices emerged out of this objectifying body of knowledge, to render a normative description of the Perfect Man. Here we see various processes at work whereby society, through various practices, imposes itself upon the individual. This is a two-fold approach: it involves first a judgement of the individual against an objective norm; second, it involves a bio-political knowledge of the individual as part of a population, and its integration into a state agenda. In this third phase, Foucault seeks to explore ways in which subjects understand themselves in light of the above processes. It seems to me that this is a two-fold project in itself: on the one hand, we have the creation of the desiring subject, who might accept social impositions and understand himself in light of the ontological truths that initially constructed him. The second part of this process is the creation of the political being, who critically analyzes power/knowledge relations and reconstitutes himself as a creature of art, who applied reason to the very thought processes which initially constituted the self, in order to render these problematic.

Foucault's ethics stands at the centre of his politics of the self and the key concern of this chapter. His ethics is presented as antagonistic in relation to the discursive bodies which constitute human subjectivity and which are responsible for the subjection implicit in this humanist knowledge. We have already outlined the humanist ontological understanding of the modern subject as an entity with depth which is conceived as stable. What I wish to explore further is the political project inherent in the ethics which Foucault offers to the critical modern subject, and the degree to which the capacity for human freedom and political agency is not only provided for in Foucault's work on ethics, but also affirmed as a central responsibility of the modern subject, the heir of Enlightenment reason.

What I would specifically like to examine are the ways in which the critical human being understands him- or herself against these games of truth and works to undermine socially accepted norms. I believe this to be an innately political task, undertaken at the core of what Foucault presents as a very new approach to an understanding of both the modern subject and ways in which this subject might engage himself politically. Foucault has already described modern politics as "a politics of ourselves", and I want to explore this in terms of the critiques levelled at his work. I wish first to look at the question of the politics of Foucault's project; second, the question of freedom in relation to this; third, and most important, the way in which reason and a critical understanding of the historical creation of knowledge of Man is central to Foucault's project and renders his *oeuvre* both theoretically complete and politically coherent.

### **THE SELF AND POLITICAL PRACTICE**

Foucault draws a direct parallel between an ethics of self-conduct and behavior which concentrates on a care of the self, and a politics inherent in this process. We have seen Foucault look back to classical Greece and Rome for models on which to base his ethics. The notion of "care of the self", and the process of self-making or constructing the self along a particular ethical line of thought, the "'ascetics' that enabled one to make oneself into an ethical subject was an integral part--down to its very form--of the practice of a vir-

tuous life, which was also the life of a ‘free’ man in the full, positive and political sense of the word.”<sup>2</sup> Why would this be so? We can only understand the relationship between individual ethics and a political activity inherent in this after examining the way in which the Greeks defined virtue and the qualities which were required of their rulers.

In *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 3), Foucault charts the close relationship of an ethics of self and the power to govern, especially in relation to the Roman imperial advance on ancient Greece. Ancient ethics were directly tied to political activity for two reasons: first, this type of self-examination was usually reserved for free men of the elite; and second, and more importantly, because this practice on the self publicly defined the degree to which one was capable of ruling a group: “this principle applies to anyone who governs: he must attend to himself, guide his own soul, establish his own *éthos*.”<sup>3</sup> Under such conditions, politics existed as a “practice”,<sup>4</sup> and “the art of governing oneself [as] a crucial political factor”<sup>5</sup>:

“A whole elaboration of the self by oneself was necessary for these [political] tasks, which would be accomplished all the better because one did not identify in an ostentatious way with the trappings of power...It is the modality of a rational being and not the qualification of a status that establishes and ought to determine, in their concrete form, relations between the governors and the governed.”<sup>6</sup>

In this, we see a closely-defined relationship between the way one conducts oneself, this influenced directly by the degree to which one is in “knowledge” of oneself, and the degree to which one is capable of holding high political office: “Self-mastery had implied a close connection between the superiority one exercised over oneself, the authority one exercised in the context of the household, and the power one exercised in the field of an agonistic

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<sup>2</sup>ibid., p. 77.

<sup>3</sup>Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 3), p. 89.

<sup>4</sup>ibid., p. 87.

<sup>5</sup>ibid., p. 89.

<sup>6</sup>ibid., pp. 90, 91.

society. It was the practice of superiority over oneself that guaranteed the moderate and reasonable use that one could and ought to make of the two other superiorities.”<sup>7</sup> An “ascetics of the self”, which required a careful mastering of the natural urges, (*aphrodisia*), was absolutely necessary for a mastering of the self towards attaining wisdom and the ability to lead. Implicit in this paradigm was the need for rational leaders who would not abuse public office. The way in which one related to the self was directly related to the way in which a leader, who was in control of himself, would govern a group. *Éthos*, and a rational way of living, could only result in fair conduct within political office and ensure a commensurate care for the population at large. In this way, Foucault links ethics and political practice:

“I [sf. Foucault] think that the relationships between philosophy and politics are permanent and fundamental. It is certain that if one takes the history of the care for self in Greek thought, the relationships to politics is obvious...on the one hand, you see Socrates...who calls out to the young people, ‘Hey, you, you want to become a political person, you want to govern the city, you therefore want to take care of others but you did not even take care of yourself, and if you do not take care of yourself, you will be a bad leader’...the care for self appears like a pedagogical, moral and also ontological condition, for the constitution of a good leader.”<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, Foucault distinguishes this ethos, this care for the self, as a delimiting force on relationships of power. If one has control over one’s emotions, and is able to make wise decisions regardless of “one’s whims, one’s appetites, one’s desires,” then one is in a position to resist the temptation to dominate those in less powerful social positions.<sup>9</sup> This positive ethical stance can work to convert power in a sense, away from a model of domination to one of mutual benefit; it is a “way of controlling and limiting” power:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>8</sup>Foucault, “The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984,” in *The Final Foucault*,” p. 13.

<sup>9</sup>ibid., p. 8.

<sup>10</sup>ibid.

“the image of the tyrant or simply of the powerful and wealthy man who takes advantage of his power and his wealth to misuse others, to impose on them undue power...this man is in reality a slave to his appetites. And the good ruler is precisely the one who exercises his power correctly, i.e., by exercising at the same time his power on himself. *And it is the power over self which will regulate the power over others.*”<sup>11</sup>

Ethics in the Greek world, measured by the degree of mastery an individual exhibited over his self and its desires, established whether one would be able to rule justly and with wisdom, hereby ensuring that domination over those governed would not ensue. Ethics is thus innately political, and in two essential ways. Not only is this ethics something applied to one's body and mind, but from this, to the social body at large; “it constituted, not an exercise in solitude, but a true *social practice*...The care of the self--or the attention one devotes to the care that others should take of themselves--appears then as an *intensification of social relations*.”<sup>12</sup> An ethical political existence served to foster relations within society. But what of freedom? How does Foucault link an ethical practice on the self with a liberty, the ability to act and think for oneself? This is the second question which I would like to address here.

### **THE EXISTENCE AND ROLE OF FREEDOM IN FOUCAULT'S ETHICS**

Foucault describes the Greek ethics of self, or aesthetics of the self, as requiring an explicitly active role on the part of the subject, a task which required agency and intervention on the part of the self on the self. A moral action is such that it leads to a “self-formation as an ‘ethical subject’.”<sup>13</sup> This requires the self-constituting subject to

“act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and *transform himself*. There is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.* My emphasis.

<sup>12</sup> *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 3), pp. 51, 53. My emphasis.

<sup>13</sup> *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), p. 28.

call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without 'modes of subjectivation' and an 'ascetics' or 'practices of the self' that support them. *Moral action is indissociable from these forms of self-activity, and they do not differ any less from one morality to another than do the systems of values, rules and interdictions.*"<sup>14</sup>

How does Foucault describe the relation of human agency or freedom to this practice on the self, and how might this describe process begin to answer marxist concerns? Foucault introduces two Greek words in *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), which I believe describe this relationship. First, *sôphrosyné*, which is a word used to describe actions which are deemed necessary or desired in social terms, versus *enkrateia*, which describes a *personal* activity in defining the self. In Foucault's words: "the term *enkrateia* in the classical vocabulary seems to refer in general to the dynamics of a domination of oneself by oneself and to the effort that this demands."<sup>15</sup> *Enkrateia* is thus defined more as "an active form of self-mastery [versus *sôphrosyné* which is chiefly concerned with choosing "what is fitting"<sup>16</sup> ], which enables one to resist or struggle, and to achieve domination in the area of desires or pleasures."<sup>17</sup> It is the explicit task of producing a desired effect upon the body, the way of bringing the *aphrodisia* into line with a desired mode of action and conduct. It is an exercise which can be likened to a domination of self over self, or the battle of *logos* with *thumos*, the rational with the irrational or emotive faculties, which is the classical Platonic position and remains to inform the Roman approach to the divisions within the self.

While *enkrateia* is the active forming of a desired self, *sôphrosyné* is the action of introducing this transformed self to public or social life. Implicit in this process too is the notion of a central requirement in agency; the ability to conduct oneself in the way of what

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<sup>14</sup>ibid. My emphasis.

<sup>15</sup>ibid., p. 65.

<sup>16</sup>ibid., p. 64.

<sup>17</sup>ibid.

is deemed right or “fitting”: “*Sóphrosyné* was a state that could be approached through the exercise of self-mastery and through restraint in the practice of pleasures; it was characterized as a freedom.”<sup>18</sup> Between a practice of freedom on the self, and the practice of an acquired wisdom in the governing of one’s life publicly, we see the emergence of a two-fold practice of freedom: first, the ability to work upon the body, to be self-reflexive and self-critical as implied in the striving towards a required personal goal; second, the practice of this acquired liberty within the public arena, as a political ethos or action. In classical Greece, “[t]he freedom that needed establishing and preserving was that of the citizens of a collectivity of course, but it was also, for each of them, a certain form of relationship of the individual with himself.”<sup>19</sup>

What emerges here is the possibility of a practice of freedom which is at one and the same time ethical *and* political, with liberty or the freedom to act as pivotal in defining this relationship. Innate to the process of *enkrateia* and *sóphrosyné* is freedom, a liberty which is at one and the same time political and ethical. Thus, one of Foucault’s most important articles defining and clarifying his final work is aptly named “The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom”. Foucault describes freedom is an *innate* part of the process by which one works on the self and acquires the necessary skills and insight to serve within the public realm. For Foucault, in fact, there is little distinction to be made between ethics and liberty, or the condition within which to practice a freedom: “[W]hat is morality [ethics], if not the practice of liberty, the *deliberate* practice of liberty?...*Liberty is the ontological condition of ethics...ethics is the deliberate form assumed by liberty.*”<sup>20</sup> Foucault asserts that in order to practice an ethics or a morality (even though a distinction is made), the ontological condition of this practice is the presence of freedom. The subject resisting power-knowledge relations does so within a “cocoon” of freedom. Human agency, the

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<sup>18</sup>ibid., p. 78.

<sup>19</sup>ibid., p. 79.

<sup>20</sup>“The Ethic of Care of the Self as a Practice of Freedom,” p. 4.

ability to act, is not only secured within Foucault's political paradigm as an necessary ontological condition within which to practice an ethics of thought, but a *responsibility* as indicated by Foucault in his affirmation in "What is Enlightenment" of the modern role of reason. The modern subject has a responsibility and a *duty* to act, and does so with an ethics paradigm that innately affirms the ability to act freely.

A personal ethics and social political activity were intrinsically linked for the ancients: implicated in, and essential for, such a relationship was the presence of freedom. This was the ontological condition and foundation for a political practice. In this way, the Greeks considered freedom in itself as a problem for political reflection and "as an ethical problem",<sup>21</sup>

"But ethical in the sense that Greeks could understand. *Ethos* was the deportment and the way to behave [*sóphrosyné*]. It was the subject's mode of being and a certain manner of acting visible to others. One's *ethos* was seen by his dress, by his bearing, by his gait, by the poise with which he reacts to events, etc. For them, that is the concrete expression of liberty. That is the way they 'problematized' their freedom."<sup>22</sup>

Liberty is directly tied to a political practice in that one is only free to practice a reflection on oneself in a particular political situation--as a free man. This is denied the slave and thus politically situates the subject who is engaged in a process of *epimeleia heauton*: care of the self; in this way, and because

"liberty signifies for the Greeks non-slavery...the problem is already entirely political. It is political in the measure that non-slavery with respect to others is a condition: a slave has no ethics. Liberty is then in itself political. And then, it has a political model, in the measure where being free means not being a slave to one's self and to one's appetites, which supposes that one establishes over one's self a certain rela-

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<sup>21</sup>ibid., p. 6.

<sup>22</sup>ibid.

tion of domination, of mastery, which was called *arche*--  
power, authority."<sup>23</sup>

Ethics and freedom are both intertwined in a relationship to freedom and politics, with the latter reinforcing one another. Freedom is exercised both politically, as outlined above, by the free man, as well as ontologically, in the creation of a mastered self. Now that we understand the close and essential relationship between freedom, politics, and ethics, I wish to explore how Foucault relates freedom and the practice of an ethics of self to power. Most importantly, in order to complete a Foucauldian answer to the marxist critique of his work, we resolve how truth related to politics. We seek to understand whether we can connect the work this dissertation has done on Foucault's first two periods which are concerned with modern knowledge and its intersection with power in the constitution of the modern subject, and his work on a political ethics which he conducts in his final work to countervail such power-knowledge impositions. Further, we seek to understand the point at which Foucault's work on ethics can be used to provide answers to the philosophical and political dilemmas which he present in his first two periods. Answers to these questions will vindicate Foucault against marxist critiques; simultaneously, it will bring closure and a positive conclusion to my initial thesis regarding the coherent and political nature of Foucault's work.

Foucault describes a power relationship first as containing within it free agents; second, power is described as a "relation between individuals," as the means to manipulate another's actions towards a desired outcome;<sup>24</sup> third, as a relation which is manifested by the struggle of opposing forces for hegemony: "the characteristic feature of power is that some men can more or less entirely determine other men's conduct--but never exhaustively or coercively."<sup>25</sup> Foucault uses the Greek work *agon* to describe the struggle which is in-

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<sup>23</sup>ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Foucault, "Politics and Reason," The Tanner Lectures on Human Values (Oct 10 and 16, 1979), in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 83. My emphasis.

<sup>25</sup>ibid.

dicative of this form of power, a word which I believe is fundamental to understanding his work on political ethics. He has described “*agon*” or “agonism” as “a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation.”<sup>26</sup> This describes both his definition of power, and of the proposed ability of the subject to question and destabilize power relations and their effects on individuals. Foucault rejects the possibility of a total ontological (or political) liberation of the subject, but does allow in his theory, and I believe that this is the strength of it, for a *resistance* on the part of individuals and groups to impositions of power. In defining a “politics of ourselves”, Foucault is primarily concerned with a critical rethinking of the notion of *identity*, and definitions of the normal or the right which are contained within epistemologies accepted as scientifically steadfast, and yet which suppress individuals. In the final part of this chapter, I would like to look at the way in which an ethics of *thought*, supported by liberty and the practice of agonistic struggle, define Foucault’s political project in ontological and epistemological terms. I believe that the key to understanding his final work, and thus his work in totality, lies in being able to link his analysis of the human sciences and the birth of Man conducted in *The Order of Things*, with his definition of power in his middle period, and his ethics of thought and action offered in the final works we have investigated. Let us turn our attention now to Foucault’s ethics, which is based on problematizing systems of thought and their imposition on modern man.

### MODERN REASON AS A CRITICAL TOOL

It is clear that Foucault’s project rotates centrally around a question of the status of truth in modernity, and the degree to which thought is contingent as the result of being based on an *epistémé* which is archaeologically definable. If we understand that Foucault relates epistemological and ontological truth to particular social and institutional practices that consti-

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<sup>26</sup>Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” p. 222.

tute subjects, then we arrive at a point where modern knowledge is intricately tied to social practice and ontological experience. In thinking within a particular paradigm, we limit ourselves to a particular structure of thought, a system of truths which are verifiable only within this particular structure and which by its very nature creates an Other, an anomalous entity within Unthought which falls outside of the rational or reasonable. Alternatively, if philosophy is adopted as a critical tool of analysis, which seeks to question and even undermine the relationship between knowledge and social practice, then *reason and its use assumes an innately political function and task.*

As far as the way in which truth interacts with power and knowledge in Foucault's work, and ultimately describes a particular form of politics, I would like to point to three fundamental points in his work: first, that thought is contingent and given to particular rules of formation as we have discovered in the Knowledge section of this paper; second, that these systems of knowledge work to delimit the types of activities and thoughts which are rendered permissible, valuable, and normal within a particular social field as outlined in Part II of this dissertation on power; third, that if we understand the relationship between the modern *epistémé* and Foucault's definition of power as constitutive of reality, then the possibility of overturning these systems or struggling against them is a real possibility and provides the basis for an *ethics of thought* which is innately political. It is through this model that I believe Foucault answers his marxist critics, and, above and beyond this victory, affirms a new type of political action with radical implications for social practice. In the final part of this thesis, I wish to relate this ethics to a practice of reason on thought in a new type of political action. Additionally, I wish to show how this ethics provided by Foucault affirms my thesis that he does in fact provide a coherent and cogent political project in his work, regardless of the fact it was tragically incomplete at the time of his death.

Foucault's work centres around a "price" of knowing oneself, and I believe a fundamental part of his intellectual ethos rotates around the degree to which the modern subject

is free to problematize identity, or an ontological truth which is imposed upon him in a restrictive way:<sup>27</sup>

“What interested me...were precisely the forms of rationality applied by the human subject to itself. While historians of science in France were interested essentially in the problem of how a scientific object is constituted, the question I asked myself was this: how 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? *This is my question: at what price can subject speak the truth about themselves?*”<sup>28</sup>

Foucault's *oeuvre* thus investigates truth as it has come to be constituted in modernity; second, and of equal if not more significant importance, his work is centrally concerned with “the price” individuals and society have had to pay as a result of modern truth systems, exclusive and as intolerant of Difference as our investigations into Foucault's work has shown them to be. As a result, modern power/knowledge relations have stifled or oppressed subjects. Ultimately, the central question remains: What is the nature of modern truth, and what is its cost? I would answer that this cost lies on many levels: politically, intellectually, economically, and socially; perhaps most importantly, ontologically, as modern Man was created in his singularity and solidity, defying the necessity for Difference in modern society.

Foucault's political ethics problematizes and seeks to overturn a uniform and metaphysical ontology of Man. If the modern subject does exist as epistemologically ungrounded, then no concrete understanding of Being is possible, and to construct such a model would reinforce a limiting model as initially deconstructed. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault has clearly shown that the nature of modern knowledge is a movement towards the Same, given the structure and form of the epistemic configuration which shapes knowl-

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<sup>27</sup>Foucault. “Critical Theory/Intellectual History,” interview by Gérard Raulet, in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 30.

<sup>28</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

edge in this particular epoch; the price which individuals have to pay, and which Foucault would like to problematize and establish as a political problem, is the stifling within this paradigm of identity and Difference.

Of fundamental importance to note here, and the core of his ethics as a political tool, is Foucault's stance toward Reason. In "Critical Theory/Intellectual History", he answers in the following way to a query regarding his claim that reason is created through history and within discourse:

"I [sf. Foucault] do not believe in a kind of founding act whereby reason, in its essence, was discovered or established and from which it was subsequently diverted by such and such an event. I think, in fact, that *reason is self-created*, which is why I have tried to analyse forms of rationality: different foundations, different creations, different modifications in which rationalities engender one another, oppose and pursue one another. Even so, you cannot assign a point at which reason would have lost sight of its fundamental project, or even a point at which the rational became the irrational."<sup>29</sup>

For Foucault reason does not only exist as a contingent and constructed entity, but it takes on a number of different forms; it can be moulded, or conceived as a tool towards different ends or realities. He is unwilling to affirm a totalized view of reality or a "grand narrative":

"...I [sf. Foucault] am not prepared to identify reason entirely with the totality of rational forms which have come to dominate...in types of knowledge, forms of technique and modalities of government or domination: realms where we can see all the major applications of rationality...For me, no given form of rationality is actually reason. So I do not see how we can say that the forms of rationality which have been dominant in the...sectors I have mentioned are in the process of collapsing and disappearing...I can see multiple transformations, but I cannot see why we should call this transformation a collapse of reason. *Other forms of rationality are created endlessly*. So there is no sense at all to the proposition that reason is a long narrative which is now finished, and that another narrative is under way."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>ibid., pp. 28-29.

<sup>30</sup>ibid., p. 35. My emphasis.

Foucault asserts here that not only does reason take on many forms through history as it is used to define particular truths, but also that no semblance of an Hegelian teleology exists to affirm a metanarrative of thought and action. Reason is a thing of history, created through time and within social space in the interplay of knowledge and power. In this game, truth is defined and imposed, with multiple players vying for hegemony. Of course, in Foucault's definition of power, this point is never reached in its entirety, and strategies and games are entered into, always underscored by the presence of a freedom to act and resist. Most importantly, what this paradigm presents is the ability for thought to think *differently*, that other forms of reason and knowledge of the world are possible through a process of challenging the limits of thought. In other words, and central to Foucault's politics, is the freedom inherent in Enlightened reason to think critically on Truth and transform the latter into Other knowledge.

It is within this model of reason and philosophy being able to critically examine thought and knowledge systems that Foucault is able to make the assertion (as he does at the end of *The Order of Things*) that the "death of Man" is possible through a challenging of existing thought structures. Reason is a tool for resistance, and I believe that it is here that he centres his political critique and possible modes of future action. While he is unwilling to provide a model, a theorem for resistance, and a theory for subsequent liberation, Foucault provides a coherent and powerful critique of present knowledge systems, and a theory of knowledge and power which affirms an ethics of reason, and thus an action upon the limits of thought.

Intellectually, Foucault is fascinated with deciphering the nature of the *present*, the way in which we have constructed a truth which defines our reality, and the degree to which we work to either affirm this truth, or provoke a change in it. The historical moment is always contingent however, dependent on the structures which make up the knowledge systems of a particular epoch. Important, however, is that history is the space in which

change occurs, and reason is the catalyst for this change; his “diagnosis concerning the present”, and the political utility of reason and philosophy, Foucault can define as follows:<sup>31</sup>

“It does not consist in a simple characterization of what we are but, instead--by following lines of fragility in the present--*in managing to grasp why and how that-which-is might not longer be that-which-is*. In this sense, any description must always be made in accordance with these kinds of virtual fracture which open up the space of freedom understood as a space of concrete freedom, i.e., *of possible transformation*.”<sup>32</sup>

Foucault’s political project centrally entails the desire to problematize systems of thought in their historical coming-to-be, their innate contingency and their sense of flux; in other words, the vulnerability of thought to transformation. A vulnerability which opens up the possibility for critique and the affirmation of an ethics for thought and action which leads to a questioning of our present in relation to our past and our future. The central task Foucault sets philosophy is that of thinking *differently*, of conceiving of the world Other than it presently is. In this way he affirms a conception of history no longer seen as a massive and singular movement towards completion, but rather as the pursuit of a future time which is less dominated by a thought process that oppresses, excludes, and denies certain groups of people. Reason serves as a catalyst for this process of change, linked as it is to an ancient ethical practice by which the self might critically examine itself towards a desired change. As a result, Foucault links Enlightenment reason, and the innately critical responsible of this tradition, with an ancient concern for critically examining one’s actions and thoughts towards establishing a critical ethics for existence. For this, I believe we owe Michel Foucault a great deal; as a man, a thinker, a philosopher, and as someone who dared to think beyond the limits of thought, to provide a critique that is innately political

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<sup>31</sup>ibid., p. 36.

<sup>32</sup>ibid.

and transformative. Foucault's politics, while existing in contradistinction to a liberal or marxist project, not only ensures that these projects have their legitimate concerns met, but, I believe, supersedes them in strength and integrity.

## *CONCLUSION:* **LIMINAL POLITICS**

‘What is happening right now, and what are we, we who are perhaps nothing more than what is happening at this moment?’ Philosophy’s question therefore is the question as to what we ourselves are [in our historical creation]. That is why contemporary philosophy is entirely political and entirely historical. It is the politics immanent in history and the history indispensable for politics.

Michel Foucault, interview 1977

In the final section of this dissertation, we have explored Foucault’s work on ethics and how this interest in ethical conduct is linked to a modern politics which I believe, given his unique theories of the human subject and its relationship with power, is distinctly Foucauldian. Of most importance has been drawing links between this final period of his *oeuvre*, and the work which preceded it; a link between his work on modern knowledge of Man and a modern askésis, or critical questioning of these truths. In the preceding chapters, I have sought to link Foucault’s description of philosophy as a critique of modern epistemology, with his political project which seeks to problematize the ontological limits which are placed on the modern subject. This process of limiting thought is the result of the particular forms which knowledge has taken in modernity.

In addition, this Part IV of this dissertation has sought to answer marxist criticisms of Foucauldian power as preventing human political activity. Through his work on Greco-

Roman ethics, and the ways in which human desire was problematized as a political problem for the ancient world, Foucault was able to describe an ethical practice which is similar to those practiced by the ancients, but is specifically modern in character. Introducing the notion of the *agon*, the internal struggle for hegemony over opposing forces, Foucault was able to provide an answer for those concerned about the seeming inability for an individual to oppose and resist external power/knowledge relations. In this way, his ethics encourages an affirmation of Enlightenment reason as a critical tool to problematize and perhaps even overturn various knowledges which have come to define Man in modernity, and are held to be self-evident; this practice is innately political and invites the possibility of overturning the very conception of Man itself. Foucault thus presents philosophy as having the crucial and ongoing task of providing a critique of modern systems of thought which are responsible for the constitution of Man, and yet which emerge as highly problematic and susceptible to change when closely examined.

Ultimately, Foucault's final period merges modern philosophy, with its roots in the Enlightenment, with ancient philosophy. The former provides for a critical application of reason, the responsibility of the modern to use reason critically and with a sense of duty; while the latter provides an ethical system for the human subject to critically examine and overturn modern epistemological and ontological impingements on itself. We are now in a position to conclude this dissertation, and look more closely at the ways in which Foucault's three periods come together as a coherent and innately political whole. If it can be shown that Michel Foucault's work is both coherent and politically valuable, something which has been vigorously contested by the humanist tradition, then the initial problems set out in the introduction to this dissertation will be answered satisfactorily, and indeed my thesis proven correct.

# **CONCLUSION**

*CONCLUSION:*

## THE POLITICS OF OURSELVES

The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to 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 that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.*

Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?"

I would like to conclude this dissertation with some of the ideas raised in Foucault's "What is Enlightenment?" In that article, he introduced the important notion of philosophy as *critique*; indeed, more than merely a means of providing a critical stance to something which is accumulative such as a "theory, a doctrine, [or a] permanent body of knowledge," Foucault affirms that modern philosophy and its task in critically examining our modern ontological constitution must be conceived of as an *ethos*, an intrinsic part of the Enlightenment tradition and the *responsibility* passed down to the modern subject.<sup>1</sup> Central to Foucault's project has been to describe the constitution of the modern human subject within particular games of truth, the bodies of knowledge that have coalesced around the subject in a process of naming it, and providing it with a stable and universalized nature.

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment," in *The Foucault Reader*, p. 50.

In naming an object both epistemologically and ontologically, it is stifled both within the formal name given it, but more importantly, is subjectively oppressed by the imposition of a stable and grounded consciousness. It is precisely this modern epistemological desire to name and constitute Man that informs Foucault's foremost intellectual and political concerns. He is unwilling to affirm a unified, sovereign subject and as a result he is unable to provide for a politics which allows for a liberation of some repressed or unactualized "true" self. In this way, he rejects the entire humanist tradition and invokes the types of critiques we have explored.

In rejecting the humanist tradition as explored in Part I of this dissertation, and the conceptions of the self which are central to this tradition, Foucault simultaneously opens himself up to extremely interesting work, as well as severe criticism; he is accused by liberals of preventing the formation of truth or identity; similarly, by introducing a conception of power as a relationship between two opposing forces, rather than as the traditional understanding of power as law or sovereignty, Foucault invited criticism from marxists for his apparent negation of the possibility for revolt. As a result, this dissertation was faced by two primary problems: first, whether Foucault offers a coherent theoretical paradigm that can be traced throughout his work; second, and more importantly, regardless of whether we answer in the affirmative to this first problem, we had to resolve whether the possibility for truth formation and political agency is provided for in Foucault's work. Ultimately, this dissertation was set the initial task of answering whether Michel Foucault's work could be followed as a coherent paradigm throughout what are generally accepted as the three periods which structure his *oeuvre*; second, a question had to be resolved pertaining to whether his work allowed for human action against the power/knowledge relations which he describes as constitutive of the modern human subject. First, does Foucault's work stand up in theoretical terms; second, can his theory be used politically.

In the introduction, I proposed dividing this dissertation into four parts: the first part was to investigate Foucault's earliest archaeological period in which he focused on the

formation of knowledge systems around Man. Part II explored Foucault's middle period, where we investigated his controversial conception of power, which he first introduced in the 1970's to provide a theoretical explanation for ways in which knowledge is applied within society. Additionally, it was during his power period that Foucault provided an explanatory model for the process whereby the subject was constituted ontologically. The third part of this dissertation provided a broadly liberal and marxist critique of Foucault's work, this to juxtapose his work to the humanist tradition of which he is so suspicious. In this way, I sought to show the contradistinction which fundamentally separates the tradition of philosophy to which Foucault belongs (which might loosely be called the *poststructuralist* tradition, even though he would reject such a label), from that which the former two ideologies find themselves indebted to (which might generally be called the *humanist* tradition). After resolving liberal problems with Foucault's work which centred around his theory allowing for the establishment of truth and identity, problems which are primarily ontological in nature, I set out the central problem which marxists generally have with Foucault's work: his seeming denial of human agency which enforces a sense of political quietism in his work. The latter is primarily a political problem, and the fourth and final part of this dissertation sought to resolve this critical and very difficult dilemma presented to Foucault's work. Regardless of his work providing a unique theory of knowledge and of human subjectivity, if it was found not to contain the practical ability of the human subject to overturn imposing power-knowledge relations, then Foucault's work might deservedly be labeled as nihilistic, and of little use in offering his readers a positive response to his critique of modernity.

After a careful reading of Foucault's initial three texts, (*Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*), which are primarily archaeologies of various modern knowledge systems, his work was able to provide sufficient proof to show both that Man as a stable and uniform entity, and a supposedly *human* consciousness which is described in knowledge, are innately modern *inventions*. By the end of

Foucault's first period, we had been introduced to his conception of Man as an entity established purely within knowledge and constituted within particular epistemological configurations, in this case unique to modernity. Additionally, his thesis provided for the possibility of this entity's demise as a result of its being undermined through a critical work on the part of philosophy or reason. The major weakness in his theory at this early stage, however, was Foucault's inability to provide an explanation to show how knowledge intersects with social practice. This would become the central focus of his subsequent period, which was centrally concerned with outlining a theory of power.

In his middle period, (marked by the publication of *Discipline and Punish*, and *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1) Foucault offered a newly-conceived definition of power which, following from his rejection of a unified subject, would not allow for the notion of a "liberation" from malevolent social forces. He rejected liberation understood both as an actualization of a innate human self which in some sense had been repressed, or liberation understood as a revolution, the toppling of a bourgeois or otherwise oppressive state and its replacement with a utopic vision of government; instead he introduced the ability and necessity for the human subject to resist and to engage in antagonistic relations with other relations of power. Foucault ultimately describes power as a relationship between two beings, both vying for hegemony, and yet always inclusive of freedom and the ability to resist. At the end of this period, a number of serious questions emerged as to the efficacy of his work, and the degree to which his conception of power really did contain a positive political vision. Part III of this dissertation provided the space to introduce two powerful arguments against Foucault's work, this the central task set for this dissertation to answer.

Liberals present an important argument against Foucault's work in relation to truth and the ability of subjects to name things, or to provide identity to the world around themselves; the marxists which I chose to introduce in the third section of this dissertation questioned the seemingly nihilistic tendencies within Foucault's work, and his apparent inability to provide for human revolt against imposing power-knowledge relations. While

Charles Taylor is more easily answered, his central weakness being his misunderstanding Foucault's conception of the subject, the marxists presented a far more deep-seated and challenging argument against Foucault, which I used the entire fourth part of the dissertation to answer. At the conclusion of the third part, I had sufficiently dealt with Taylor's criticisms, but had yet to answer the concerns of Martin Jay and others, who admittedly presented a far more difficult critique of Foucault's work. The central question remained: regardless of whether Foucault's work is intellectually coherent, and regardless of whether in fact he does allow for the formation of identity, is his work politically coherent, i.e., does he provide a positive and meaningful political alternative to the rather bleak picture which his theories of the human subject and its relationship with modern knowledge and power presented. This question would have to be sufficiently answered for my initial thesis to be proven correct, and for Foucauldian scholars to claim that he offers the world of philosophy more than just theories of knowledge.

As a result, I devoted all of Part IV to exploring Foucault's final period in which he explored ethics. Continuing with the studies into sexuality and human desire started with *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 1), in the subsequent two volumes Foucault went on to investigate how the ancient world problematized desire. Of particular importance here were his investigations into non- and pre-Christian ethics, moral or spiritual codes which were self-formulated and did not adhere to a strictly exterior and punitive code of conduct. Central to these investigations were the Platonic and Stoic traditions, both interested in the close link between self-government and the ability to govern a group; hence Plato's appeal to the youth of Athens to master their own appetites if they wished to be successful political leaders, and the desire of the Stoics to master their various desires. Extremely important in these quests was not the seeking to fulfill a morality which was imposed by a transcendental Saviour, but rather a practice on the self in a highly personal way to change one's conduct or thoughts. Foucault would adopt the Greco-Roman concept of "aesthetics

of the self" in outlining a purely modern set of ethics which could assist his political concerns.

His work emerges as political to the degree that he takes power-knowledge relations into account, problematizes these in relation to the subject, but then goes on to describe how this relationship could be critically addressed. Central to this dissertation and my thesis has been to show how Foucault's *oeuvre* works as a critique on two important levels. First, and introduced primarily in his first period, Foucault investigates the relationship between knowledge and the subject--here his chief concerns were the *epistemological* limits which define modern thought. Second, and explored from his second period, Foucault investigates the application of such knowledge to the human subject in a relationship of subjectification, this primarily an *ontological* question. Ultimately, his work exists as a critique and exploration of knowledge systems and their interaction with power relations which render a particular conception of the human subject. Foucault is thus interested in outlining the epistemological and ontological limits of modernity, and relating these to the degree to which the subject is both the centre and object of such investigations. In order to challenge such a system he must necessarily provide both an epistemological and an ontological critique.

In order to challenge modern epistemological systems, Foucault introduces his method of archaeological investigation, which situates all modern knowledge within the epistemic configuration which informs the constitution of such knowledge, and which explains all knowledge as having been constructed within history or through time. Once it is understood that all knowledge is contingent upon the epistemic configuration upon which it rests, then it becomes apparent that if such an *epistémé* is reversed or superseded, then the forms of knowledge which are indicative of this *epistémé* might also change. Following on from this, if Man is an epistemological construct unique to modernity, and thought is allowed to think Other than itself, this entity can also be reconceived or rejected completely. This process is inherently political to the degree that it threatens a modern bio-political

agenda centred around the constitution and manipulation of the human subject. In addition, and as a result of this complex model, it can be concluded that inherent in Foucault's early work is the prospect of resistance.

To deal with ontological impositions on the subject, Foucault introduced his genealogical method, which provided a theoretical framework within which to investigate social practices and the ways in which knowledge intersects with power to produce reality. In this area of his work, Foucault wrote books on modern penal systems and sexuality, showing how modern systems of discipline and the control of populations is intrinsically linked to a problematization of the human ability to reproduce; these systems of control are also linked to the modern necessity to promote life and for citizens to contribute in an economically and politically efficient way. Foucault names this form of discipline and politics which pervades modernity and which enforces these social disciplines, bio-politics; this type of government is established on the conceptions we have of Man in this epoch, and a central task of the human sciences remains to produce knowledge of this entity in order to better actualize his potential and ensure his correct incorporation within the state. Within such a system of modern discipline, however, Foucault provides the space for resistance, and it is in his final work on ethics that he is able to bring his *oeuvre* full circle and answer his marxist critics.

Taking modern knowledge and systems of discipline into account, Foucault both rejects a theory of liberation from such a system, and yet provides a two-fold strategy for resistance. First, his work provides for an epistemological undermining of modern systems of knowledge. This is the first task of philosophy as critique, the ability for thought to think Other than itself, and to critically examine knowledge structures which might appear self-evident and universal, timeless in their application and not subject to change. The second task of philosophy is the critique of individual identity, the use of thought as a practice on the body. This is Foucault's most powerful thesis which is introduced in his final two books and right before his death. In thinking critically on himself, Foucault pro-

vides for the subject to make the self as a work of art, as it were, to sculpt a self which is Other than its initial conception. While the subject will always be caught within knowledge-power relations, and “liberation” is theoretically not possible, in his final works Foucault is able to provide the theoretical possibility for *resistance*, and a critical questioning of ontological constructs that have both constituted modern Man and given him a discernible consciousness. The core of the political project contained within Foucault’s work is the ability to problematize and overturn such ontological impositions. The “politics of ourselves”, then, is realizing the historical and contingent nature of knowledge systems which define Man, as well as the inherent potential to overturn these. The process of self-making or *askésis* exists as a practice of reason upon the body and provides the basis for the modern subject to remake him- or herself as Other.

From a critique of knowledge systems, through a unique theory of power, Michel Foucault has provided his readers with a fascinating, albeit highly controversial, critique of modernity. Inherent no doubt in his work is a coherent and constant concern with the constitution of the modern subject, as he outlined in “The Subject and Power”, as well as a political concern with overturning such oppressive knowledge structures which limit thought epistemologically, and thus limit modern ontological and experiential boundaries. By denying the subject a liberation of an innate self towards the fulfillment of a future utopic vision, Foucault has taken us into a space that is hard to at first conceive of or begin to imagine: beyond the unified humanist subject, and beyond the subject of right and revolt. Tragically his oeuvre was left incomplete, and a brilliant career cut short. Regardless, and without needing to name him or his political theory, Foucault has taken us beyond the limits of the Kantian subject and into a future of liminal politics and transgression. Because of the intensity and level of his thought, Foucault does disconcert and frustrate, resulting in the types of criticisms which we have explored in this dissertation; as a result of such frustration and perhaps at times a misinformed understanding of his work, I hope that future debates will not detract from what the name Michel Foucault stands for in the world

of theory, and only enhance his brilliant contribution to the world of intellectual research and the political consequence of such work.

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