False Dichotomies: Truth, Reason, and Morality in Nietzsche, Foucault, and the Contemporary Social Sciences

Paul R. BRASS※

Abstract

Atrocities punctuate the daily news in our times, intensified since 9/11 in New York to Bombay (Mumbai) 2008 as this abstract is written. While such atrocities arise from sentiments of grievance, they are fed, continued, and justified by false dichotomies that are proclaimed by world leaders and commentators in the press and academia, especially the true believers among them, believers in good and evil, in ultimate truths, in reason, and morality. They infect east and west, all exclusive religions, and the minds of millions. They infect academic debates as well, where Nietzscheans and anti-Nietzscheans, Foucauldian and anti-Foucauldians contest stridently, while often misreading the writings of both. But my reading, at least, is that reflection on what these two thinkers have had to say about truth, reason, and morality should give us pause to think about the broader complicity of world leaders, campaigners for truth and justice, religious spokespersons, ardent nationalists in new states and old, and our own academic selves in the descent of our societies into justifications for spreading murder and mayhem and into retaliations that produce nothing but an interminable spiral that is likely to lead nowhere but to the next nuclear catastrophe we all claim to fear.

Introduction

It would appear that the titanic battle between good and evil has not yet reached its end and that, once again, moralists hold the world in sway, conjuring up the weapons of total, annihilating destruction before our eyes. These moralists, led since the infamous day of 9/11 by President George W. Bush and Osama bin

※ Visiting Professor, College of International Relations, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan; Professor (Emeritus) University of Washington, Seattle, U.S.A.

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Laden — dead or alive —and, perhaps, most of their followers, are true believers. Arrayed against them also are true believers, such as Noam Chomsky, who rushed to South Asia to speak before Indian and Pakistani audiences to claim that the United States had no evidence against bin Laden, for Chomsky appears truly to believe that most evil in our world emanates from our own, American selves.[1] Those opposed to bin Laden in the Muslim world are also true believers. They believe that bin Laden's beliefs are false doctrine, that Islam is a religion pure in its truth that carries a message of peace in its moral doctrines. And, as I write, large parts of Bombay city are in flames and at least 163 victims are dead, the latest outgrowth of the century-old struggle between competing nationalist ideologies in South Asia. In the midst of the din raised by these pious proclaimers of piety, truth, and morality, an occasional note of cynicism may be heard, but none able to make a noise loud enough to proclaim that none of the actors in this world drama deserve our loyalty.

But at least one strong voice has emerged that goes to the source of the thinking that produces these titanic battles, that of a writer of mad books, himself mad enough to have ridiculed the prophet Mohammad and his tribe, and to have incurred thereby the wrath of that Islamic assassin, the grand Ayatollah Khomeini, now gone from our midst, but replaced by worse than he among the battlers against evil. Rushdie, despite the death threats from the fanatical Muslim side, chose to take on another dangerous fanatic by the name of Bal Thackeray, a political Hindu chief in India — in *The Moor's Last Sigh* — leader of a hooligan fascist party centered in Bombay, who probably does not believe in anything, but has stood for the truth of a Hindu India in which large numbers of Muslim citizens should be killed from time to time in order to show the rest their place. One supposes that, at this writing in the midst of the carnage in Bombay, these Hindu heroes are cowering in their dens.

※ I am grateful to Richard Flathman, who read a very early version of this article, and found merit in it. Thanks to his comments, I have clarified the argument in several places. It should not be necessary in a discussion such as this to say that Flathman also does not necessarily agree with me on every point. I owe thanks also to Amelie Rorty for her sharp comments, which I have tried to address. I have treated the comments of both my colleagues as a conversation to which I have replied directly in several footnotes.

1. The statement concerning lack of evidence was quoted widely in the press. For a complete transcript of his talk in India, featured prominently on the website of a leading Indian news magazine, see www.frontlineonnet.com. Chomsky made a similar move during the anti-Vietnam movement, by visiting North Vietnam, thereby partly undermining rather than aiding that movement.

But this mad Rushdie went further to take on God himself,[2] the source of what he calls "the problem," in this case Hindu–Muslim violence manifested in the killing of perhaps as many as 2,000 or more Muslim children, women, and men in the Indian state of Gujarat in 2002, who were being paid back for the burning to death of approximately 60 persons said to have been Hindu militants returning from the town of Ayodhya, where the Muslim mosque was destroyed on December 6, 1992 and where they wish to put up a huge temple to their god, Ram, in its place. Upon their return from Ayodhya, it is said, but contested, that they misbehaved rudely, crudely, and mischievously with Muslims, attempting to force them to proclaim the Hindu truth, "Victory to the God Ram." They then paid the price for proclaiming their truth by being burned in the hell of two torched train bogeys.[3] But then, in the aftermath of their own martyrdom, their Hindu truth emerged triumphant in the slaughter exceeding even the blood standard of "ten for one" common in these affairs.

But the payback continues, with the slaughter in Bombay. Whatever else it signifies in terms of its relationship to Gujarat 2002, the elections in Kashmir, the unending killing there—justified in the name of a "dispute" over territory in which the people whose territory is disputed have never had a say—the Arab-Israeli conflict in Israel-Palestine that brought death to the Jewish victims in the Nariman building in that city, the U. S. bombing, strafing, and killing in Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan, it testifies to the cursedness of true belief and the cycle of death and destruction to which it has always led.

But what does it mean to say that God is the problem? It has a direct and an indirect import. Anyone who can read, in the original or in translation, the holy books of our Judeo-Islamic tradition, can see for themselves that the Semitic god is a wrathful god, who takes vengeance on non-believers and on the enemies of true believers. Indeed, it was this very god who answered genocidal act with genocidal act, by slaying all the first-born of Egypt, "from the firstborn of the Pharaoh ... even unto the firstborn of the maidservant ... and all the firstborn of beasts."[4] The Christian god, the Christ, is supposed to be a different sort, but his

2. "Salman Rushdie on new horrors in the name of God," in *The Guardian*, 9 March 2002.

3. A different view of the incident, which is accepted by some Muslims, states: "An official forensic report on the deadly arson attack on a train allegedly by Muslims in Godhra town of western Indian state of Gujarat on February 27 has devastated government position on the issue and demonstrated conclusively that the event used to unleash the Gujarat pogroms was engineered by the extremist Hindus themselves." See the *Millia Gazette*: http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15072002/1507200250.htm; undated, but accessed 7 December 2008. Other accounts are available through a Google search on "Godhra train burning."

4. *Exodus*, 11: 5, St. James Version.

followers mostly failed to note the difference and have carried on faithfully the Semitic traditions of smiting the non-believers. Militant Hindus, not content to accept the argument that their god, Ram, is a god of peace, have turned him into a warrior, his arrows pointed at the Muslim destroyers of temples and builders of mosques.

There is also an indirect import in the statement that God is the problem, for it is God whose truth must be proclaimed by all, in whose existence our lives acquire meaning, through whose reason — however indiscernible it may appear to our mortal eyes — the world progresses in Hegelian fashion to its ultimate end in the Christ of peace or in Hindu fashion reaches the end of total destruction followed by the emergence of a new golden era. It is through this God that we acquire the morality that will save us in the existing world of evil and will ultimately transform the entire world into one that reveals at last the sublimity of truth, the meaning of our existence, the reason that governs the universe.

But the God problem goes even further than this last import, for its mischief affects even ostensible nonbelievers among academics, philosophers and social scientists, who seek truth, a meaning in our existence, reason, and morality even in a universe without a god. These academics, believers and nonbelievers, ride under various banners, including those who believe that universal definitions of justice or human rights can be arrived at in thought divorced from action or interests, those who believe that there is a method or a methodology to be discovered or practiced properly that will clear away all the imprecisions in our knowledge and bring us to the truth of things, and ultimately all those who think dualistically, that is to say, virtually all of us in the West, whose thought derives from the original dualism of God against false gods, body and soul, true and false, reason and unreason, morality and immorality. It was against these false dichotomies that Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil* and in all his other works. And it was against their imprisoning effect that all Foucault's work has been directed.[5]

5. The lineage from Nietzsche to Foucault has been specifically discussed at length by Michael Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power, and the Subject* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) and, more recently, by Wendy Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), ch. v ("Politics without Banisters: Genealogical Politics in Nietzsche and Foucault"). This article is meant as a contribution to this type of approach to Foucault and his predecessor from a somewhat different angle.

Truth, Knowledge, and Power in Nietzsche and Foucault

Truth, for Foucault, is not an isolate, a singular bit of knowledge, but a "system," or "a whole field of ⋯ objects" in which are included "a corpus of knowledge, techniques, [and] 'scientific' discourses."[6] It follows, therefore, that truth is arrived at by specifying the relationships among objects in the field of vision or the gaze. Here comes, therefore, the first qualification around the term, truth. Since the objects viewed are a matter of arbitrary choice, that is, what is somehow of interest to an observer, what can be said to be true are only the relationships among those objects that one has deliberately brought into view, knowingly or unknowingly eliminating others that might have effects upon the ones observed, thereby altering all the interrelationships among them. So that the truth is, therefore, circumscribed by the field of vision. These truths in turn are based upon previous knowledge, the techniques available to be applied to observe the objects, and the discourse which structures, confines all—knowledge, techniques, objects—within a set of rules concerning what constitutes a statement about the objects in view.

In *Discipline and Punish* [*DP*], the objects are the "offence," the "offender," and the law. Bodies of "knowledge" have been formed around these three objects that define 1) the nature of the offence, a particular kind of act, 2) in relation to the psychological state of the offender, which determines "the causal process that produced it," and 3) the measures to be taken in accordance with the law that would best lead to the rehabilitation of the offender, given what is known about his psychological state.[7]

Not only have bodies of knowledge been formed, but special categories of persons have been designated as qualified because of their mastery of the "truth,"[8] of the theory behind the practice of their profession, whether of medicine or criminology, and because of their clinical experience acquired in institutions—asylums, hospitals, prisons. So knowledge of the truth is authorized by the state, under whose authority only recognized practitioners are allowed legitimately to

6. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 22-23. [Originally published in France in 1975; hereafter referred to as *DP*]. A. Rorty has noted that the idea of the systemic character of truth is, of course, not original with Foucault, but has been articulated by many who preceded him, going back to the Greeks and many others up to present times. The originality in Foucault is what he elaborates from this common insight.

7. *DP*, p. 19.

8. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 80-82; [hereafter referred to as *Clinic*].

practice and proclaim it.

The second qualification around the term truth relates to the means of its production. Systems or regimes of truth are products of power, of a power that "produces reality" itself and the domains of objects and rituals of truth."[9] In *DP*, the power that produces is that of the prison, particularly confinement that makes it possible to concentrate a gaze on its inmates, but also the supporting powers of the judiciary and the psychiatric profession that set the terms and provide the justifications for punishment and confinement in the first place.

So, without question marks around the second term, power produces reality. Reality exists, therefore, only within a "domain," that is, an area where an authority and specific rules apply to specified objects allowed to roam or to be fixed within it for observation. In *DP*, the objects are actually individuals, defined as criminals confined for infractions of the law. Power also produces "rituals of truth." It does not produce merely rituals that surround the truth to make it appear majestic or holy, but rituals *of* truth. Therefore, the truth that is produced stands on no higher ground than other holies, sacraments, and rites produced through rituals of religion, tribe, or custom.

Foucault goes even further to an ultimate qualification of what constitutes truth in an approving citation of Nietzsche's comments in *The Gay Science*. There, Nietzsche referred to truth as an "invention" created, as Foucault puts it, out of "the play of instincts, impulses, desires, fear, and the will to appropriate." Once again here, Foucault reverts to his preferred description of knowledge as a "production" rather than an "invention," "produced on the stage where these elements struggle against each other." So, knowledge is the result of struggle. But, it seems that, for Foucault, knowledge and truth are not the same thing. There is a knowledge that claims to be a knowledge *of* truth. The latter too is a production, and here Foucault goes finally to that ultimate qualification of truth, saying not only that it is an invention or a production, but a "falsification." Truth is finally produced "through the play of a primary and always reconstituted falsification, which erects the distinction between truth and falsehood."[10]

9. *DP*, p. 194. A. Rorty has remarked that Foucault's statement that power "produces reality" assumes a causal relationship between the two, implying independence between the two terms, which would not seem consistent with his thought. However, I think Foucault implies a process not a causal relationship between the two terms. In fact, I have deliberately used the term "production" in my own work to avoid assertions of causal relationships, in Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

10. Michel Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought," in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. by Donald F.

Why is this dichotomization between truth and falsehood always itself a falsehood? It is because, as Nietzsche argued, the sequence is from "selfish interest" that produces knowledge that then claims to be knowledge of truth itself. For Foucault, there are only systems or regimes of truth specific to time, place, and discourse *only* within which it is legitimate to say that a statement is true or false. When knowledge proclaims itself as knowledge of truth itself, of something ultimate, beyond time, place, and discourse, it reveals itself as a power based on self-interest that condemns, punishes, censors those who adhere to beliefs and opinions proclaimed as false.

That power, for Foucault, is preeminently political. It is itself "a system ⋯ which blocks, prohibits, and invalidates" other discourses and knowledge, for example, such as exist among "the masses" or subaltern groups.[11] It does so partly through proclaiming such discourses and knowledge as false, partly by ignoring them as primitive or inconsequential. But it has an even stronger, more "insidious" effect, that of imprisoning those who claim knowledge of the truth, namely, the intellectuals, within the integrated system of power, knowledge, and truth that censors itself, knowingly or unknowingly, preventing them from discovering, uncovering, and proclaiming alternative truths. The intellectuals are themselves captive within these systems, objects and instruments of power that is "invisible" because it structures all possible thought and all statements of true and false. It is, therefore, the intellectuals who must "struggle" to escape from the confines of the prison of knowledge by somehow making the power that underlies it visible, a power that has no center, but rather pervades all thought itself.[12]

Foucault, Nietzsche, Kant

Foucault appears to have greater respect for Kant than was shown to him by

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Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), pp. 202-03.

11. Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought," pp. 207-08.

12. A difficult issue raised here by Flathman concerns whether or not Foucault thought his own work produced falsifications. He makes the valuable point that Foucault's life and work and his emphasis upon resistance to power-knowledge systems suggest an effort to break out of this confinement. At the same time, it is relevant to note that Foucault himself kept moving away from and rejecting aspects of his own earlier work—especially, of course, but not only from his psychiatric/psychoanalytic period— suggesting both recognition of his own intellectual confinement and the necessity to struggle constantly against it. There is another way out of this difficulty, though, which is to suggest that Foucault distinguishes between Truths capitalized—the ones criticized in this article—and ordinary truths, useful bits of knowledge as Nietzsche might have phrased it or those that have survived the ordinary rigors of scientific work.

Nietzsche, in effect praising him for "his attempt to desubjugate the subject in the context of power and truth" by adopting a critical stance towards "knowledge." Kant, he argued, considered it the "primordial responsibility" of the philosopher, that is, the philosopher of "critique," "to know knowledge."[13] For Kant, this meant to know the limits of knowledge. For Nietzsche, it meant knowing the self-interest behind all knowledge claims. For Foucault, it means the arbitrariness of all knowledge. For Kant, the emphasis is on limitations of our ability to know; for Nietzsche and Foucault, the emphasis is on the (false) presumptions that lie behind knowledge, namely, that it is knowledge of, or knowledge that leads to, some grand truth. For Nietzsche, all religions, moralities, and philosophies rest not upon such truths, but upon lies, on false, fanciful, or self-interested behaviors that became sanctified through time and custom. The knowledge purveyed by priests and philosophers claims to provide the path to ultimate truths that will lead to freedom or the good or happy life. In fact, all such knowledge is based upon self-interest and power that subjugates and imprisons all within its prevailing confines under a cover of ultimate truth. Foucault carries matters a step further by applying the Nietzschean insight to all forms of objectifying conceptualizations, including such subjects as power and sexuality. One can make valid observations concerning sexual behaviors or techniques of exercising power, but one can never know anything about "sexuality 'in general' or power 'in general'" because these objects do not exist,[14] anymore than does a god in heaven.

Nietzsche's attack upon the Western philosophical and religious linking of knowledge and ultimate truths rests upon two foundations. The first is relativism, the argument that, in practice, there are no universal principles upon which all societies and peoples lay their claims to truth, only sets of customs, practices, habitus (a term first used by Nietzsche, taken up systematically by Bourdieu) some of which become unconscious, others self-evident, others bases for assertions of moral struggles, but all having arisen in times past, sometimes out of struggles long forgotten. In this respect, Nietzsche argues, neither the Greeks nor the Christian thinkers are any different and have, therefore, no better claims to knowledge of ultimate truths than any savages. It is a mere presumption of Western thought to lay claim to universality, a claim Nietzsche argued, that had become so entrenched that "all sceptical and relativistic positions in regard to any

13. Michel Foucault, "What is Critique," in Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth* [hereafter referred to as *TRUTH*], ed. by Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), p. 36.

14. Paul Veyne, "Foucault Revolutionizes History," in Arnold I. Davidson (ed.), *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 176.

question of knowledge whatever" caused "a profound displeasure."[15] It is obvious in all contemporary struggles for justice, human rights, equality, and freedom that relativistic positions continue to cause "a profound displeasure" even as relativistic positions have become more clearly articulated and more widely acceptable.

The second foundation of Nietzsche's claim concerns "reality," that is to say, the absence of an ultimate reality. Nietzsche insisted that there was no reality separate from appearance, that is, from man's observations, which itself is clearly a relativistic position.[16] It was the belief among the Greeks that there was an ultimate reality to be discovered that led to the pursuit of its truth and to the claims of all knowledge as being the discovery or mirroring of reality. That belief persists in all contemporary forms of pursuit of knowledge and is less contested than is the belief in the existence of ultimate truths, despite the obvious fact that there can be no ultimate truth if there is no ultimate reality.

For both Nietzsche and Foucault, the exalted claim that knowledge leads to ultimate truth and to the freedom that truth brings is a mask that hides the operation of systems of social control or discipline. It all began, Foucault argues, between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C. in Greece when pre-Socratic philosophers, articulating the "political struggles" then taking place over "the distribution of justice" "created a form of justice linked to a form of knowledge which presupposes that truth is visible, ascertainable, and measurable, that it responds to laws similar to those which register the order of the world, and that to discover it is also to possess its value for purification."[17] Nietzsche argued that Socrates and Plato perfected this (erroneous) line of philosophical argument and that both post-Socratic philosophy and Christianity not only made false claims to knowledge of ultimate truths, but also set Western civilization on another path of truth marked by the injunction to know oneself, that is, to know the truth about

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15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), p. 200; [originally published in 1886].

16. Howenver, A. Rorty has reminded me that there was, in fact, one reality in Nietzsche's writings, namely, energy. Here again there are similarities and differences between Nietzsche and Foucault. The similarity is suggested in the following quote from Foucault. "Thus discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, 'docile' bodies. ...it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection." [*DP*: 138]. The difference between the two is that Nietzsche saw the energy/power of the "free spirit" and the "overman" as an exit, but only for individuals, whereas Foucault saw resistance as a universal possibility built into all relations of power.

17. Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought," p. 204.

oneself, in order to adopt the means to become free or to attain salvation. For the Greek philosophers, this path led to self-control and the life of virtue through containment and moderation of the passions. For Christianity, it meant the concept of sin, especially original sin, that enjoined believers to scrutinize the intentions behind every act, to uncover the sinful motivations that lay behind them and to cleanse oneself of such motivations. For Foucault, this orientation towards self-knowledge broadens out in the modern human (social) sciences that take upon themselves the task of "knowledge of individuals," teaching individuals how to know themselves (psychoanalysis) and adopting techniques of observation by which practitioners (of medicine or punishment) may claim to know the individual, his motivations and intentions as well as or even better than the person knows himself. Modern medical, psychiatric and social scientific knowledge systems, therefore, encompass methods of ascertaining "with precision" the truth about the acts of individuals that make possible also the appropriate penalty in the case of crime and punishment, treatment in the case of medicine and psychology.[18]

Social control and discipline, however, are not the proclaimed aims of the will to truth in history and of the search for knowledge. The proclaimed aim, the historical and continuing aim, is the pursuit of justice and the good society. But the distribution of justice also involves the distribution of punishment. All knowledge of ultimate truths, therefore, must have consequences in the social order. The distribution of justice and of punishment for infractions of the rules of the just, good, or true society are authorized and implemented by church or state institutions, but it is the hallmark of the modern state that the (scientific) disciplines themselves become implicated in these distributions, most especially those associated with mental and physical health and with the legal and judicial apparatuses, but certainly not only there. It is, therefore, nothing but a conceit for modern and contemporary scholars in the sciences that deal with man—rather than with the physical laws of the universe—to imagine that they can pursue a "'pure' knowledge 'without consequences,'" which Nietzsche characterized as a "truth that comes to nothing."[19] Or, in Foucault's words, there is no knowledge or truth dissociated from power and the consequences that flow from the exercise of power, the distribution of justice, and the implementation of practices of discipline, social control, and punishment.

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18. *DP*, p. 181.

19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. by Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980 [1874]), p. 33.

Nietzsche and Foucault are very close on this matter of the uses of Socratic and Christian techniques of knowledge on the path to truth. Nietzsche condemns Socrates and Plato for laying the basis in philosophy for the false claims of Christianity to know ultimate truth as well as the path towards it through containment of the passions. Foucault notes that the "return to Socratism" in the 16th and 17th centuries served the purposes of the authorities of church and state in perfecting methods "of governing men," that is, controlling them "through an operation, a technique of precise piloting, which implied a full range of knowledge concerning the individuals being guided, the truth towards which one was guiding."[20]

For a time, a division of responsibilities existed between church and state in which the church piloted souls while the state contained, confined, controlled, and disciplined bodies as it developed from feudalism to the modern, centralized administrative state. But then, again, the two functions merged in the ultimate transformation of the modern state into its totalitarian form in which both souls and bodies came under supervision, surveillance, and control. That form of state in turn depended in its evolution upon new bodies of knowledge, such as nineteenth century theories of race or class or nation, that led to the creation of governments and states proclaiming their possession of ultimate truths concerning the necessary direction of humankind or a segment of it. The authorities also proclaimed the goals toward which humankind must inevitably strive to arrive at perfection, that is, a complete merger of ultimate knowledge and truth in a racial, socialist, or nationalist utopia. Nietzsche detested all such ideologies and moralities of both church and state. However, his main attacks were directed at the moralities produced by religion, particularly Christianity. Foucault came to maturity at the height of the two most abhorrent manifestations of the state's claim to govern "in the name of the truth"[21] in Nazism and Stalinism and saw them both as logical culminations of this human striving for all-embracing certainties. Both, but Communism most articulately, claimed possession of a discourse that anticipates "the truth whose nature and history it defines."[22]

But Foucault did not spend much time analyzing or condemning Nazism or

20. Foucault, "What is Critique?" pp. 70-71.

21. Colin Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," in Graham Burchell, et al. (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality: With Two Lectures by and an Interview with Michel Foucault* (London: Harvester, 1991), p. 8; [hereafter referred to as *EFFECT*].

22. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (a translation of *Les Mots et les Chose*) (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. 320.

Stalinism, though he came to detest the French approvers of Stalinism, including Sartre, as well as its local minions. Clearly, he thought there were enough analysts of the evils of totalitarianism and of the latter's increasingly obvious misuses of ideologies proclaiming knowledge of the truth to control, manipulate, and destroy entire peoples. Instead, he directed his attention to the origins of the institutions of confinement in the modern state, shared by both its totalitarian and liberal democratic varieties. In doing so, he argued that these institutions, in all modern societies, created the conditions for the control and discipline of both bodies and souls. They made it possible to spread throughout societies pervasive forms of knowledge that claimed to know the truth of man's condition and the means for improvement. This type of knowledge of the truth was, he implied, endemic to both liberal democratic and totalitarian states. Both were carceral societies, imprisoning all their members not only in institutions of confinment, but in regimes of "truth" that required all to know themselves so that they could improve themselves so that they could become docile, industrious, disciplined workers and contributors to the creation of the good society.

It is a particular delusion of the modern and contemporary practitioners of the disciplines in the human (social) sciences to imagine that their very methods and techniques have freed *them* from the pre-modern associations of knowledge, truth, and power. Certainly, the labor of science has increased, the division of labor in the sciences has become infinitely more complex, and the techniques used to arrive at valid statements more refined in comparison to pre-modern forms of seeking knowledge. Where once, Foucault asserts,"all that [was] required" to justify a truth claim[23] was to demonstrate, through commentary on an authoritative text, that it flowed logically from some statement or maxim contained in it, modern scientists must demonstrate the validity of their findings (their statements of the truth) through experimental and observational methods that can, in principle, be replicated by others. Insofar as such scientists confine their statements to confirmation or disconfirmation of particular hypotheses, they may have little, some, or great consequences for society. However, as soon as they relate their findings to theories of man and society and, of course, most especially when they become implicated in projects of "social engineering" or crime control or explanations for the existence and persistence of violence among humans, and

23. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 40. "The function proper to knowledge [in pre-modern times] is not seeing or demonstrating; it is interpreting. Scriptural commentary, commentaries on Ancient authors, commentaries on the accounts of travellers, commentaries on legends and fables; none of these forms of discourse is required to justify its claim to be expressing a truth before it is interpreted; all that is required of it is the possibility of talking about it."

so on ad infinitum, they become implicated fully in the striving for universal truth claims with their consequences for the distribution of justice, the creation of the good society, and relationships of power within societies.

It is clear enough, then, that the principal attacks of both Nietzsche and Foucault were directed at all claims on behalf of ultimate truths. It is also clear that Foucault went further than Nietzsche in placing all discourses in the human sciences in a similarly dubious place with regard to the authenticity of their truth claims. At the same time, Nietzsche many times expressed his respect for the scientific search for limited truths, carefully and skeptically arrived at, always subject to doubt and disconfirmation. Foucault kept silent for the most part on the question of more limited truth claims, but here and there in a footnote or in the briefest of mentions avowed some appreciation for the natural sciences — and even for economics — and for their claims to knowledge. But Foucault certainly refused any credit to the view that there has been a steady accumulation of knowledge in any of the sciences towards anything that could be described as "the complete truth." Such claims have been dismissed by many others, including, for example, Peirce and Kuhn. These claims cannot be accepted not only because "once-prized theories" have so often been discarded,[24] but because whole bodies of theory, paradigms, have also been discarded and replaced by others.[25] But neither of these forms of skepticism concerning the truth claims of science go as far as does Foucault. It is not that accumulated anomalies lead to the discarding of paradigms or discourses of science for better ones, but that, for reasons often unrelated to strictly scientific problems, the whole field of view changes. Foucault's principle illustration, of course, concerns the complete transformation of scientific methods of observation that occurred with the establishment of the institutions that made such observations practical, namely, the asylums, clinics, and prisons. Although Foucault offers no comparable examples from the natural sciences, it is probable that he assumed that similar circumstances affected developments in those sciences as well.

Reason

If there are no ultimate truths, what then is the place and purpose of reason in

24. C. J. Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Peircean Account of Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 120.

25. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

the pursuit of knowledge, which both Nietzsche and Foucault, of course, valued above all else? Before one can answer this question, it must be recognized that here too both thinkers distinguished between Reason and reason(ing), as they did between Truth and truths, Meaning and meanings. Thus, Foucault time and again attacked the whole idea that Reason was some kind of entity or spirit or force like Truth itself, that unfolds, develops, progresses and ultimately establishes for mankind at some future time all the secrets of life and the universe. We cannot look upon the history of mankind as a progressive unfolding of Reason's power to unveil, once it is freed from the shackles of superstition and religion and acquires the techniques and methods (first adumbrated, for example, by Bacon) that multiply its powers. We cannot look at past periods as imperfect approaches to comprehensive, scientific knowledge of the world, of reality. Rather, once again, we had best not be deluded and had better examine each such period in terms of its episteme, that is, "not the sum of its knowledge," but its system of knowledge, the interrelations of its parts, of "its various scientific discourses."[26]

The task is not to see each period as building upon the successes of a previous period or rectifying its errors, but to discover the "laws and determinations" that, in each period, not only expanded human knowledge, but confined it, restricted the gaze of Reason's eye. These laws and determinations are not known either to a Reason that progresses through time nor to science, either in general or in any particular branch thereof. However conscious science and scientists are about their methods and techniques of observation, Foucault argues, there is always something they do not know, namely, those very laws and determinations that underlie their choices of methods and techniques of observation and of what they observe. These, Foucault argues, constitute "autonomous" domains that must be unearthed, brought to light. They constitute "the unconscious of science" and of "knowledge."[27] Although he is here using a psychoanalytic metaphor, his more usual metaphor is that of archeology. The archeology of knowledge seeks to unearth the foundations of scientific discourses in an epoch, their interrelations, and the unspoken, unchallenged premises that lie beneath all forms of thought, science, and Reason itself.

Every era will have such unspoken, unchallenged premises because of the

26. Michel Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," in Colin Gordon, "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction," in Burchell, *EFFECT*, pp. 54-55.

27. Michel Foucault, "Foucault Responds to Sartre," trans. by John Johnston, in Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1966-84)*, trans. John Johnston, ed. by Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), Columbia University, 1989), pp. 39-40; [hereafter referred to as *Foucault Live*].

very limits on human reason itself, its ability to know itself, to know "up to what point you can know." All reason and all knowledge has its limits, says Foucault in his appreciation of Kant.[28] It was the failure of the Enlightenment—"the first epoch to name itself," as Foucault puts it[29]—to recognize the limitations on human reason, despite Kant's cautions,[30] that produced the hubris of the age, that expressed itself in all the grand ideological and technological solutions to the problems it posed for and about man and humanity. Indeed, it is only recently that the very premises that reason, science, and technology can solve all problems for man, whether of the distribution of wealth, the removal of suffering, the cures for all diseases, the production of limitless supplies of food, and so on, have been declared to be among the falsest of all false, autonomous, unconscious premises of the thought of our age. Science, reason, and technology have once again, as in every previous epoch — despite the achievements that no sensible person can deny — come up against its limits witnessed in the destruction of the environment, the extinction of species, the threats to human existence itself. These were not the limits on which Foucault himself focused. Rather, the limits he addressed concerned man's ability at last to know himself, to punish, to define the boundaries between reason and nonreason, to solve problems without creating new ones.

But, Foucault remarks, the Enlightenment cannot be treated merely as another "episode in the history of ideas." It is the episteme of epistemes that defines itself in terms of reason, truth, knowledge, rationality, technology. It does not, like all earlier epochs, leave questions for philosophy and philosophers to resolve. It does not conjure man to use his reason instead of being moved by passions, to trust in God when reason cannot solve human problems, to reflect on what can be known and what cannot be known, what is the correspondence between perception and reality. Rather, it declares itself to be the solution to all

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28. Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?" in Foucault, *TRUTH*], p. 35.

29. Foucault, "What is Revolution?" in *TRUTH*, p. 88. A statement challenged by James Schmidt in his critique of Foucault's interpretation of the Englightenment as a distinct period in the hisory of "philosophical thought"; see his "Misunderstanding the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'", available online at his website. However, Schmidt also notes that the statement did not appear in the later version of Foucault's discussion of Kant's response in the article, "What is Enlightenment," in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 32-50.

30. As well as those of Voltaire who, Genevieve Lloyd informs us—in an unpublished paper, "The Dying Light: Reflections on the Enlightenment and the Future"—celebrated not the Kantian phrase, "*Sapere Aude*" (Dare to Know) but "the utterance 'I Do Not Know,'" in his condemnation of "the zealous religious believer."

such questions. It considers itself, as Foucault puts it, "the permanent process which manifests itself in the history of reason," reason that finally triumphs over all. Its limitations ought by now to be known by all, but are not in fact recognized by most true believers in "the Enlightenment." Foucault is rather caustic concerning such true believers, whom, he suggests, we leave to "their pious meditations," their pious and undying belief in the powers of Reason and the Enlightenment, "the most touching of all treasons."[31]

But Foucault, no more than Nietzsche, rejects reason or, for that matter, the pursuit of knowledge in all areas accessible to human reason. On the contrary, he would agree with Nietzsche that we need make no "decision in domains where neither faith nor knowledge is needed" and that it would be "more useful, even for the greatest lovers of knowledge, if around everything accessible to reason and investigation there lies a misty and deceptive girdle of quagmire, a band of the impenetrable, indefinable, and eternally fluid."[32] To which Foucault or we might add that it would be less dangerous as well if reason were not allowed to overreach itself in the pursuit of impossible dreams, if reason were not enshrined along with "morality, God, and truth" as the ultimate key to universal knowledge.[33]

Yet, the dream of universal knowledge persists in all scientific disciplines today, most of all those that have the least claim to scientificity, such as the social sciences. Indeed, it is here that the most immodest claims are made by those who enshrine reason in the methodological form known as rational choice theory. This type of theory engages in a double enshrinement of reason. It makes the dubious—indeed untenable—claim, that men are, in all matters of choice, rational actors, that all other values, such as honor, have no truly independent existence, but are mere expressions of the pursuit of self-interest. Only in the case of the passions does rational choice hesitate, but even here they imagine some future triumph of their powers of reason to penetrate the rational choices that lie behind passionate actions. And that, of course, is the second enshrinement, the belief of rational choice practitioners that *their* reason can (re)interpret, recast, and explain the stated or apparent reasons of actors whose motives are said to be, or appear to be, based on the desire for respect, honor, fame, or love.

It is to the anthropologists that we must turn to find a bastion of scholarship

31. Foucault, "What is Revolution?" in *TRUTH*, p. 98. But again, see Schmidt on Foucault's alleged misconstural of "the Enlightenment."

32. Nietzsche, *Human,* pp. 308-9.

33. Veyne, pp. 125-26.

that resists with force and determination the imperial pretensions of the pseudosciences. Bourdieu, for example, insisted, with the full apparatus of a man of science, that "the rational action that an impartial observer, endowed with all the necessary information and capable of mastering it rationally, would deduce" is nothing but appearance. Our actions, he insisted are "not based on reason," that is, the reason imagined by the rational choicers that is produced "consciously" and is aimed "at explicitly formulated goals on the basis of adequate knowledge of objective conditions." It is rather based on habitus, "the incorporation of objective necessity," that unconsciously or habitually determines actions, strategies, conduct, behavior in conformity — more or less — with a social or moral code, with custom and tradition. Furthermore, none of the latter are perceived by actors as objective parameters confining choices nor are they grounded on "all the necessary information" to make choices that rational choice theories posit as the basis for all rational action.[34]

Morality

The Nietzschean-Foucauldian attack on the very pinions of virtually all previous thought is not a mere intellectual exercise or game, but has broad political and ethical ends in view. It takes aim ultimately at all moralities that arise from the endless search for Truth (and Meaning) through Reason, and offers in their place far more difficult means for individual attainment of a life of freedom and personal expansion. The negative aspects of the thought of both Nietzsche and Foucault have been far more powerful and resonant than have the positive aspects, which, in Nietzsche, are almost incoherent, in Foucault barely developed. It is, nevertheless, clear that both felt it essential to destroy and clear away the debris that had accumulated in thought, practice, and institutions over two millennia before men could begin seriously to inaugurate the political and personal transformations necessary for a life of freedom, of free exercise of the will to live an expansive human life.

Standing in the way of both political and personal freedom everywhere were systems of morality based upon truths proclaimed as absolute, authoritative, incontestable, open to human reason once its fundamental assumptions were understood and accepted as a matter of faith. While the work of destruction undertaken by Nietzsche and Foucault has achieved some successes and made its

34. Bourdieu, "Fieldwork in Philosophy," in *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 10-11.

mark in contemporary intellectual thought, it should be obvious that the forces of moral fundamentalism remain predominant and perhaps more powerful than ever.[35] Nor is it only fundamentalist moral thinking that continues to hold sway over most of mankind, but belief in occult powers. Yet a further obstacle to the destruction that would clear the way towards lives of personal expansion are the humanists, who preach universal doctrines of rights and justice, whose aims one wants to share, but not their premises. For these humanists — among whom Noam Chomsky is perhaps the most egregious example — believe that arbitrary exercise of power, repression, and oppression can be met and overcome by the spread of true principles of right conduct, messages of peace and sympathy, and the like, and, most egregiously of all, that one's enemies are more virtuous than we. In effect, the work of destruction must combat not only fundamentalism in all its forms, but its opposite, a universalism that condemns our very selves and believes virtue exists both abstractly and in the lives of the unfortunate and the weak in our world, and would be activated if only the powerful disarmed themselves.

But there is yet another foe, as powerful as these other two, namely, those believers in "the Enlightenment" itself as the ultimate solution to all problems of truth. The opposition of these true believers is most difficult to confront directly, for they claim to share the outlook of those who stand in the Nietzschean line. They also disparage all belief in ultimate truths, faiths, moralities, with, of course, one exception, the belief in the exercise of right reason and the methods by which partial truths are achieved on the road to complete understanding of the world and the behavior of all its occupants. Among them, the most articulate was Ernest Gellner, who, in his wry manner, declared himself an Enlightenment fundamentalist, a believer in no truths, who proclaimed "the notion of a Revelation" of any sort as "morally unacceptable," but held fast to the methods of science as the one "fixed point in our world-view, and the only one."[36] But it has already been noted how far along the road to megalomaniac world construction this faith in the methods of science has taken us, how its projects of social

35. See, e.g., William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 105.

36. Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 84-85. Foucault, on the contrary, saw no "fixed point" on which to anchor. Morever, he rejected the notion that there was a great struggle in progress between believers in and opponents of "the Enlightenment," describing the demand that one take a stand "for or against" the Enlightenment and "rationalism" as a form of "blackmail"; Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" In my terms, therefore, another false dichotomy.

engineering, control of the environment, mastery of nature, have taken us rather further towards world destruction. All these forms of true belief — in all the varieties of fundamentalism, humanistic universalism, and right reason — are but contemporary forms of moralism that continue to hold sway over most of humanity and to control, confine, and discipline mankind.

How has morality or, better, the various moralities that have come to control and discipline mankind come into being and held sway over men in virtually all times and places? What is the driving force behind them? Of what use are they, especially since the game of life everywhere also includes tacitly accepted modes and manners of violating at least some of them?

Nietzsche gave multiple explanations for the origin, development, and ubiquity of moral systems. He argued that they reflect, among other things, human emotions (especially self-love), their utility to communities, fear or reverence for the authorities who proclaim moral principles, habit, benevolence, "sense of community,"[37] custom, and the use of all these as mechanisms of directing and controlling individuals in order to maintain differential advantages held by "certain segments of the populations of various societies."[38]

At one place, Nietzsche remarks that it is the "sense of community" that "is almost a definition of morality." Like so many of Nietzsche's pithy statements, this one begs for clarification. What is this "sense of community," how does it arise, and why is the definition hedged by the word, almost? Sense of community for Nietzsche is a sentiment, which arises from many of the sources and emotions just mentioned, which overcomes our "vehement" desires that sometimes rise even to the point at which "we would like to devour each other," and which places the interests of the community above our desires. But here Nietzsche provides only speculation concerning the origins of this sense of community. He argues that actions that must have arisen in "primitive society" for utilitarian purposes, that is, for the sake of preserving the safety, well being, and perseverance of human communities acquired, over generations, the sanctity of custom long after their utility for the preservation of the community had been not only forgotten but had become unnecessary or irrelevant. Children from generation to generation were brought up to learn — from observation of the behavior of others, from rewards they received for performing the correct actions, and fear of sanctions for violations thereof — to accept the customs of the community as the

37. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968 [originally published 1883-88]), p. 160.

38. Richard Schacht, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 427.

right and proper, the moral forms of behavior. In the process of transmission of right behavior over generations, an inversion takes place that, for Nietzsche, amounts to a virtual castration of man.[39] The origin of customary practices in utility for the community is forgotten while the practices themselves become sanctified for their own sake. One is then praised for performing those actions *despite* their lack of utility. One is praised and rewarded then for upholding the practices of the community, for having that "sense of community" that overrides "private utilities," in short for being selfless, for acting morally without regard to one's own interests.[40]

But then, also, other mechanisms come into play to preserve "systems of morals." One is the Kantian imperative that says, in effect, that what is good for me must be good for you, which Nietzsche castigates as a reflection of mere emotion, a base emotion that, in fact, says, you will not be allowed to do anything contrary to what I, as a moral being, must do. Nietzsche particularly selects for attack, out of Kant, his principle of obedience. According to Nietzsche, what Kant is saying is: "what is estimable in me, is that I know how to obey — and with you it *shall* not be otherwise than with me!"[41] To put it more baldly even than Nietzsche has done, "Since I must obey, you must also obey."

To put the matter in these terms suggests that resentment is part of the set of emotions that preserves moral regimes. But elsewhere, Nietzsche suggests otherwise, namely, that it is self-love that sustains moral systems. Moral systems arise originally out of the need for communal self-preservation that prevails over individual desires for the pursuit of personal advantage, irrespective of communal requirements. A consequence of this is the splitting of the individual into two: self-regarding and community-regarding. One loves oneself, but one also wants to be loved by the members of the community in which one lives. The individual also may— irrespective of communal duties and obligations that are internalized —

39. Nietzsche clearly means "man" specifically in this metaphor, so there is no gender neutral way of stating this without distorting his meaning.

40. Nietzsche, *Human,* p. 320.

41. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, in *The Philosophy of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), p. 476. Foucault was less harsh in his discussion of Kant's arguments concerning obedience. He interpreted Kant's position as "the contract of rational despotism with free reason: the public and free use of autonomous reason will be the best guarantee of obedience, *on condition, however, that the political principle that must be obeyed itself be in conformity with universal reason* [my italics]; Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" But, he concludes a few paragraphs later in the same piece by opposing the Kantian "necessary limitation" of critique with the call for "a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression."

have internally contradictory or divergent or merely different "idea[s], desire[s], and offspring." All these are loved because they are one's own, something of oneself, but one may single out for special love one or more of these feelings or relations with others, which are then justified in terms of morality. One sacrifices, then, one part of oneself for the sake of another part and justifies that choice as the right and proper moral choice, good for all. Thus, Kant, or anyone who loves to obey, enshrines obedience as a moral principle for all, obedience to authority or to a principle that one transforms into a categorical imperative.[42]

So, morality, it appears, arises from utility and self-love, converted into the sanctified custom, habit, and practices of communities. But then, with Judaism and Christianity, not the community, but God "is inserted and utility withdrawn." It is not just the community that demands obedience, but God. And now "everywhere the real origin of morality is denied: the veneration of nature, which lies precisely in the recognition of a natural morality, is destroyed at its roots."[43] Nietzsche's remarks here seem to suggest not a condemnation of all morality, but a condemnation of the replacement of "a natural morality" by — what else can it be? — an unnatural morality that makes man "sweeter" but simultaneously emasculates him.[44] This is a morality that not only denies its true origins but condemns them, condemns the very idea that either individuals or communities exist to preserve and expand themselves, to enhance life and to live in harmony with nature, to acquire mastery over themselves, "over circumstances, over nature."[45]

But there is something more to Nietzsche's morality. In his own words, there is a morality that recognizes utility and self-love, which he defines "as a continual self-command and self-overcoming practised in great things and in the smallest."[46] This is a morality of rationality whose fundamental principle is control of the self, not self-control in the sense of obedience to the commands and customs of the community or of God, but obedience to one's own ideas, ideals, goals, desires, and desired relationships. But this is not a blind obedience that merely defies all the commands and customs of the community and interpersonal

42. Nietzsche, *Human*, p. 42.

43. Nietzsche, *Power*, p. 120.

44. Again, Nietzsche's thought cannot always be presented in gender neutral language, which would, in effect, mask the fact that he made distinctions between the genders that are no longer considered acceptable.

45. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, II, p. 2, cited in Schacht, p. 294.

46. Nietzsche, *Human*, p. 322. A. Rorty has asked whether the voice here is that of Nietzsche or myself, using Nietzsche's voice. I believe the discussion here is true to Nietzsche and to my own aspirations.

relationships, but takes all into account while firmly pursuing one's own will to expand one's powers — not one's *power*, necessarily, or even desirably, but one's abilities, capacities, and competencies.

Such a morality is very far from any kind of categorical moral imperative. On the contrary, since personal expansion may very well lead one into struggle with others whose own goals stand in one's way, it is the very opposite of a categorical imperative. It says, rather, that what is good for me may not in fact be good for you, that every person must find his or her own way. But that does not necessarily mean that personal self-expansion must be at the expense of others. While it is true, in a sense, that Nietzsche was committed to a "contest conception of life,"[47] that contest did not imply the perpetual struggle for power that characterizes most modern political orders. Nietzsche's contest conception of life involved, rather, perpetual struggle for self-mastery, perpetual striving, perpetual surpassing — through achievement — oneself, others, and all stifling moral constraints.

In contrast to these aspects of a rational, self-loving, self-expanding, but not necessarily selfish or other-disregarding morality, most moral systems everywhere — but Christianity above all — propose false and hypocritical self-denying forms of behavior, for which Nietzsche had the utmost contempt. Indeed, his contempt for conventional values was almost in inverse proportion to the reverence in which they were held — and remain held today. He characterized all the apparently selfless forms of behavior as themselves merely different forms of self-love and will to power. Of all contemporary moral values, he hated most pity, that apparently selfless sentiment of concern for the suffering of others, which he interpreted as nothing more than a display of one's own virtue and superiority over others. While this contempt for pity seems harsh, one has only to reflect for a moment and ask oneself what use to anyone but the pitier is pity, either to the strong person who seeks recovery or to the weak or disabled person with no hope.

In this, as in many other respects, Foucault took up, "reactivated," as he put it, a Nietzschean project, that of the "genealogy of morals," both with respect to the analysis of moral systems and the search for a personal ethics. Foucault is explicit with regard to the first project. In his own words, his masterwork, *Discipline and Punish*, was taken up with "the idea of reactivating the project of a 'genealogy of morals.'"[48] But he did more than reactivate that project. He

47. Richard Flathman, "Introduction to the Transaction Edition" of H.L. Mencken, *Friedrich Nietzsche* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1993), p. xxxii.

48. Michel Foucault, "Questions of Method," in *EFFECT*, p. 74.

established it as a viable mode of historical inquiry. Where Nietzsche had provided, however brilliantly, mostly vague and speculative arguments concerning the origins, persistence, and relativity of moral systems, Foucault, through exhaustive historical inquiry and examination of records, documents, developments in political and social thought, and works of literature and art, described transformations in moral thinking and practice that have occurred throughout the history of Western civilization. He examined and referred to these moral systems in an entirely new way, as "moral technologies." In using this term, Foucault also went beyond Nietzsche in precision. Nietzsche saw moral systems as stifling and controlling. Foucault, in his empirical work, left aside his own moral evaluations and condemnations. He provided substantial factual, documented evidence of the controlling and surveilling aspects of what he called moral technologies, but he went further in specifying the ways in which moral systems operated on the souls and bodies of men, not merely through observation of behavior, supervision, exhortation, education, and moral guidance, but through an array of mechanisms that did not even necessarily parade themselves in moral terms.

On the contrary, the moral technologies he described, particularly those surrounding practices of confinement of the mad, the delinquent, and the criminal, masqueraded behind oppositions — framed in the language of science — between the normal and the pathological, reason and unreason. Whatever the terminology, the tendency, amounting to periodically reformulated categorical imperatives, established divisions and dualities throughout Western history concerning what was acceptable in society and what was not and, in modern times, what constituted behavior permissible in society and what constituted grounds for confinement. Indeed, we come back here in this process of dualistic division to the underpinnings of both Nietzsche's and Foucault's ideas concerning knowledge and truth, namely, their argument that all systems of thought and of morality that operate through such dividing are, at bottom, falsifications. They are none of them "true," only different modes by which communities, whether of whole peoples or of scientific bodies, organize thought, practice, institutions, and discourse. Moreover, they are all inherently confining. They confine one's gaze, one's mode of life, one's relationships within boundaries that one cannot cross without risking social disgrace and contempt, failure in one's profession, and physical confinement as well.

The Kantian moral imperative was intertwined with reason, which in turn was reflected in the law. The moral man in law was a person with "command of

his reason."[49] For Kant, the only reason that mattered for morality was that which was in tune with universal reason, that is, with the categorical imperative.[50] Yet, Foucault found in the parricide, Pierre Rivière, in the post-Enlightenment France of 1830, a man deemed by the presiding judge of the assize court, to have "had sufficient command of his reason to discern the morality of his actions and to be responsible for them." In Kantian terms, however, it is obvious that Rivière's actions were not in consonance with universal reason. For Kant, this meant that he was not "worthy of happiness," for the court in France it meant he was not worthy of life itself. Arguments in defense of Rivière's right to life, to not be punished for his actions, also were phrased in terms of the ideal of right reason. It was said in his defense that he was not in "the full possession of reason" when he committed his hideous acts. What most matters to the discussion here is that the case of Rivière demonstrates not only the futility, even the falseness, of the dichotomy between reason and unreason and the irrelevance of the Kantian imperative in the face of such transgressions of all law and morality, but the sway of a moral technology that was used to condemn Rivière to death in post-Enlightenment French society at a time when his actions could not be comprehended at all, by reason or in terms of reason.

Both Nietzsche and Foucault rejected all the systems of punishment as well as the mechanisms used to arrive at them for the above reason and for many others, including the inability of punishment to achieve any of the many aims it was proclaimed to serve — deterrence, remorse, reform — and its well-documented consequences for institutionalizing criminality and delinquency through recidivism. However, despite Foucault's massive work on the prison, on punishment, and on confinement in general, and despite his personal efforts for prison reform, he offered no systematic alternative. Following Nietzsche, his assault was on the moral systems that produced the irrational dead ends enshrined in the criminal justice system.

Against the false dichotomies that led ultimately to futility and unreason (*non*-sense), both Nietzsche and Foucault proposed a different kind of moral technology. They rejected all moral systems and all universalizing principles and

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49. Report by the Presiding Judge of the Assize Court to the Director of Criminal Affairs, in Michel Foucault (ed.), *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother, my sister, and my brother ... A Case of Parricide in the 19th Century*, trans. by Frank Jellinek (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pp. 142-47.

50. Immanuel Kant, *On the Relationship of Theory to Practice in Morality in General*, in Hans Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings*, trans. by H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 64, and everywhere else in Kant's *Political Writings*.

imperatives in favor of personal technologies of self-development. Nietzsche, as usual, provided no blueprints for such self-development or personal expansion. He described what, in his view, was the highest type of manhood or personhood that could be achieved in his times, namely, that of the "free spirit," but the qualities of the "overman" to come were described inchoately.

Here again, Foucault took up systematically and historically the Nietzschean project of self-development that he described as "care of oneself."[51] He died before he could offer an alternative moral or ethical way of life to replace existing moral systems. But it is clear that he was searching in his historical analyses of Greek, Roman, and early Christian moral technologies of self-development for a moral technology suitable to our times. There can be no doubt that Foucault rejected not only all prevailing moral systems as such, but virtually all the alternative "isms" that imagined themselves breaking free of them. It is not that he rejected social democratic, liberal, feminist, gay, or any other of the goals associated with the movements that promoted them, but he saw in all of them dual dangers: of integration or reintegration into existing systems and institutions or the establishment of new, false, dichotomous, universalizing value systems to replace the old.

Nor did Foucault argue for the acceptance of any of the older systems of personal moral development that featured in his works on the care of the self and sexuality. However, he clearly did see in these older, personal moral systems a way towards an alternative mode of living that would open up in societies new ways of life, new relationships, new ways of experiencing pleasure. The hallmark of a worthwhile future society for Foucault was one in which individuals not only found their own way, but in which society itself became open to new ways and new relationships. In contrast to the Kantian moral imperatives for relationships in society based on uniformity, duty, obligation, obedience, Foucault proposed, in an interview on friendship and homosexuality, a set of goals that are of relevance to all, not only to those defined as gay: mechanisms to make possible "polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated relationships."[52] The achievement of such a polymorphic society — not to be confused with the plural societies of our times and aspirations, which amount to little more than the acceptance of a plurality of cultures, each operating with its own false dichotomies — depends less upon

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51. Michel Foucault, "The Hermeneutic of the Subject," in Michel Foucault, *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley and others (New York: The New Press, 1997), p. 95, and throughout his last works.

52. Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Foucault Live*, p.209.

group movements than upon the cultivation of a personal morality and aesthetic that at once disciplines the self in order to make of oneself a life project, make oneself a person not "worthy of happiness" in the Kantian sense, but worthy of choosing to live with oneself, capable of setting goals, achieving one's aims, experiencing the pleasures that one desires, and living with others in friendship.

Conclusion

The line of thought that links Nietzsche and Foucault has the most radical implications for social theory as well as social practice in everyday life. In Nietzsche's day, indeed even for a century that followed his work, when he was considered by many as incomprehensible, mad, or, worst of all a precursor of Nazism, no strong movement developed to solidify, canonize, and implement his ideas. The case is different today with regard to Foucault whose work has come to occupy the center of a broad movement in history and the social sciences under the general rubric of postmodernist and postcolonial studies. While by no means approaching hegemonic status, such studies have begun to challenge prevailing and formerly hegemonic modes of social analysis, in varying degrees from discipline to discipline. Foucauldian and postmodernist thought appear most prominently in humanistic fields such as literature and literary criticism, but have had much less of an impact in history and the social sciences, where their influence ranges from modest, in the case of historical studies, to substantial in anthropology, to marginal, bordering on nonexistent, in political science, sociology, psychology, and most of the other behavioral and social science disciplines. All in all, however, there can be no doubt that Foucauldian and postmodernist studies now occupy a major place in contemporary social theory, ranged in contestation against the pretensions of the still dominant adherents to the various forms of social science theory, such as rational choice theory, that seek to mimic the natural sciences in universalism, precision, and predictive powers. In contrast to the post-Nietzschean era, therefore, the battle has been at last joined.

In concluding, I want to emphasize the radical character of Nietzschean-Foucauldian thought and its implications for social practice as well, though the latter requires lengthy separate treatment and can only be touched upon here. I want also to address the charge that this system of thought, however radical it may be, is merely nihilist, a charge that both Nietzsche and Foucault faced while

they lived and Nietzsche answered on his own behalf.[53] My argument in relation to both these matters of radicalness and nihilism centers upon three aspects of this line of thought. The first is the importance of a complete overturning of existing systems of thought and their replacement by modes of analysis that inherently contain critique—of both what they replace and of the institutions and practices on which they focus. The second is the replacement of such systems of thought by constantly shifting modes of analysis that keep pace with, or, rather, keep ahead of congealed and congealing systems of thought, including—and even especially—those that claim to hold a key to history and to the resolution of social problems in various utopian and universalistic schemes of social and political organization. The third aspect concerns the radical implications of Foucauldian thought for personal freedom and social relations and practices. All these matters require extensive separate treatment. I mean only to suggest here how they follow from the preliminary task of the overturning of all dualistic thinking, all false dichotomies.

Consider first the matter of overturning and critique. Like all other radical and revolutionary forms of thought, the Nietzschean-Foucauldian line begins by undermining the claims to our loyalty of prevailing systems of thought, institutions, and practices. It denies all holistic, systematic truth claims and the authority of the designated masters of such truths. It denies, therefore, the legitimacy (*pace* Weber) of the powers of the state, state institutions, and their professional handmaidens to enforce their truth claims on individuals and society as a whole. It notes, and by implication condemns, the way those powers are used to surveil, punish, and confine those whose behavior or mode of life do not fit within the existing grid of truth. It exposes the falseness of the alleged realities produced by these agents, such as their depiction of a world comprised of forces of good and evil, engaged in a never-ending titanic struggle. It exposes all such false truth claims and those who manipulate them in their self interest.

But the critique does not stop at such exposures. It is also a call to resistance, protest, and action. Here, moreover, Foucault's call to action is decidedly different from that of Nietzsche. No word from Foucault about the "man above all." Nor, for that matter, no glorification of a proletarian class. Instead, Foucault calls for paying attention to the discourses and systems of thought held predominantly by lower classes, masses, subaltern groups, and marginal elements in society — including the lumpen elements rejected by Marxists — who resist, by their very

53. Especially in Nietzsche, *Power*, Book One: "European Nihilism," pp. 5-82.

being, the hegemonic truth claims of the satisfied classes. Moreover, this is a task for intellectuals, who are implicitly called upon to free themselves from their implication in, and imprisonment *within*, these regimes of truth, and to engage themselves in critique. In short, it ought to be the function of intellectuals to resist the systems of social control and discipline that arise out of these truth claims and that masquerade as utopian schemes for a world of justice and the creation of a good society, which, of course, always includes schemes and structures of punishment. These systems of social control and discipline always include also techniques for governing and controlling societies and individuals, for social engineering, and for campaigns of all sorts against crime, drugs, domestic violence, violence in general, pornography, sex offenses and sex predators, and on and on, virtually all of which either miss their target or lead instead to ever proliferating forms of social control and discipline, restrictions on freedom, and increased surveillance.[54] One is tempted to ask why it is not sufficient to have a code of laws, a police, and a judiciary to deal with crimes of all sorts, why it is necessary to have all these campaigns that represent nothing so much as a modern, sophisticated, middle class form of vigilantism.

It follows from the Foucauldian critique of systems of truth, as well as of discourses that claim to know the meaning of our existence, that the pretensions of those officially authorized to uphold and proclaim such truths and meanings must be resisted. The intermediaries between God and man or between our conscious and unconscious selves or between our present and our past as individuals, societies, and nations, are but impostors. The whole crowd of priests, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, psychologists, criminologists, and social workers — insofar as they stand forth as such intermediaries — hinder, rather than enhance our self-realization. They do so directly and indirectly — directly when they treat us or testify against us and indirectly through the vast influence they have in society to proclaim who amongst us are abnormal, pathological, sociopathic, neurotic, or unfit to carry out our responsibilities as parents.

Further, the pretensions of the theorists and practitioners of these pseudo-scientific disciplines and cults to cumulation of knowledge must also be rejected. Their theories, based on false assumptions and false dichotomies, provide no basis for progress, scientific or otherwise. Rather, they are all interrelated in any given

54. They also make money for advertising agencies producing mindless full page newspaper ads and billboards showing the faces of persons allegedly ravaged by drugs, as if many youths about to experiment with marijuana for the first time, or any drug addict, would be influenced by such matter.

historical period, proclaiming more or less the same truths and hidden meanings with different vocabularies or, rather, jargons. Moreover, just as there is a unifying discourse in a given historical period, so the practitioners operating within these discourses speak the same language with a different vocabulary. Priests take advanced degrees in psychology. Social workers with B.A. degrees mouth psychological jargon to their clients. The psychologists administer rorshach tests — that ultimate instrument of meaning decipherment consisting of six charts kept hidden away and inaccessible to ordinary people until the time comes for the truth of their being to be deciphered. And, all these are supported by political, legal, and juridical institutions in the modern state.

Here, therefore, in this realm of truth and meaning, and of the personal and the social, lies a field of contestation sorely neglected by political and economic ideologues who have directed their aim solely at the institutions of the state or capitalism. In this personal and social field, resistance operates on a daily basis, as in the others.[55] There are also works that attack the pretensions of the theorists and practitioners in the above-named disciplines, but no revolutionary or radical political movement such as existed in the heyday of socialism or that exist today in movements for democratization and human rights. Moreover, the targets are constantly moving, with the proliferation of new theories and therapies and cults. What then can be done to resist more effectively the constant inroads into our minds, our daily practices, and our fortunes, material and otherwise, of these pseudoscientific theorists and practitioners? Here, the role of intellectuals must be central, for, in these cases, it is intellectual pretension and false claims to scientific truths not political dictators and global corporations, that must be attacked.

But how should this struggle be waged? No revolutionary movement against mind control can be imagined that would mimic in this arena the trade union movement in the economic arena or mass mobilizations in the political arena. Moreover, since the targets are constantly moving, so must the attack keep pace. But, most important, the attack must not lead to some new synthesis or paradigm to replace the old in any of these human or social sciences. Contrary to the currently predominant views of scientific progress in these fields, such progress is

55. Consider the Rorschach and other psychological tests. If, for example, one wishes to undermine these schemes for normalization and exclusion, one can consult a psychologist friend about what *not* to see and say when administered a rorshach test and, with a bit of intelligence, also completely undermine the MMPI test by avoiding too many inconsistent answers to repetitive questions in that vast schedule. It is possible to imagine, in this vein, a postmodernist guide to methods for undermining all such schemes and practices of normalization.

not achieved by the construction of new paradigms to replace defective ones. It is the very existence of paradigms that must be resisted, grids of knowledge and power that place us now here, now there on the various scales of normal and pathological, fit and unfit, social and antisocial.

Finally, the charge of nihilism arises in the alleged failure of either Nietzsche or Foucault to present a coherent statement of "what is to be done." In fact, however, neither Nietzsche nor Foucault nor their thought can reasonably be characterized as nihilist. Nietzsche was politically conservative, no doubt, insofar as he rejected the socialist ideologies of his time and their egalitarian implications, but political conservatism is not the same as nihilism. No one, however, has been able to pin down Foucault, who has been variously characterized as an anarchist, a conservative, a reformist, and, of course, a nihilistic revolutionary. Moreover, he seemed to some to have merely retreated at the end of his life into a search in the classical world for a new technology of the self. But what cannot fail to impress anyone who looks closely into Foucault's thought, and its policy implications, are both their radicalness and their unpredictability, not in the sense of inconsistency, but in the sense that they stand outside the confines of everyday practice and thinking, that they are virtually unthinkable, at least in our times.

But, since Foucault certainly knew very well that he could not present the practical implications of his thought without being universally condemned, he was extremely cautious in making policy statements. For example, what conclusions can possibly be derived from Foucault's and, for that matter, Nietzsche's wholesale criticisms of all previous systems of punishment and confinement and their justifications than that the prisons, like the insane asylums, ought to be emptied? But, Foucault never said this, and might not even have desired it immediately. We can only know for sure that he condemned every single aspect of the contemporary prison and can only guess at how he would have proposed eliminating the prisons. Instead of presenting ideas for their elimination, however, he did in fact make reformist proposals. The latter fact indicates clearly that he was not a nihilist, but it does not demonstrate that he was *merely* a reformer.

Similarly, Foucault argued without doubt that the differences between the sexes were more socially constructed than biological. He clearly thought that homosexuality itself was a social construction. Further, he was certainly aware to what extent the homosexuals of our time were caught in the prison of gender constructions or, rather, were cast out of the churches of male and female gender

constructions, and how self-defeating were their attempts to gain recognition for themselves as, in effect, a third gender. Surely, he thought that, insofar as sexuality and sexual practices were concerned, gender ... could, should, might as well ... be considered irrelevant and that, in a more reasonable and joyful world, all that would matter sexually would be "bodies and pleasures," the mutual enjoyment by persons of each other's bodies, irrespective of gender, as a means of taking pleasure. Yet, he did not present a scheme for such a world, but instead participated actively in movements for gay rights and recognition in France. So, again, his thought was more radical than his political action, which again was reformist. But, once more, it should be obvious that Foucault was not merely a reformist. Rather, he chose to propose only what might be achieved now, but held back from spelling out the revolutionary implications of his thought.

Yet a third example. Foucault let slip in a panel discussion on one occasion that he thought most forms of rape should be considered cause for civil not criminal action.[56] Can one even imagine that a campaign could be launched for such a cause in today's world? Is it possible even to imagine a serious discussion of it on any of the radio talk shows?[57] Who would not be pilloried for even suggesting such a thing in public when even 25-year sentences are mandated for a late night penetration of a woman by a young man on a sandy beach after the couple had been drinking together the entire evening?[58] This last example suggests the impossibility of a revolutionary program of action, with a manifesto that contained a long series of items that included, e.g., 1) emptying the prisons; 2) allowing the free play of all passions for all genders, and all acts that do not involve infliction of unwanted violence on other people's bodies; 3)

56. Michel Foucault, "Confinement, Psychiatry, Prison," in *Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, trans. by Alan Sheridan and others, edited by Lawrence D. Krizman (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 200-210.

57. Indeed, I can testify to the fact that it is virtually impossible even to discuss the subject, with guests, at the dinner table.

58. The reference here is to my recollection of the televised case some years ago of a nephew of Ted Kennedy, a young man of the Shriver family, who one suspects was actually guilty, but was saved from punishment by the "not guilty" verdict of the jury—saved, that is, from the possibility of 25 years in prison. Perhaps the lines from the *Mikado* are relevant here:

"My object all sublime
I shall achieve in time —
To let the punishment fit the crime —
The punishment fit the crime;
And make each prisoner pent
Unwillingly represent
A source of innocent merriment!
Of innocent merriment!"

decriminalization of most acts of alleged rape; 4) legalization of drug use; etcetera, etcetera. A radicalism that not only thinks the unthinkable, but presents it in the form of a manifesto of this sort would be not only impractical, but ⋯ insane. So, a reformism that keeps hidden its most radical thoughts, because they cannot even be broached in public, is rather different from reformism that does, in fact, uphold an existing system of institutions, but merely modifies certain practices. The latter is a reformism designed to save existing institutions, whereas a radical reformism would keep in view an ultimate goal of displacement and elimination.

What both Nietzsche and Foucault offered most of all was a stance of critique of virtually all existing forms of social thought and practice that arose from Western dualistic thinking. Foucault's work also stands as a contrast to, and implied critique of nearly all contemporary work in history and the social sciences. Veyne has shown how Foucault's ideas have revolutionized historical writing. I have shown elsewhere how his work on power and governmentality have, at one and the same time, captured and reformulated these concepts from the discipline of political science, where they have been largely discarded in favor of extremely narrowly defined topics that arise from theories of rational choice.[59] Even more distressing in the latter discipline is the celebratory character of so much work that takes for granted the existence of democracy and freedom in our world, and hails their extension to the rest of the world in processes of so-called democratization. It never recognizes the need for anything but reform without displacement, even if it ever makes any policy suggestions. It never offers a thoroughgoing critique. Before revolutionary action can be proposed, revolutionary thought is required.

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59. Paul R. Brass, "Foucault Steals Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. III (2000), 305-30.

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