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# The Unbreakable Circle: An Intellectual History of Michel Foucault

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THE UNBREAKABLE CIRCLE: AN INTELLECTUAL  
HISTORY OF MICHEL FOUCAULT

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Social Sciences:  
History

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by  
Christopher Marc Bettis Moreland

March 2014

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## ABSTRACT

The following is a chronologically ordered internal intellectual history of Michel Foucault. The objective of this analysis is to determine whether or not Foucault provides a viable critical social theory of bourgeois society. In order to examine this topic, I trace the development of Foucault's thought during his early, pre-archaeological stage, his archaeological stage, and his genealogical stage. I frame Foucault's stages as attempts to overcome Kant's subject/object division—or the paradox that man operates as both a meaning-giving subject and an empirical object—that one encounters in discourses pertaining to the social sciences. Foucault's pre-archaeological stage is characterized by two humanistic modes of thought: hermeneutics and phenomenology. Hermeneutics involves the interpretation of historical events in pursuit of existential meaning. By contrast, phenomenology seeks to uncover meaning in subjective experience. After the publication of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Foucault rejects hermeneutics and phenomenology on the grounds that the search for meaning through interpretation will inevitably obscure truth under endlessly multiplying interpretations. Neither method offers a coherent resolution to the subject/object division.

Foucault's archaeological method attempts to overcome the subject/object division by studying the relationships—or patterns appearing in language—between empirical observations. Archaeology does not account for the truth-value associated with codified empirical observations (or statements). In other

words, archaeology studies the language patterns comprising claims to objective truth. Archaeology consequently assumes a relativistic and objective position that escapes the subject/object division. However, this method suffers from internal instabilities; the rules governing language pertaining to empirical observation are objective, yet the analysts are themselves a product of these rules. This contradiction casts doubt up archaeology's claim to objectivity.

Foucault's genealogical method does not seek to resolve Kant's subject/object division; rather, genealogy embraces the notion that the interaction between subject and object remains unknowable. Genealogy, therefore, retains archaeology's relativistic stance regarding claims to truth while forgoing the former method's pursuit of objective analysis. During his genealogical stage, Foucault directs his attention away from language patterns and toward the interaction between power and knowledge. Foucault conceptualizes power as a multidirectional, decentralized, and self-perpetuating force that manifests itself as the material result of interpersonal, institutional, and society-level conflicts. Knowledge complements power by defining normal and abnormal behavior. In doing so, knowledge establishes the cognitive field comprising the individual's self-concept. Genealogy is an analytic of the power/knowledge interaction; the method provides a relativistic means of conceptualizing the reciprocal influence between force relations and discourses. While genealogy does not constitute an objective critical theory, the method has a concrete basis in the form of the positive manifestations of the power/knowledge interaction.

Based on my assessment of the above methods, I conclude that genealogy is a viable social theory. Moreover, Foucault consistently deconstructs narratives comprising bourgeois society. From this recurrence it is apparent that Foucault is a para-Marxist; he provides a critique of bourgeois society and attempts to test the limits of individual experience within that society. This conclusion supports the continued relevance of Foucauldian analysis in the social sciences.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background and Statement of the Problem

There is a wealth of secondary literature on Michel Foucault (1926-1984). Secondary sources tend to examine Foucault's life and work from well-worn perspectives: biographical accounts relate Foucault's theories to surrounding political, social, historical and personal context; methodological surveys meta-analyze Foucault's methods; and academic fields examine his relevance within their respective disciplines. Despite the wide coverage Foucault receives, there is no universally accepted consensus with regard to his legacy. What, if anything, does Foucault leave us with in terms of methodology? Does Foucault provide a viable critical social theory?

James Miller, author of Foucault's biography, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, argues that Foucault's relativism undermines the utility of his theories: "Hostile to the encyclopedic ideal in the human sciences and to transcendental claims in philosophy, Foucault left behind no synoptic critique of society. No system of ethics, no comprehensive theory of power, not even ... a generally useful historical method."<sup>1</sup> Certainly, Foucault's insistence on avoiding persuasive arguments with definitive applications makes it difficult to situate him

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<sup>1</sup> James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 19.

within the confines of a modern utilitarian narrative. To assess Foucault from within that narrative, however, would contradict Foucault's intention to remain undefined by the boundaries of persuasive discourse. This begs the question: can one assess Foucault—and by what standard—when his theories defy and identify potential distortions brought about by assessment?

Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, professors at the University of California, Berkeley and coauthors of the analysis of Foucault's work, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, do not dispute the notion that Foucault's theories are unapologetically relativistic: "We have no recourse to objective laws, no recourse to pure subjectivity, no recourse to totalizations of theory. We have only the cultural practices which have made us what we are. To know what that is, we have to grapple with the history of the present."<sup>2</sup> Despite Foucault's avoidance of definitive arguments, Dreyfus and Rabinow interpret Foucault as having provided a unique social theory that can be used to critique institutions: "The job to be done is *not* to free truth from power ... The job is rather to make this pragmatic account function differently within a field of power."<sup>3</sup>

There are numerous other views regarding the usefulness of Foucault's work. I cite the above two arguments in order to establish a dichotomous problem: can Foucault's theories be judged as useful under their internal logic?

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<sup>2</sup> Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 204.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

## Purpose of Study

The purpose of the following study is to assess Foucault's theories in order to determine whether or not Foucault provides a viable critical social theory of bourgeois society. If Foucault's theories can be shown to have real-world applications, it would lend credibility and significance to relativistic perspectives in societal analysis. The Foucauldian theme of testing intellectual limits would, if translated into formalized methodologies, open novel research venues in the social sciences.

This is by no means an original topic; Foucault's work has been subjected to extensive analyses by scores of researchers. I differentiate the following study as an internal intellectual history of Foucault. That is, I conduct an interpretive reading of Foucault without reference to social, political, economic and individual context. An internal analysis differentiates itself from other forms of investigation—or, analyses that address surrounding contexts—by focusing the study entirely on a close reading of pertinent literature. Where other analyses attempt to situate Foucault by referencing the external factors that influence his work, I review and make reference only to Foucault's body of literature. That being said, there are studies that take a similar approach to investigating Foucault—Dreyfus and Rabinow's interpretive reading, for instance.

*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* analyzes Foucault's work from 1961 up through the late 1970s. Dreyfus and Rabinow

argue that Foucault has developed a “sustained and largely successful” method that they term “interpretive analytics.”<sup>4</sup> The following study is intended to support Dreyfus and Rabinow’s with a close reading of Foucault’s work from 1954 to 1976. I begin my study at an earlier date in order to demonstrate how Foucault’s early, undeveloped theories influenced his later intellectual development. I build on Dreyfus and Rabinow’s study by arguing that Foucault’s genealogical method comprises a para-Marxist critical theory of bourgeois society. Foucault establishes a method for conceptualizing the reciprocal relationship between discourses and power. This conclusion supports the continued relevance of Foucauldian analysis in the social sciences.

### Review of Literature

While a comprehensive review of the secondary literature on Foucault would be a worthwhile topic for future research, it is beyond the scope of this analysis. A brief listing of prominent texts on Foucault will suffice for our purposes: Foucault’s friend and contemporary philosopher Gilles Deleuze provides an account of Foucault’s thought as it pertains to knowledge, power, and subjectivism in *Foucault* (1986); Béatrice Han examines a recurrent Foucauldian dichotomy in *Foucault’s Critical Project: Between The Transcendental and the Historical* (1998); Clare O’Farrell situates and analyzes

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., xii.

Foucault in *Foucault: Historian or Philosopher?* (1989) and *Michel Foucault* (2005); in *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* (1980), Alan Sheridan conducts a chronological analysis of Foucault's works (several of which Sheridan himself translated into English); and Barry Smart offers an extensive, seven-volume study of Foucault's theories and critical responses to said theories in *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments* (1995).<sup>5</sup> Foucault has also been the subject of numerous biographies—including Didier Eribon's *Michel Foucault* (1989) and David Macey's *The Lives of Michel Foucault: A Biography* (1994)—and academic articles such as Amy Allen's "The Anti-Subjective Hypothesis: Michel Foucault and the Death of the Subject" (2000), and Hubert L. Dreyfus' "Foucault's Critique of Psychiatric Medicine" (1987). Countless studies across academic disciplines cite Foucault.

Of the sources outlined above, only two were written during Foucault's lifetime: *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* and *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*. In other words, the majority of analyses on Foucault have been written in the past thirty years. It may be that researchers delayed analyzing Foucault's theories until it was certain that he would not develop them any further. Given this timeframe, Foucault is a young topic of analysis relative to

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<sup>5</sup> Other secondary texts include: *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (2003), by Gary Gutting; *The Philosophy of Foucault* (2006), by Todd May; *Foucault Beyond Foucault: Power and Its Intensifications Since 1984* (2008), by Jeffrey Thomas Nealon; and *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (2006), by Eric Paras.

other prominent intellectuals. It stands to reason, then, that analysts have yet to fully exhaust the possible interpretations and uses of Foucault's work.

The volume of secondary literature on Foucault reinforces my argument that Foucault's theories continue to be relevant within academic discourses. Furthermore, I justify the following study on the grounds that the possibility of developing new interpretations and uses for Foucault's theories warrants a return to his original works.

### Organization and Method

The following study is a chronologically ordered internal intellectual history of Foucault's works from 1954 to 1976. I divide the analysis into three chapters, excluding this introduction and the conclusion. The chapters consist of methodological analyses and readings of corresponding works. The second chapter, titled "Origin of Method," includes an analysis of Foucault's earliest methods and their influence on his later work and methodology. I also conduct a supporting investigation of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, and *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. These works represent Foucault's progression from a hermeneutic form of analysis to a semi-structural method.

Chapter three is titled "The Promise of Archaeology." In this chapter, I examine the foundations, strengths, and weaknesses of Foucault's



archaeological method. Supplementing this analysis is a reading of *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. The fourth chapter, "The Narrative from Within: Genealogy," describes Foucault's genealogical method. I also include a reading of *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* and make brief reference to *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*.

The reasoning behind this organization is two-fold: firstly, the chronological analysis of Foucault's methods allows us to see which aspects of Foucault's thought remain constant and which change over the twenty-two year span covered. Secondly, coupling methodological analyses with interpretive readings serves to illustrate how Foucault applies his abstract methods in the form of historical analyses. In other words, the readings function as examples of the concepts outlined in the methodological analyses.

I analyzed Foucault's English-translated works before delving into secondary sources. This was in order to avoid developing preliminary biases. The majority of sources cited in this study are primary sources readings, though I reference *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* and Miller's biography of Foucault as prominent interpretations of Foucault's work.

### Limitations of Study

There are three notable limitations to my study: comprehensiveness, secondary sources, and the fact that it is an internal intellectual history. The

study is not a comprehensive review of Foucault's works. I do not reference Foucault's earliest work—his introduction to Ludwig Binswanger's 1952 text, *Dream and Existence*. This omission is due to the fact that Foucault's early theories lack the cohesion and originality of his later ones, thus it was necessary to include only one text—*Mental Illness and Psychology*—as representative of this period in the analysis. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, several essays, and Foucault's published lectures are excluded for purposes of brevity.

Further, I do not reference the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. These texts represent the final phase in Foucault's intellectual career, which is characterized by the analysis of subjective experience.<sup>6</sup> I trace the development of Foucault's thought up through his genealogical phase in order to demonstrate that genealogy is the only phase in which Foucault provides a viable critical social theory. Consequently, it is unnecessary to continue the analysis beyond this point.

Of the innumerable volumes of secondary literature on Foucault, this study references only two. I neglect secondary materials in the interest of providing an original and unbiased interpretation of Foucault's works. That this is an internal intellectual history also assures some degree of objectivity. On the other hand, the lack of surrounding context also limits the study's scope, as this precludes deriving conclusions from factors outside of Foucault's words. I would argue,

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<sup>6</sup> In his article on misconceptions surrounding Foucault's intellectual development, Bryan Smyth refers to Foucault's final phase as "the return of the subject" (94). Bryan Smyth, "Foucault and Binswanger: Beyond the Dream," *Philosophy Today*, 55, Issue Supplement (2011): 92-101.

however, that my approach produces a thorough and focused analysis that would not have been possible without omitting surrounding contexts. Moreover, this omission may yield topics for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ORIGIN OF METHOD

#### Kant, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Foucault's intellectual development can be divided into three phases. The first phase consists of several divergent methodologies and social theories used in Foucault's earliest book, *Mental Illness and Psychology*. He sought to distance himself from his pre-*Madness and Civilization* methodology, and therefore neglected to name—or even differentiate—this first phase. Foucault refers to his middle phase as the “archaeological method”—employed from 1961, with the publication of *Madness and Civilization*, up through *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*'s publication in 1969. The third phase, which Foucault christened the “genealogical method” was used from 1969 onwards. This chapter examines the philosophical background underlying Foucault's methodology, as well as the shift in his thinking from his first phase through his early archaeological phase.

Foucault historicizes each of his major works (exempting, to an extent, *Mental Illness and Psychology*) in the context of a reorganization of knowledge that took place during the European Enlightenment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This event entailed a significant increase in Western European society's interest in objectivity, positivism, rationality, and humanistic

ideals. Foucault regularly refers to the development of the social sciences during this period. Dreyfus and Rabinow outline the significance of this reorganization as it pertains to the social sciences: “Foucault thinks that the study of human beings took a decisive turn at the end of the eighteenth century when human beings came to be interpreted as knowing subjects, and, at the same time, objects of their own knowledge. This Kantian interpretation defines ‘man.’”<sup>7</sup> The term ‘Kantian’ refers to Immanuel Kant, the famous eighteenth century Prussian philosopher.

The centrality of Kant’s subject/object division—or the reciprocal relationship between the perceiver and the perceived—to the examination human activity warrants a brief digression. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant attempts to transcend the rationalist and empiricist traditions’ common assumption that knowledge is subject-independent; that is, human understanding, which is the basis for knowledge, must reflect an objective reality which exists independently of the perceiver: “It has hitherto been assumed that our cognition must conform to the objects.”<sup>8</sup> This notion implies that objective reality preexists the perceiver’s understanding, which is a problematic assumption from the standpoint that it is impossible to intuit objects *a priori*, or without experience of an object, yet empirical knowledge of an object is also limited due to the spatial and temporal restrictions inherent in perception. Hence,

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<sup>7</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, *xix*.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn. Cited from “The Great Books of the Western World” compilation, *The Critique of Pure Reason; The Critique of Practical Reason and Other Ethical Treatises; The Critique of Judgment*, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, Executors of the translator Thomas Kingsmill Abott. (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1990), 7.

subject-independent knowledge does not have the capacity to ascertain truth. Kant concludes, “if the intuition must conform to the nature of objects, I do not see how we can know anything of them *a priori*.”<sup>9</sup> In response to this impasse, Kant introduces his theory of transcendental idealism, or the notion that knowledge does not conform exclusively to the object being perceived: rather, one’s cognition and experience of objective reality interact to form knowledge. Knowledge is both objective and subjective in that one’s perception of an object is dependent upon a set of cognitive rules. Kant elaborates on these concepts in his preface to the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*:

I may assume that objects, or, which is the same thing, that *experience*, in which alone as given objects they are cognized, conform to my conceptions—and then I am at no loss as to how to proceed. For experience itself is a mode of cognition which requires understanding. Before objects are given to me, that is, *a priori*, I must presuppose in myself laws of the understanding which are expressed in conceptions *a priori*. To these conceptions, then, all the objects of experience must necessarily conform. Now there are objects which reason *thinks*, and that necessarily, but which cannot be given in experience, or, at least, cannot be given *so* as reason thinks them.<sup>10</sup>

The ‘laws of understanding’ that Kant mentions in this passage signify time and space, or synthetic *a priori* forms of intuition that allow humans to conceive of, differentiate, and represent objects. However, Kant’s transcendental idealism maintains that these forms of intuition can only provide one with knowledge of appearances; humans cannot conceive of objective knowledge outside of our perception. In Kant’s words, “we can have no cognition of an object, as a thing in itself, but only as an object of sensible intuition, that is, as

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 7. Kant’s italics.

phenomenon.” Although this conclusion postulates an insurmountable roadblock for human cognition and our ability to establish objective truth, Kant offers the optimistic view that “while we surrender the power of cognizing, we still reserve the power of *thinking* objects, as things in themselves.”<sup>11</sup> According to Kant, our cognitive limitations serve a constructive purpose; humans must attribute meaning and structure to objects in order to overcome this inability to conceive of objects in themselves. Hubert Dreyfus provides a useful interpretation of Kant’s transcendental idealism in his foreword to *Mental Illness and Psychology*: “Kant accepted the finitude of human reason and sought to make this very finitude the basis of man’s positive powers ... Thus man, as defined by Kant, became both the source of all meaning in the universe and a meaningless object in it. Indeed, it is precisely as a finite system of representations that he is the source of all order.”<sup>12</sup>

As constructive as transcendental idealism sounds, Kant’s conception of man as subject and object (or the purveyor and recipient of meaning) becomes problematic when attempting to ascertain determinate truth. If reality varies, at least in part, according to the subject’s perception, then how can one establish an objective foundation of knowledge? While this issue is not so prevalent for

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 9. Kant’s italics.

<sup>12</sup> Hubert Dreyfus, cited from Michel Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, trans. Alan Sheridan. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), xvii. In the interest of avoiding confusion, it should be noted that the current English edition of this book is published under the title *Madness: The Invention of an Idea*, trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011). This analysis cites the older edition for its inclusion of Hubert Dreyfus’ foreword, which is omitted from the 2011 edition. The initial 1954 edition of *Mental Illness and Psychology* was titled *Maladie Mentale et Personnalité*, or *Mental Illness and Personality*. *Mental Illness and Personality* has not been translated into English, and its second section—which Foucault rewrote in 1962—is not considered in this analysis.

determining the truth-value of knowledge derived from empirical experience, Kant's subject/object division remains pervasive in more abstract discourses, such as the social sciences. Dreyfus and Rabinow clarify this point by stating: "Kant introduced the idea that man is that unique being who is totally involved in nature (his body), society (historical, economic and political relations), language (his mother tongue), and who at the same time finds a firm foundation for all of these involvements in his meaning-giving, organizing activity."<sup>13</sup> Miller argues that Kant's philosophy carries important social implications, hence its aforementioned pervasiveness; "human beings are both able and obliged to *construct* a moral and political world for themselves."<sup>14</sup> When taken to its logical conclusion, Kant's philosophy advocates either—as Miller's statement suggests—a somewhat relativistic view of human activity (insofar as humans construct truth pertaining to themselves), or an appeal to some transcendental factor that makes this construction possible. As human activity consists of psychic machinations that are not easily reduced to concrete and empirically observable elements, any study thereof must contend with this issue of truth.

Foucault was acutely aware of the uncertainties that Kant's subject/object division creates in the social sciences. Indeed, his work is characterized by picking fields of supposedly objective discourse apart, eventually revealing the discourses' hidden subjective foundations—thus reducing these sciences to a complex network of social constructs. Miller argues that Foucault's methodology

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<sup>13</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, *xix*.

<sup>14</sup> Miller, 139.



“has the curious effect of causing the object under investigation to crumble before our eyes.”<sup>15</sup> This should not be viewed as a purely deconstructive effort, however. Foucault’s methodology—particularly during his archaeological and genealogical phases—rests on the aforementioned relativistic interpretation of Kant’s subject/object division; hence Miller’s claim that Foucault “never ceased to regard himself as a kind of Kantian.”<sup>16</sup> And as a Kantian, Foucault analyzes how subjects and objects construct and interact with each other. Based on this analysis, Foucault is able to narrate the processes by which knowledge bases are formed.

In *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Foucault employs a phenomenological and existential/hermeneutic analysis of mental illness alongside historical, Freudian and—though only in the first edition—Marxist interpretations. Each of these constitutes a different method of analyzing the subject/object relationship. This discussion will be restricted to phenomenology and hermeneutics, as Foucault later developed his own methodology as an alternative to these systems of thought. Phenomenology is the exploration of subjective experience. Founded by Edmund Husserl in the early twentieth century, the phenomenological tradition maintains that the subject, which gives meaning to itself and external objects, is an autonomous and transcendental existence. Dreyfus and Rabinow summarize phenomenology as a philosophy which

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 152. Miller is referring to Foucault’s analysis of the social sciences, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, though this passage can be applied to any of Foucault’s major works.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 138.

“accepts the view that man is totally object and totally subject, and investigates the meaning-giving activity of the transcendental ego which gives meaning to all objects including its own body, its own empirical personality, and the culture and history which it ‘constitutes’ as conditioning its empirical self.”<sup>17</sup> While the phenomenological subject is formed in part by external circumstances (family, society, etc.), all meaning is internal, or created by the subject.

Foucault’s use of phenomenology in *Mental Illness and Psychology* is evident in his existential terminology and advocacy of understanding mental illness from the patient’s subjective perspective. That said, Foucault does not utilize phenomenology for constructive purposes, such as formulating a phenomenological pathology of mental illness; rather, he seeks to disprove the possibility of establishing an autonomous science of the mind. In order to accomplish this, he employs a hermeneutic approach. Martin Heidegger developed hermeneutics as a “rethinking” of phenomenology with the publication of *Being and Time* in 1927.<sup>18</sup> Hermeneutics rests on the phenomenological notion that the subject is a product of its environment. However, hermeneutics does not claim that all meaning derives from the transcendental subject. Instead, hermeneutics studies and interprets the meaning underlying cultural practices. Cultural practices constitute the reification of a deep meaning that must be uncovered in order to understand human nature. Dreyfus and Rabinow offer a succinct explanation of this school of thought:

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<sup>17</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, xx.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

Heidegger's phenomenology stresses the idea that human subjects are formed by the historical cultural practices in which they develop. These practices form a background which can never be made completely explicit, and so cannot be understood in terms of the beliefs of a meaning-giving subject. The background practices do, however, contain a meaning. They embody a way of understanding and coping with things, people, and institutions. Heidegger calls this meaning in the practices an interpretation, and proposes to make manifest certain general features of this interpretation.<sup>19</sup>

Dreyfus and Rabinow conclude that hermeneutics “amounts to giving an interpretation embodied in everyday practices.”<sup>20</sup> In *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Foucault displays an “unquestioning acceptance” of Heidegger's hermeneutics of suspicion, or what Dreyfus describes as “the repression of a deep, nonobjectifiable truth.”<sup>21</sup> According to this skeptical variant of hermeneutics, the task of the analyst is to interpret and offer commentary on social practices in order to uncover, beneath the “groundlessness” of these practices, some form of concealed truth. Once the individual becomes enlightened to said truth—generally via a bodhisattva-like intellectual authority—a “liberation” occurs, freeing the individual from repressive forces.<sup>22</sup> As Dreyfus and Rabinow point out, this liberation can be seen in Marxism in the form of “the power released by the realization that one's class is exploited,” and in Freudianism in “the maturity gained by facing the deep secrets of one's sexuality.”<sup>23</sup> In *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Foucault employs the hermeneutics of suspicion in order to show, historically, how the notion of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., *xxi*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., *xxi*.

<sup>21</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Mental Illness and Psychology*, *xxxii*.

<sup>22</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, *xxii*.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., *xxii-xxiii*.

madness is an attempt made by society to obscure the groundlessness of human nature. Uncovering the deep truth surrounding madness—which lies in the historical relationship “of man to the madman and to the true man”—will free individuals from the “alienation” brought about by psychology’s attempts to ascribe a scientific language to madness.<sup>24</sup>

There were numerous problems inherent in Foucault’s early methodology. To begin with, Foucault incorporates several methods and analytic lenses into *Mental Illness and Psychology*—such as the abovementioned existential methods. The expansiveness of the 1954 work proves to be problematic, however, as some of the theories he postulates conflict with others. As Miller observes, “part of the book’s problem is simply the amount of ground it tries to cover.”<sup>25</sup> There are other related, yet more fundamental, issues with this work. In its first half, Foucault examines psychology from Freudian and existential viewpoints in an effort to provide “a description of the structure of self-interpreting beings and its variations—a philosophical anthropology.”<sup>26</sup> Dissatisfied with the Marxian social history covered in the second half of the original edition, Foucault rewrote the second half in 1962 to include “a history of the experience of madness, i.e., of the series of self interpretations embodied in our cultural practices that determine how the most extreme variations are to be understood.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, Foucault attempts to combine a description of

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<sup>24</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 2, 76.

<sup>25</sup> Miller, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Mental Illness and Psychology*, xxiii.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiii.

madness as a baseless (that is, reflecting the groundlessness of existence, or lack of human nature) and phenomenological experience with a historical analysis of madness as a perspective that is constructed by early and modern psychological theories. The result of this combination is a study whose methodology abruptly shifts away from an abstract analysis of humans as self-interpreting subjects toward a historical/hermeneutic analysis of madness as a societal construct. Taking the conflicting nature of these analyses into account, there is little reason to contest Dreyfus' critique of the work as "an unstable combination of Heideggerian existential anthropology" and "a history of forms of experience."<sup>28</sup>

Foucault was most certainly conscious of the flaws outlined above. That he would trouble himself to revise the work, in 1962, indicates that he saw problems with the first edition. According to Dreyfus, Foucault rejected "all reprint rights to the first version, published in 1954," presumably as a result of these problems. He did not favor the second edition either, as evidenced by the fact that he "tried unsuccessfully to prevent the translation of the radically revised 1963 version."<sup>29</sup> Foucault even refers to his *Psychiatric Power* lecture series as the "second volume" in his analysis of mental illness, with the first being *Madness*

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, *viii*. Dreyfus elaborates on the point about Heidegger later in his foreword, stating: "The method Foucault adopts in his history of madness is an unstable synthesis of early Heidegger's existential account of *Dasein* as motivated by the attempt to cover up its nothingness and later Heidegger's historical interpretation of our culture as constituted by its lack of understanding of the role of the clearing in both making possible and limiting a rational account of reality." *xxvii*

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, *viii*.

and Civilization.<sup>30</sup> *Mental Illness and Psychology* is cheerfully omitted from this count. As Dreyfus bluntly surmises, “clearly, Foucault did not like the book.”<sup>31</sup> Foucault provides the reasoning behind his overwhelming dissatisfaction with both versions of the 1954 text in the original preface to *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*:

To study forms of experience in this way—in their history—is an idea that originated with an earlier project in which I made use of the methods of existential analysis in the field of psychiatry and in the domain of “mental illness.” For two reasons, not unrelated to each other, this project left me unsatisfied: its theoretical weakness in elaborating the notion of experience, and its ambiguous link with a psychiatric practice which it simultaneously ignored and took for granted.<sup>32</sup>

Regarding the two reasons Foucault gives for rejecting *Mental Illness and Psychology* in this esoteric passage: The first reason focuses on the work’s attempt to analyze the experience of madness from an existential perspective. Foucault disapproved of his early acceptance of Heidegger’s hermeneutic assumption that madness concealed truth. The second reason refers to Foucault’s acceptance of certain aspects of Freudian theory, though he critiqued the Freudian hermeneutics of suspicion in the second half of the revised edition. The commonality between these two reasons is clearly Foucault’s dislike of hermeneutics. Foucault rejected hermeneutics as early as one year prior to

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<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *Psychiatric Power, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-74*, ed. Jacques Langrange, trans. Graham Burchell, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13.

<sup>31</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Mental Illness and Psychology*, viii.

<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault, “Preface to *The History of Sexuality, Volume II*,” trans. William Smock, in *The Foucault Reader*. ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) 334. Cited from Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, vii-viii. As Dreyfus points out, Foucault disliked *Mental Illness and Psychology* to such an extent that he did not even name the work in this passage. Also, a point of clarification: Foucault is referring to his technique of examining the history of discourses within the social sciences and how these discourses influence the individual’s self-concept—or the history of how the individual experiences itself.

revising *Mental Illness and Psychology*, with the publication of *Madness and Civilization*, in 1961. Moreover, in the preface to his 1963 archaeology of medical science, *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault vehemently rejects hermeneutics' meaning-centric approach—which he refers to as 'commentary' and 'exegesis'—arguing that it can obscure and fabricate truth during the interpretive process. Moreover, truth can only be found in the origin of the object of analysis; yet it is impossible to replicate origins due to spatial and temporal limitations, thus hermeneutic analysis can only search for truth by interpreting discourses in an effort to uncover meaning reflecting the object's origins: "*Commentary* questions discourse as to what it says and intended to say; it tries to uncover that deeper meaning of speech that enables it to achieve an identity with itself, supposedly nearer to its essential truth; in other words, in stating what has already been said, one has to re-state what has never been said."<sup>33</sup> Foucault argues that this interpretive process can only result in endlessly multiplying discourses, as there are an infinite number of meanings one can attach to an object of discourse, and truth will never reveal itself through any given meaning. A lucid explanation of Foucault's rejection of hermeneutics can be found in his preface to *The Birth of the Clinic*:

Commentary rests on the postulate that speech (*parole*) is an act of 'translation', that it has the dangerous privilege images have of showing while concealing, and that it can be substituted for itself indefinitely in the open series of discursive repetitions; in short, it rests on a psychologistic interpretation of language that shows the stigmata of its historical origin. This is an exegesis, which listens, through the prohibitions, the symbols,

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<sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), *xvi*.

the concrete images, through the whole apparatus of Revelation, to the Word of God, ever secret, ever beyond itself. For years we have been commenting on the language of our culture from the very point where for centuries we had awaited in vain for the decision of the Word.<sup>34</sup>

For all the methodological differences between Foucault's early and later work—his views regarding hermeneutic analysis, for instance—certain commonalities remain. As Dreyfus notes, Foucault consistently doubts any theory claiming, “to provide a science of the human subject.” Moreover, Foucault dissects conventional narratives in the social sciences even in *Mental Illness and Psychology*, leading Dreyfus to refer to the work as “the opening salvo in Foucault's lifelong use of the interpretation of practices against the claims of the human sciences.”<sup>35</sup> Foucault also uses historical analysis in each of his works, and he begins his persistent effort to overcome—albeit using unoriginal methods—Kant's subject/object division in *Mental Illness and Psychology*.

From these consistencies it becomes apparent that the 1954 book occupies a significant developmental phase in the progression of Foucault's thought. Yet it is an obscure work; indeed, Miller devotes a single paragraph to *Mental Illness and Personality* in his 500-page biography of Foucault, and he only mentions the revised edition in an endnote.<sup>36</sup> The reasons behind *Mental Illness and Psychology's* lack of prestige are clear enough; it is a work renounced

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., xvii. The interpretation of Foucault's views on hermeneutics corresponds with Dreyfus's—he cites portions of this passage in his preface to *Mental Illness and Psychology* (xxxiii)—and Dreyfus and Rabinow's—who quote a similar passage from the same preface (12).

<sup>35</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, ix.

<sup>36</sup> Miller, 63. There are two possible reasons for this: either Miller did not regard the work as being equal in intellectual rigor or influence when compared to Foucault's later works, or Miller respected Foucault's wish to disassociate himself from this early work.



by its own author; it lacks the cohesiveness, originality, and linguistic flair of Foucault's future works; and overall, it suffers from the methodological problems outlined above. On the other hand, as Miller aptly writes: "The work reflects the variety and heterogeneous character of Foucault's formative interests, and also the ambiguity (if not confusion) of his own emerging convictions."<sup>37</sup> Taking the aforementioned methodological commonalities into account, it is reasonable to argue that Foucault's later methods constitute either reactions against or constructive reassessments of the early methods employed in *Mental Illness and Psychology*.

*Madness and Civilization* marks a transitional period in Foucault's thought. His lingering usage of hermeneutic and phenomenological ideas suggests that the work was a re-evaluation of Foucault's early methodology. Jean Khalfa, editor and co-translator of *History of Madness*, argues that while the 1961 work marks the point at which "Foucault's thought starts to look beyond phenomenology and toward structuralism," Foucault has not completely discarded his existential roots, as "most of [the book's] vocabulary is phenomenological and its avowed object is a particular *experience*, that of the other as mad."<sup>38</sup> Beyond this borrowed terminology, *Madness and Civilization*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>38</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, (New York: Routledge, 2009), *xiv*. Note that this work is the unabridged version of *Madness and Civilization*. When referencing Foucault's original history of madness, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (or *Madness and Unreason: History of Madness in the Classical Age*), this analysis will generally cite the abridged version, *Madness and Civilization*, unless the passage in question is not included in that edition. The reasoning for this being that

also—according to Dreyfus and Rabinow—borders on adopting the hermeneutics of suspicion as an approach for examining madness: “It is only a slight distortion of the text to substitute ‘madness’ for ‘the Word of God’ and apply Foucault’s own criticism of hermeneutics ... to his suggestion that madness is a deep secret experience, masked by rationality and discourse, of what it is to be human.”<sup>39</sup>

Evidence of Foucault’s closeted hermeneutics can be seen in his assertion that madness has an “inaccessible primitive purity” which society and rational thought “hold[s] captive”—a hidden truth, in other words. And by analyzing the historical point at which reason separates from and represses madness, or the “the originary confrontation that gives meaning to the opposition of sense and senselessness,” Foucault hopes to discover something—presumably some truth that exists beyond the rationalist narrative—that will “allow that lightning flash decision to appear once more, heterogeneous with the time of history, but ungraspable outside it, which separates the murmur of dark insects from the language of reason and the promises of time.”<sup>40</sup> Unlike hermeneutics, phenomenology, Freudianism, Marxism, and other variants of humanist thought, Foucault’s vision does not promise any sort of liberation as a result of this discovery.

Remnants of humanistic thought notwithstanding, *Madness and Civilization* is unarguably a historical, archaeological, and structural work—

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*Madness and Civilization* is the first English translation of this work, and is therefore more well-known and accessible than the more recent *History of Madness*.

<sup>39</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, *History of Madness*, xxxiii. This passage is cited from the unabridged preface to the 1961 edition.

indeed, when outlining his goal to examine the language with which psychiatry has silenced madness, Foucault argues that his intention “was not to write the history of that language, but rather draw up the archaeology of that silence.”<sup>41</sup> While the core facets of structuralism and the archaeological method will be discussed in the third section, it bears mention that these both adopt a relativistic perspective. Hermeneutics and phenomenology both overcome Kant’s subject/object division by positing a transcendental meaning within societal practices or the subject. This meaning presupposes the existence of definitive truth, and the interpretation of which inevitably leads to the moral valuation of all actions and objects. In contrast, structuralism and archaeology avoid the notion of transcendental meaning altogether—that is, these methods assume that truth and meaning are constructed by humans—and instead analyze an object’s truth through a purely materialistic lens. Despite his aforementioned implication that madness contains some hidden truth, Foucault rejects hermeneutics and the possibility of discovering truth within psychology, opting instead for the archaeological approach: “I remained in a sort of relativity without recourse, never looking for a way out in any psychological *coup de force*, which might have turned over the cards and denounced some unrecognised truth.”<sup>42</sup>

Foucault describes *Madness and Civilization* as “a structural study of the historical ensemble” of the social institutions and concepts that constrain

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., xxviii.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., xxxv. Miller cites a portion of this passage when enumerating on Foucault’s methodology (107).

madness.<sup>43</sup> As Jean Khalifa argues, this method does not entail analyzing historical documents from a modern perspective that deciphers a hidden meaning behind clinical descriptions; rather, Foucault examines documents “to see ... how those specific descriptions articulate with certain norms or principles (in particular moral and religious) of their time.”<sup>44</sup> Comparatively speaking, Foucault employs historical analysis in *Mental Illness and Psychology* in an effort to demonstrate flaws in dominant psychological theories and offer his own phenomenological theory as an alternative. His historical narrative exists to support his conclusion, in other words. In *Madness and Civilization*, his approach allows for a more autonomous historical narrative, at least insofar as he draws significance from events based on temporal and social context. This being said, Foucault still interprets historical sources with the intent to advance his conclusion.

Foucault’s methodology in *Mental Illness and Psychology* and *Madness and Civilization* varies from his later works in that he advances a number of conclusions based on definite casual connections. In the former text, for example, he argues that alienation causes madness, and contradictions within society cause alienation: “The social relations that determine a culture, in the form of competition, exploitation, group rivalry, or class struggle, offer man an experience of his human environment that is permanently haunted by contradiction. ... Only in the imaginary can he recognize the fraternal status in

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., xxxiii.

<sup>44</sup> Jean Khalifa, cited from the introduction to *History of Madness.*, xxi.

which his social relations find their stability and coherence.”<sup>45</sup> And in *Madness*—as Dreyfus and Rabinow argue—Foucault draws a clear-cut relationship of oppressor and oppressed in his account of the Hôpital Général’s administrative policies; “Foucault explicitly identifies the establishment of the Hôpital Général as the direct policy of royal authority. ... The actors are identified, the actions given rather straightforward motivational accounting and the effects of their actions duly noted. In his later works, Foucault will rarely be this explicit about causal explanations of who acts and why.”<sup>46</sup>

The absence of this definitive causality in Foucault’s later work can be attributed to developments in his methodologies. Neither the archaeological nor the genealogical methods allow for claims to truth; while both methods ground their analyses in historical narratives, they do not project meaning or intention unto their object of study. In this regard, Foucault does not completely subscribe to this core aspect of the archaeological method until his next work, *The Birth of the Clinic. Madness and Civilization* is, therefore, a semi-archaeological work that has not quite cast off the phenomenological and hermeneutic components that characterize Foucault’s first book.

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<sup>45</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 82.

<sup>46</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 5.

## Mental Illness and Psychology

Methodological and stylistic differences between the two works notwithstanding, the central arguments of both *Mental Illness and Psychology* and *Madness and Civilization* are identical: society constructs the notion of mental illness, and this notion varies according to social and historical context. Foucault articulates this thesis in the introduction to the second section of *Mental Illness and Psychology*: “For a long time now, one fact has become commonplace of sociology and mental pathology: mental illness has its reality and its value qua illness only within a culture that recognizes it as such.”<sup>47</sup> Of course, this does not preclude the existence of individuals exhibiting abnormal behaviors. Hence, Foucault’s goal in the 1954 work is to deconstruct commonly-held explanations of mental illness, and to substitute these pathologies with a phenomenological understanding of individuals which society deems ‘mad’.

The crux of the first half of *Mental Illness and Psychology* is that dominant (at the time of the work’s publication) psychological theories are unable to provide a causal model of mental illness. In Foucault’s words, “psychology has never been able to offer psychiatry what physiology gave to medicine: a tool of analysis that, in delimiting the disorder, makes it possible to envisage the functional relationship of this damage to the personality as a whole.”<sup>48</sup> Foucault attributes psychology’s failure in implementing the “same conceptual structure as those of organic pathology” to the disunity between two postulates upon which

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<sup>47</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 60.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

somatic medicine rests. The first postulate, which Foucault calls the “‘essentialist’ prejudice,” conceptualizes illness as an “essence ... that can be mapped by the symptoms that manifest it, but that is anterior to them and, to certain extent, independent of them.”<sup>49</sup> In this view, illness is an abstraction reified by physiological symptoms, and symptoms are therefore assumed to be the result of illness. Consequently, the essentialist postulate classifies illness based on commonalities between symptoms, or using “a *symptomatology* in which the constant, or merely frequent, correlations between a particular type of illness and a particular morbid manifestation were picked out.”<sup>50</sup>

Complimenting this view is the ‘naturalist postulate,’ which attempts to classify illness through qualitative description. Toward this end, somatic medicine analyzes illness according to their frequency, duration, and perceived evolutionary stages, thus establishing ‘species’ of illnesses based on descriptive characteristics. Of this classificatory structure, Foucault states, “the unity that was supposed to exist in each nosographical group behind the polymorphism of the symptoms was like the unity of a species defined by its permanent characteristics and diversified in its subgroups.”<sup>51</sup>

These postulates can certainly provide a means with which to classify illness, whether somatic and mental; yet they cannot establish a concrete connection between illness and symptoms. By viewing the body’s function in

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 6. Nosography refers to the systematic classification and description of diseases.

mechanistic terms, physiology is able to overcome this limitation by regarding illness as a deviation from normal functioning in response to physical harm. In Foucault's words, illness "is the organism reacting in an ordered manner to pathological damage and with a view to repairing the damage."<sup>52</sup> It follows that physiology has achieved relative autonomy as a science owing to its ability to link symptoms with somatic function via a concrete causal relationship. Foucault refers to this link as "organic totality," and argues that it reinforces both the abstract and somatic analysis of illness, or "makes possible a more valid abstraction and the determination of a more real causality."<sup>53</sup> In contrast, psychology analyzes abstract mental processes, and thus cannot unify and substantiate its classificatory structures using causality-based pathology. For this reason, psychology can only describe mental illness using the two aforementioned postulates—that is, by classifying mental illness according to symptomatic and descriptive similarities. Psychological analysis is therefore based on the statistical fallacy of inferring causation from abstract correlation.

If mental illness is defined with the same conceptual methods as organic illness, if psychological symptoms are isolated and assembled like physiological symptoms, it is above all because illness, whether mental or organic, is regarded as a natural essence manifested by specific symptoms. Between these two forms of pathology, therefore, there is no real unity, but only, and by means of these two postulates, an abstract parallelism. And the problem of human unity and of psychosomatic totality remains entirely open.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 6.



The final sentence of this passage is particularly important, as Foucault is arguing that psychology's reliance on abstract postulates in describing mental illness has notable consequences beyond simply straying into scientifically unverifiable territory: psychology cannot establish a theory of 'human unity' or 'psychosomatic totality.' While these are similar concepts, the latter refers to the connection between illness and behavior in terms of pathology, while the former refers to this connection as it pertains to individual personality, or human nature. If psychology cannot achieve psychosomatic totality (essentially overcoming the mind/body problem), then mental pathologies are only supported by self-referential and abstract analysis—or 'metapathology'—and are therefore complex fabrications. Foucault argues that "mental pathology must shake off all the postulates of a 'metapathology': the unity that such a metapathology provides between the various forms of illness is never more than factitious."<sup>55</sup>

The questionable accuracy of metapathologies applies even to theories with an allegedly biological basis, such as psychological evolutionism. A popular theory of human nature during the 1950s, psychological evolutionism holds that mental illness entails the patient's regressing back to earlier stages of psychological evolution. Foucault describes this regression as "the process throughout which the web of evolution is unraveled, suppressed first, in its most benign forms, the most recent structures, then attaining, at its culmination and

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 13. Foucault seems to be using the term 'metapathology' to refer to purely abstract mental pathologies. This usage should not be confused with Abraham Maslow's, who defined it as factors preventing self-actualization. See Abraham A. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1993).

supreme point of gravity, the most archaic levels.” Psychological evolutionism imitates physiology in its use of a mechanistic model to explain mental illness. This model proposes that illness is a natural phenomenon insofar as it represents a predetermined biological process. Yet this is “an inverted process; the natural history of the illness has merely to flow back against the current of the natural history of the healthy organism.”<sup>56</sup> Foucault is quick to point out a critical flaw in this theory: “The regressive analysis describes the orientation of the illness without revealing its point of origin.” While physiology is able to determine causes of illness based on empirically observable causal connections, psychological evolutionism has no such recourse owing to the abstract nature of mental regression. As such, psychological evolutionism cannot explain mental illness’ causes on an individualized level; “why this or that person is ill, and is ill at this or that moment, why his obsessions have this or that theme, why his delusion involves these demands rather than others, or why his hallucinations are riveted to these visual forms rather than others, the abstract notion of regression is unable to explain.”<sup>57</sup> Psychological evolutionism, therefore, cannot establish psychosomatic totality, and instead degenerates into metapathology.

Foucault’s critique of psychological evolutionism can be generalized to apply to psychology’s inability to provide a unified causal theory of personality. Thus far Foucault has argued that psychology cannot link the individual’s behavior and personality illness with a causal pathology without resorting to the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 18, 19.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 28.

usage of abstract postulates. Yet Foucault also attacks psychology on a more fundamental level, arguing that the notion of an autonomous standard with which to describe and delineate normal and abnormal behavior and personality is inherently flawed, as such a standard would require an objective understanding of human nature. Dreyfus accurately summarizes Foucault's views regarding human nature: "there are no objective answers to such questions as What is human nature?" and consequently arrives at the conclusion that "there can be no science of the self."<sup>58</sup> To Foucault, the notion of a unified understanding of human nature is analogous to a belief that "the illness is a general reaction of the individual taken in his psychological and physiological totality." This totality establishes an abstract corpus of knowledge, thus diminishing a positive understanding of mental illness: "the more one regards the unity of the human being as a whole, the more the reality of an illness as a specific unity disappears and the more the description of the individual reacting to his situation in a pathological way replaces the analysis of the natural forms of the illness."<sup>59</sup> The conclusion that Foucault draws from these issues is that an abstract understanding of mental illness can be neither unified nor objective, as it ignores the fact that illness can vary according to the individual's perspective. "In mental pathology, the reality of the patient does not permit such an abstraction and each

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<sup>58</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Mental Illness and Psychology*, xxiii.

<sup>59</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 9. While the notion of an abstract corpus of knowledge can only be inferred in *Mental Illness and Psychology*, this will become a critical theme in his later works.

morbid individuality must be understood through the practices of the environment to him.”<sup>60</sup>

The focus thus far has been on Foucault’s argument that any attempt to develop an objective science of the mind is doomed to abstraction. He offers an alternative form of analysis that, as the above quotation suggests, emphasizes the relationship between the patient and his or her environment. In this instance the term ‘environment’ refers to psychology’s influence within society. As such, this solution reflects Foucault’s continual interest in examining the social sciences; he turns the analysis inward, toward psychology and its role in creating mental illness. In order to understand madness, “we must analyze the specificity of mental illness, seek the concrete forms that psychology has managed to attribute to it.” Madness can be described not through the manifestation of symptoms (which leads to the aforementioned issues with abstraction), but rather by examining specific conditions within the individual and society (in this instance within psychology) that “have made possible this strange status of madness, a mental illness that cannot be reduced to any illness.”<sup>61</sup> In short, Foucault advocates for the removal of scientific analysis from the study of mental illness, and proposes a phenomenological analysis of madness as an alternative.

To clarify, Foucault outlines his phenomenological method in the first half of *Mental Illness and Psychology*. It bears mention that Foucault adopts this approach in reaction against objective pathology. Regarding psychological

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 13.

evolutionism, for example, Foucault argues that “the causality that makes [illness] necessary is not yet disengaged [presumably from subjective factors], no more than that which gives each clinical picture its particular coloring. This necessity, with its individual forms, is to be found not in an always specific development, but in the patient’s personal history.”<sup>62</sup>

In order to analyze the patient’s personal history, Foucault argues for the use of Freudian psychoanalysis alongside phenomenology. Granted, Freudianism carries with it several deterministic components—for example, the uniform interpretation of the unconscious, the libido’s influence over behavior, and the death instinct—that fall under the umbrella of objective pathology which Foucault so vehemently rejects. Yet Foucault maintains that while these causal elements are certainly ingrained in psychoanalysis, Freudianism has grown less deterministic and more phenomenological, and “is tending more and more to turn its attention to the defense mechanisms and finally to admit that the subject reproduces his history only because he responds to a present situation.”<sup>63</sup> It is clear that Foucault is interested in the meaning-centered elements of psychoanalysis, or methods strongly tied to phenomenology. Accordingly, Foucault describes his objective as follows: “The understanding of the sick consciousness and the reconstitution of its pathological world, these are the two tasks of a phenomenology of mental illness.”<sup>64</sup> To sum up, Foucault borrows the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 46.

method of analyzing the patient's history from Freudianism, and he borrows the notion of the self-interpreting subject from existentialism in order to create his analysis.

Dreyfus offers a concise summary of Foucault's phenomenological explanation of mental illness: "social contradictions cause alienation, alienation causes defenses, defenses cause brain malfunction, and brain malfunction causes abnormal behavior."<sup>65</sup> Foucault's account of social contradictions and alienation consists mainly of Freudian case studies, resulting in a somewhat fragmentary explanation. Social contradictions are actions reflecting conflicting desires or expectations. As an example, Foucault recounts how a child attempts to receive affection by stealing candy, but does so with the intention of getting caught, thus assuaging the child's guilt. The theft is therefore a defense mechanism intended to protect the child from anxiety stemming from her social circumstances. In Foucault's words, defense mechanisms are "a protection against a conflict, a defense in face of the contradiction that arouses it."<sup>66</sup> Individuals employ defense mechanisms in response to anxiety, which Foucault defines as, "a psychological experience of internal contradiction."<sup>67</sup> Anxiety generally results from discordance between the patient's perspective and what the patient perceives others' perspectives to be with regard to a past event. In other words, anxiety stems from feelings of alienation. It follows that anxiety is

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<sup>65</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Mental Illness and Psychology*, xxvi.

<sup>66</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 38.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

closely tied to the patient's interpretation of his or her personal history; "by uniting past and present, [anxiety] situates them in relation to one another and confers on them a community of meanings."<sup>68</sup> In this regard, a patient's perception of his or her anxiety (and resultant defense mechanisms) plays an integral role in determining the patient's overall self-interpretation.

The phenomenological aspect of defense mechanisms derives from the notion that the form mental illness takes depends on how a patient interprets a past event and its relation to the present: "beneath all the protective mechanisms that particularize the illness, anxiety reveals itself and each type of illness defines a specific way of reacting to it."<sup>69</sup> The meaning behind defense mechanisms, then, can be traced to the patient's interpretation of his or her anxieties. Thus, defense mechanisms, or the neurotic behavioral manifestations of mental illness, derive from a series of significations leading back to the transcendental subject, whose anxiety "serves as a common denominator and that gives a single signification to the psychological development of the individual."<sup>70</sup>

The fact that an individual has anxiety or employs defense mechanisms as a result does not mean the individual is mentally ill. Mental illness emerges alongside a temporally circular relationship between anxiety and its resultant defense mechanisms; "the patient protects himself by his present defense mechanisms against a past whose secret presence arouses anxiety; but, on the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 40.

other hand, against the possibility of a present anxiety, the subject protects himself by appealing to protections that were set up in earlier, similar situations.”<sup>71</sup> In this view, anxiety, although born from a specific prior experience, can develop the unsettling ability to metastasize its way throughout the subject’s entire history, multiplying and attaching itself to other experiences in the past and present. According to Foucault, anxiety, “defines, from the outset, a certain style of experience that marks the traumas, the psychological mechanisms, that triggers it off, the forms of repetitions that it affects in the course of pathological episodes: it is a sort of a priori existence.”<sup>72</sup> In short, anxiety pervades all aspects of the patient’s personal history. As such, the patient exhibits a hyper-attentiveness to their condition—hence “nothing could be more false than the myth of madness as an illness that is unaware of itself as such.”<sup>73</sup> This awareness is skewed, however, toward a detached viewpoint, or “an allusive recognition”; patients regard their condition as “an accidental, organic process,” whose progression and manifestations are consequently inevitable, such that “they see their illness as a destiny.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, patients tend to view mental illness as a physiological ailment over which their cognition holds no influence. At the same time, patients do not regard themselves as the passive vehicle in the illness’ development; patients exhibit a vague understanding of their cognitive role in perpetuating the illness. Ironically, this understanding contributes to the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 47, 48.



malady's progression. Foucault clarifies this point by arguing that patients' awareness (or self-interpretation) of their illness shares a causal link with the illness' manifestations (actions taken based on this interpretation); "[the patient's] consciousness of the illness arises from within the illness; it is anchored in it, and at the moment the consciousness perceives the illness, it expresses it."<sup>75</sup>

When patients' self-interpretation becomes completely detached from their illness—Foucault does not go into great depth as to how and why this occurs—a rift will appear between patients' consciousness, or inner world, and the real world. Both of these are perceived as objectively real by patients. "The most consistent delusion appears to the patient just as real as reality itself; and in this interplay of two realities ... awareness of the illness reveals itself as awareness of another reality."<sup>76</sup> This other reality serves as a defense mechanism that allows patients to isolate themselves from the real world, thus distancing themselves from the burden of bearing responsibility for their actions. There are several consequences to this dissociation from the real world. For one, patients no longer experience the real world as having spatial and temporal continuity; "objects have lost their cohesion and space has lost its coherence."<sup>77</sup> In some instances, patients lose all sense of material existence. Moreover, they come to regard other people as meaningless objects, rather than self-interpreting and meaning-giving subjects, thus they no longer have external meaning-giving

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 48-49.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 52.

subjects with which to help situate themselves in reality. Without external substantiation, their inner world is without meaningful foundation. These factors ultimately result in both realities becoming meaningless. In Foucault's words:

By losing the significations of the world, by losing its fundamental temporality, the subject alienates that existence in the world in which his freedom burst forth; being unable to possess its meaning, he abandons himself to events; in this fragmented, futureless time, in that incoherent space, one sees the mark of a disintegration that abandons the subject to the world as to an external fate. ... The nucleus of the illness is to be found in this contradictory unity of a private world and an abandonment to the inauthenticity of the world. Or, to use another vocabulary, the illness is both a retreat into the worst of subjectivities and a fall into the worst of objectivities.<sup>78</sup>

Having provided this description of mental illness as a state of being, Foucault does not take the next step—pursued by existential psychologists such as R. D. Laing—of creating a causal pathology linking events with resultant mental states. This is to be expected, as such an effort would contradict Foucault's rejection of a uniform meaning and causality behind events leading to mental illness. Instead, Foucault reflects on the mode of analysis, arguing that, "the morbid world is not explained by historical causality (I am referring, of course, to psychological history), but historical causality is possible only because this world exists: it is this world that forges the link between cause and effect, the anterior and the ulterior."<sup>79</sup> The meaning of this passage changes entirely depending on whether one interprets Foucault's use of the phrase 'this world' as referring to the patient's morbid world or to external reality. In the former interpretation—whose accuracy is more probable assuming 'morbid world' and

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 55.

'this world' represent the same subject—the reality of mental illness can only be grasped from the patient's phenomenological perspective, as this perspective encompasses the only level of analysis in which the illness is real. The latter interpretation, however, corresponds with Foucault's conclusion to the first half of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, where he argues that the various meanings attached to mental illness owe their existence to psychology itself, rather than existing as objective fact.

But here we may have touched on one of the paradoxes of mental illness that demand new forms of analysis: if this subjectivity of the insane is both a call to and an abandonment of the world, is it not of the world itself that we should ask the secret of its enigmatic status? Is there not in mental illness a whole nucleus of significations that belongs to the domain in which it appeared—and, to begin with, the simple fact that it is in that domain that it is circumscribed as an illness?<sup>80</sup>

In referencing both psychology and 'the world,' Foucault is suggesting that society also plays a role in constructing mental illness. This passage, therefore, foreshadows Foucault's theses in the second half of *Mental Illness and Psychology*—which, as Dreyfus notes, "is a summary of Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*"—and, concordantly, in *Madness and Civilization*.<sup>81</sup> In Foucault's estimation, the first half of his 1954 work "fixed the coordinates by which psychologies can situate the pathological fact" and identified mental illness's "forms of appearance," yet it neglects to explain why mental illness exists as it does.<sup>82</sup> Behavioral science, in both its organic and phenomenological forms, can demonstrate how mental illness operates; yet psychologists "have been unable

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>81</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Madness and Psychology*, viii.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 60.

to show its conditions of appearance.”<sup>83</sup> In the second half of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Foucault attempts to correct this oversight and locate the origins of mental illness. As previously mentioned, these origins lie within psychology and society.

A substantial amount of the material in the second half of *Mental Illness and Psychology* is covered in greater detail in *Madness and Civilization*, thus the following reading of the former text will only cover the more salient arguments, with emphasis given to those which do not appear in the latter text. Foucault’s assertion that mental illness is a social construct seems an appropriate place to begin this reading. In support of this view, Foucault makes the bold statement: “a society expresses itself positively in the mental illnesses manifested by its members; and this is so whatever status it gives to these morbid forms.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, society determines what constitutes mental illness, and mental illness’s manifestations vary according to societal conditions. Hence, Foucault refers to social and behavioral research as “a projection of cultural themes.”<sup>85</sup> And in this argument Foucault’s adherence to Heideggerian hermeneutics of suspicion becomes apparent: “our society does not wish to recognize itself in the ill individual whom it rejects or locks up; as it diagnoses the illness, it excludes the patient.”<sup>86</sup> Confinement therefore serves as a means to conceal the hidden nature of madness that is inherent in society. Building on this argument,

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 63.

psychology constructs mental illness in an effort to obscure madness's hidden meaning.

It is at this point relevant to note that Foucault does not use the terms 'madness' and 'mental illness' in an interchangeable manner in any of his works. Madness, in Foucault's 1954 and 1961 works, constitutes an aspect of human nature that is obscured by the language of science and rationality. In "Madness, The Absence of an Œuvre," a 1964 essay Foucault wrote in order to clarify his arguments in *Madness and Civilization*, he describes madness as "everything ... that characterises the *spoken* and forbidden world of unreason; madness is the excluded language."<sup>87</sup> Madness remains unknowable in terms of the concealed meaning it may carry, rather like the contents of a sealed tomb. At the same time, however, madness contains an infinitely vast "*reserve* of meaning."<sup>88</sup> Phrased differently, madness is a blank slate upon which interested parties might inscribe any number of potential meanings; madness "furnishes a void where all that is proposed is the still-unaccomplished possibility that a certain meaning might appear there, or a second, or a third, and so on to infinity."<sup>89</sup> In the modern world, madness does not possess a language of its own, but rather is spoken for through psychology: "Since Freud, Western madness has become a non-

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<sup>87</sup> Michel Foucault, "Madness, The Absence of an Œuvre," from *History of Madness*, ed. Jean Khalfa, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 546. Foucault's italics.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 547. Foucault's italics.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 547.

language because it has become a double language (a language which only exists in this speech, a speech that says nothing but its language).<sup>90</sup>

Mental illness, then, is the codification of meaning and practices associated with madness at a given time; it is the language of psychology and psychiatry. As such, mental illness is the product of numerous societal factors. Foucault portrays these factors that comprise mental illness as a matrix of increasingly regimented disciplinary practices, such that mental illness “is set to enter a technical region that is increasingly well controlled: in hospitals, pharmacology has already transformed the rooms of the restless into great tepid aquariums.”<sup>91</sup> Given these definitions, it is clear that madness and mental illness do not speak the same language; “the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue.” Foucault’s purpose in *Mental Illness and Psychology* and—to a greater extent—*Madness and Civilization* is to demonstrate how mental illness, or “the language of psychiatry,” comprises “a monologue of reason *about* madness” which serves to silence madness—or, in hermeneutic terms, to obscure its meaning.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 547.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 549. Miller cites this passage when differentiating madness and mental illness (104). Also, while Foucault analyzes power, coercion, and disciplinary practices in *Madness and Civilization*, he elaborates at length on these subjects in *Discipline and Punish*.

<sup>92</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), x-xi. Foucault’s italics.

In his 1954 text, Foucault argues that “madness is much more *historical* than is usually believed, and much *younger* too.”<sup>93</sup> The definition of madness has changed over time, hence the historical narrative that Foucault puts forth in support of his relativistic attitude toward psychology. During the Renaissance, for example, literature and art often depicted madness in a favorable light, as demonstrated by Shakespeare and Cervantes. “Up to about 1650, Western culture was strangely hospitable to these forms of experience.”<sup>94</sup> Foucault asserts that the modern language of madness—mental illness—does not represent a discovery of objective truth; rather, it reflects another shift in how madness is perceived—a dominant perspective in a given culture for a given period of time—and psychology is not the autonomous purveyor of this truth, but an instrument of punishment, guilt and—it follows—behavioral control.<sup>95</sup>

From these assertions, Foucault arrives at the conclusion that psychology and mental illness share an oddly interdependent existence. Certainly, there can be no mental illness without the study and classification thereof, yet there can be no psychology without mental illness. Mental illness and psychology exhibit this circular causality owing to their constructed origins. That is, factors entirely unrelated to the objective truth of mental illness—e.g., social norms, power relations, and the goal of behavioral control—construct and mediate the

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<sup>93</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 69. Foucault’s italics.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>95</sup> Foucault uses the term ‘psychology’ in *Mental Illness and Psychology* to refer to academic studies relating to human activity—essentially the social and behavioral sciences—and the applications of this research. He replaces ‘psychology’ with ‘psychiatry’ in *Madness and Civilization*, and often employs ‘the human sciences’ as an analogous term in his later works. As this variation suggests, Foucault defines these terms in the broadest possible sense.

relationship between mental illness and psychology. These factors (external and internal dimensions in the following passage) serve as the impetus for defining madness through psychology.

Man became a “psychological species” only when his relation to madness made a psychology possible, that is to say, when his relation to madness was defined by the external dimension of exclusion and punishment and by the internal dimension of moral assignation and guilt. In situating madness in relation to these two fundamental axes, early-nineteenth-century man made it possible to *grasp* madness and thus initiate a general psychology.<sup>96</sup>

When analyzed under the hermeneutics of suspicion, the relationship between psychology and mental illness takes on a conspiratorial tone; psychology must obscure the constructed nature of mental illness in order to justify its own existence. This is due to the fact that madness’s true meaning—which psychology conceals through its language—does not derive from psychology and the various factors defining mental illness; its meaning is instead found in socio-historical context and in the baselessness of human nature. Hence, Dreyfus describes the revised second half of *Mental Illness and Psychology* as “an account of the constitution of mental illness as the last stage of a historical denial of the experience of strangeness,” and “a historicized version of early Heidegger’s claim that the truth that is covered up is strangeness, i.e., that there is no objective truth about the nature of human beings.”<sup>97</sup> Psychology operates under the opposing assumption that human nature exists and can be known through reason. Hence, psychology must

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<sup>96</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 73. Foucault’s italics.

<sup>97</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Mental Illness and Psychology*, xxxii-xxxiii.



conceal and oppress the hidden meaning of madness; to do otherwise would be to “undermine its own conditions, that it should turn back to what made it possible, and that it should circumvent what is for it, by definition, the un-supersedable. Psychology can never tell the truth about madness because it is madness that holds the truth of psychology.”<sup>98</sup> Consequently, psychology subordinates unreason to reason. It follows that to conduct a true study of madness—or unreason—would inevitably cause psychology to deconstruct its own rationalistic foundations. “If carried back to its roots, the psychology of madness would appear to be not the mastery of mental illness and hence the possibility of its disappearance, but the destruction of psychology itself and the discovery of that essential, non-psychological because non-moralizable relation that is the relation between Reason and Unreason.”<sup>99</sup>

Foucault’s purpose is not to declare the pre-ordained failure of any attempt to conduct an objective study or treatment of madness—indeed, he expresses the hope that “one day, an attempt must be made to study madness as an overall structure.”<sup>100</sup> Yet Foucault questions the validity of theories claiming to have a unified and scientific understanding of mental illness. The 1954 text was “intended simply to show a particular relation between psychology and madness and a disequilibrium so fundamental that they rendered vain any attempt to treat the whole of madness, the essence and nature of madness, in

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<sup>98</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 74.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

terms of psychology.”<sup>101</sup> The unequal relationship between psychology and madness also results in the ‘othering’ of the madman; that is, psychology objectifies and reclassifies the madman as mentally ill, thereby justifying his isolation from society. As Dreyfus accurately notes, Foucault’s acceptance of the hermeneutics of suspicion emphasizes this relationship, “which led him to look for a connection between scientific truth-seeking and alienation—the repression of a deep, nonobjectifiable truth.”<sup>102</sup> To Foucault—at least in his early intellectual development—mental illness serves only as a set of self-referential constructs intended to conceal madness’s truth. In this regard, mental illness, “is simply *alienated madness*, alienated in the psychology that it has itself made possible.”<sup>103</sup>

A final word regarding Foucault’s brand of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Foucault suggests that madness can be liberated from psychology, presumably through the acceptance of strangeness and the de-objectification of madness. In this view, madness should be “freed and disalienated, restored in some sense to its original language.”<sup>104</sup> Foucault is exceedingly vague as to what this liberation might entail, perhaps because the nature of liberation can only be known alongside the discovery of madness’s hidden meaning. Yet his assertion that alienation is the result of psychology’s objectifying the patient is surprisingly harmonious with his later thought, as it coincides with Foucault’s model of

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>102</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Mental Illness and Psychology*, xxxii.

<sup>103</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 76.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 76.

knowledge and power relations. It is in this vein that Foucault describes psychology as “obscurely directed toward the point at which its possibilities are created ... toward those regions in which man has a relation with himself and inaugurates that form of alienation that turns him into *Homo psychologicus*.”<sup>105</sup>

Dreyfus is undoubtedly correct in his argument that, for Foucault, “the ultimate form of alienation in our society is not repression and exclusion of the truth but rather the constitution of the individual subject as the locus of pathology.”<sup>106</sup>

Having concluded that “the psychological dimensions of mental illness cannot, without recourse to sophistry, be regarded as autonomous,” Foucault shifts the second half of *Mental Illness and Psychology* away from a phenomenological analysis of a patient’s personality and toward a socio-historical analysis of psychology and its role in creating the experience of mental illness.<sup>107</sup> Foucault has discarded the humanistic notion that some objective element unifies humanity and adopted instead a relativistic viewpoint; with the exception of his acceptance of the hermeneutics of suspicion, Foucault no longer attributes any inherent meaning to his objects of study. Hence, as Dreyfus states,

What counts as personality and mental illness is itself a function of historical interpretation. The task thus changes from situating personal existence in a concrete social situation to studying the historical and discursive practices that define a ‘psychology’ in which the notion of mental illness becomes thinkable as something that can be the object of scientific study.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 74. Foucault’s italics.

<sup>106</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Mental Illness and Psychology*, xxxvii.

<sup>107</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 84.

<sup>108</sup> Dreyfus, cited from *Mental Illness and Psychology*, xxx.

In his conclusion, Foucault makes his case for the materialistic, historical study of psychology as a means of understanding mental illness:

Mental illness may be situated in relation to human genesis, in relation to individual, psychological history, in relation to the forms of existence. But, if one is to avoid resorting to such mythical explanation as the evolution of psychological structures, the theory of instincts, or an existential anthropology, one must not regard these various aspects of mental illness as ontological forms. In fact, it is only in history that one can discover the sole concrete a priori from which mental illness draws, with the empty opening up of its possibility, its necessary figures.<sup>109</sup>

The conclusion of *Mental Illness and Psychology* reflects Foucault's shift away from viewpoints with humanistic grounding and toward a relativistic analysis of narratives.

### Madness and Civilization

The above conclusion serves as an appropriate transition point to Foucault's next work, *Madness and Civilization*. Arguably one of Foucault's most influential texts, *Madness and Civilization* is a social history of the development of madness in Western society from the end of the Middle Ages through to modern times. Using this historical approach, Foucault is able to analyze madness from a relativistic perspective, or, in Jean Khalifa's words, "as a cultural, legal, political, philosophical and then medical construct."<sup>110</sup> Miller summarizes Foucault's thesis: "madness was ... a product of social relations—and not an independent biological reality."<sup>111</sup> As previously established, this argument holds

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<sup>109</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 84-85.

<sup>110</sup> Jean Khalifa, cited from *History of Madness*, xiv.

<sup>111</sup> Miller, 103.

unsettling implications for the scientific study of human behavior; that is, if mental illness is a social construct, then the scientific study thereof has no autonomous, objective basis in physiology. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault demonstrates that, historically, psychology's supposedly objective basis is rooted in power relations and other social factors.

The second chapter of *Madness and Civilization*, titled "The Great Confinement," provides a suitable example of madness' constructed nature. Foucault recounts how, in seventeenth century Paris, "more than one out of every hundred inhabitants" found themselves incarcerated in the Hôpital Général—the first of several hospitals whose administrations were directly linked to royal authority.<sup>112</sup> Foucault describes the Hôpital Général as having "nothing to do with any medical concept. It was an instance of order, of monarchical and bourgeois order being organized in France during this period. It was directly linked with the royal power which placed it under the authority of civil government alone."<sup>113</sup> The Hôpital Général did not detain over one percent of the Parisian population for medical reasons; rather, this confinement took place, both in France and across Europe, by royal decree and in the larger context of social tensions. European governments used confinement as a means to police their populations, which simultaneously served as "an economic measure and a social precaution."<sup>114</sup> The Hôpital Général (and similar medical institutions) allowed states to curb unemployment and political opposition by confining potential

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<sup>112</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 38.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

dissidents—these included the unemployed, the ill, the infirmed, and other disparate groups that did not fit the emerging bourgeoisie’s image of a productive citizenry—and mandating patients to perform physical labor. These practices coincided with the increasingly dominant view among state and religious authorities that labor was “a general solution, an infallible panacea, a remedy to all forms of poverty.”<sup>115</sup> Idleness, in contrast, came to be associated with madness. Thus, views commonly held by state and religious authorities served to both legitimize and necessitate confining the unemployed. Foucault summarizes this conclusion in the following passage:

In the classical age, for the first time, madness was perceived through a condemnation of idleness and in a social immanence guaranteed by the community of labor. This community acquired an ethical power of segregation, which permitted it to eject, as into another world, all forms of social uselessness. It was in this *other world*, encircled by the sacred powers of labor, that madness would assume the status we now attribute to it.<sup>116</sup>

In this redefinition of idleness as a form of mental illness we see Foucault’s central argument that madness is a social construction; the unemployed found themselves newly classified as mentally ill for political reasons. Their confinement was a monarchical effort to stimulate the economy and cure social ills associated with unemployment. Thus, state and medical authorities constructed a meaning behind mental illness, rather than this meaning being biologically innate. Foucault skeptically argues that the social factors which define mental illness also call into question the humanitarian motive driving

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 58. Foucault’s italics.

medical treatments: “before having the medical meaning we give it, or that at least we like to suppose it has, confinement was required by something quite different from any concern with curing the sick. Our philanthropy prefers to recognize the signs of a benevolence towards sickness where there is only a condemnation of idleness.”<sup>117</sup>

One might arrive at several conclusions based on Foucault’s 1961 analysis of madness thus far, each with its own validity: for instance, Foucault obviously assumes that mental illness is a social construct; his argument implies that psychology is a tool of power used to mask stratagems for controlling human behavior; and he deconstructs commonly-held historical narratives in order to expose society’s mistreatment of the mentally ill. Yet none of these capture Foucault’s real purpose in *Madness and Civilization*, which is to demonstrate how modernity has silenced madness (and although this point has already been established in the second half of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Foucault provides a deeper analysis in this later work.)<sup>118</sup> “Modern man no longer communicates with the madman,” declares Foucault, elaborating that although a dialogue between madness and reason existed prior to the end of the eighteenth century, “there is no such thing any longer.” Without this dialogue, the voice of true madness cannot be heard, and only a silent and (one supposes) suppressed

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>118</sup> Foucault’s use of the term ‘modernity’ generally encompasses the intellectual developments (rationalism, positivism, etc.) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which influence how humans conceptualize themselves. Foucault elaborates on this subject in his 1984 essay, “What is Enlightenment?” trans. Catherine Porter. Cited from *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 32-50.

madness remains. Modernity and behavioral science have filled this silence by displacing the voice of madness with their own language: “The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason *about* madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence.”<sup>119</sup> Thus, in order to understand Foucault’s argument in *Madness and Civilization*, one must isolate the intellectual and socio-historical movements comprising psychiatry, the modern language of madness.

The unidirectional dialogue between madness and reason emerged in the Classical Age, when madness came to be associated with unreason. Foucault uses the term ‘unreason’ in reference to the experience of madness as described by reason, or “all that, for reason, is closest and most remote, emptiest and most complete; all that presents itself to reason in familiar structures—authorizing a knowledge, and then a science, which seeks to be positive—and all that is constantly in retreat from reason, in the inaccessible domain of nothingness.”<sup>120</sup> In short, unreason is the opposite of reason; hence, it is a paradoxical viewpoint that, from reason’s perspective, cannot be directly known through any capacity of its own. In this regard, the classical era’s conception of madness as unreason is symbolically akin to a terrestrial notion of the dark side of the moon. Foucault elaborates on these qualities in his definition of madness:

Madness is precisely at the point of contact between the oneiric and the erroneous; ... But while error is merely non-truth, while the dream neither affirms nor judges, madness fills the void of error with images, and links

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<sup>119</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, x-xi.

<sup>120</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 107. Foucault seems to use the terms ‘unreason’ and ‘non-reason’ in an interchangeable manner.



hallucinations by affirmation of the false. [Yet] ... however vivid they are, however rigorously established in the body, these images are nothingness, since they represent nothing; as for erroneous judgment, it judges only in appearance: affirming nothing true or real, it does not affirm at all; it is ensnared in the non-being of error.<sup>121</sup>

Madness, then, is nothing; it is a blind, dream-like state without grounding in reality or reason. “Madness begins where the relation of man to truth is disturbed and darkened.”<sup>122</sup> Yet the madman and the man of reason “both live in the same brightness.”<sup>123</sup> The term “brightness” here refers to truth as proposed by Cartesian Dualism. In the Cartesian tradition, truth can only be divined through reason, as reason stems from innate, God-given knowledge. Reason therefore comprises a set of transcendent laws under which “everything must be either waking or dream, truth or darkness ... [Such] a law prescribes an inevitable order.”<sup>124</sup> The Cartesian tradition classifies madness as nothing insofar as it is a perspective of “dazzled reason,” or a distorted view that cannot see truth, and therefore cannot see anything.<sup>125</sup> Foucault refers to the madman’s condition as “dazzled reason,” meaning—in the classical, Cartesian view of madness—that reason continues to exist for and apply to the madman, even if the madman is unable to acknowledge truth in reason. Reason, therefore, defines the experience of madness as unreason—a state of erroneous but nonetheless existent reason.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 108. Foucault’s italics.

If madness is erroneous, it follows that whatever truth it may otherwise contain is unverifiable. Yet, as Foucault notes, however groundless madness may be, one cannot deny that the madman exists: “the paradox of this *nothing* is to *manifest* itself, to explode into signs, in words, in gestures.”<sup>126</sup> Madness cannot be conceived of in itself and has no internal logic, yet it continues to exist; it is “the paradoxical manifestation of non-being.”<sup>127</sup> The aforementioned “Great Confinement” served as a figurative and literal means of resolving this paradox by banishing madness, the ‘thing that should not be,’ from society. “Confinement is the practice which corresponds most exactly to madness experienced as unreason, that is, as the empty negativity of reason; by confinement, madness is acknowledged to be *nothing*.”<sup>128</sup> Of course, if this were a purely incarcerative effort, then confinement would only be the relocation of madness, as opposed to a means toward its disappearance. In this regard, confinement was intended to return madness to a state of nothingness through correction or death. This process began at the societal level, where “madness is immediately perceived as difference”; society (“men of good sense”) deemed an individual mad on the grounds that he or she exhibited abnormal behavior. The obvious solution, then, was to confine the madman and correct his or her behavior. Whether the abnormal behavior vanished or the madman died in confinement, the result is the same: madness disappeared; “confinement cannot have any other goal than a

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 116. Foucault’s italics.

correction (that is, the suppression of the difference, or the fulfillment of this nothingness in death).”<sup>129</sup>

The modern conception of mental illness emerged from the classical paradox of reason and unreason and its resolution through confinement and correction. This is most apparent in unreason’s inability to explain madness. Unreason is a non-autonomous perspective; it is erroneous, and thus can neither ascertain nor dictate whatever truth it may contain. Hence, madness cannot speak its own truth. Where, then, can one find a causal explanation of madness? “Inextricable unity of order and disorder, of the reasonable being of things and this nothingness of madness! For madness, if it is nothing, can manifest itself only by departing from itself, by assuming an appearance in the order of reason and thus becoming the contrary of itself.”<sup>130</sup> In short, madness cannot be understood except in the language prescribed to it by its antithesis—reason.

Meaningless disorder as madness is, it reveals, when we examine it, only ordered classifications, rigorous mechanisms in soul and body, language articulated according to a visible logic. All that madness can say of itself is merely reason, though it is itself the negation of reason. In short, *a rational hold over madness is always possible and necessary, to the very degree that madness is non-reason.*<sup>131</sup>

Toward the end of the classical era, the practices of confinement and correction complemented this projection of reason unto madness. A systemic understanding of madness was, for state and medical authorities, necessary in order to identify and correct abnormal behaviors. “Madness had become a thing

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 107. Foucault’s italics.

to look at ... an animal with strange mechanisms.”<sup>132</sup> The confined madman thus became an object of observation; in cataloguing his or her behavioral patterns and signs, one found a malformed but nonetheless existent rationality in madness. Positivism, or the practice of direct observation in ascertaining truth, thus served as the method for studying madness. Under the reductive gaze of positivism, madness had no intrinsic meaning—it is “a phenomenon adrift, *insignificant* upon the undefined surface of nature. An enigma without any truth except that which could reduce it.” Ironically, this lack of intrinsic meaning did not free madness from external significations; rather, it redefined madness as “nothing more than a disease,” or an organic *tabula rasa* upon which reason may carve its own meaning.<sup>133</sup> As such, madness became meaningful only when a psychologist observed the madman and attributes some rational significance to a perceived abnormality in his or her behaviors. The meaning behind madness is, therefore, not the product of empirical observation and scientific analysis, but of language and subjective judgment. Behavior can now be judged as mad—and therefore mistaken—under the guise of positivism. Beneath their scientific trappings, the diagnosis and treatment of madness entail observing a behavior, labeling it as erroneous, and correcting that behavior; as Foucault wrote, “we are dealing with an art of discourse, and *the reinstitution of truth*, in which madness is significant as unreason.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 198. Foucault’s italics.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 197. Foucault’s italics.

This “reinstitution” of truth assumes a distinctly moral significance in the late classical and modern eras. Cartesian Dualism deemed unreason to be a state of continuous error, with modernity rechristening this error as immorality; hence, the madman’s tendency toward error becomes “*the psychological effect of a moral fault.*” Foucault maintains that the moralization of madness “compromises what had been essential in the experience of unreason.”<sup>135</sup> Whereas unreason had previously asserted the non-being of error, nothingness, blindness, and an unknowable truth beyond madness—or “the condition of possibility for all the manifestations of madness”—now (in the late classical and early modern era) there is only the codification of blindness, or behavioral error; “what had belonged to unreason, to the transcendence of its discourse, was relegated to the psychological.”<sup>136</sup> Madness had been indefinable when it was perceived as unreason during the classical age. In becoming disassociated with unreason, madness was characterized only by a lack of truth-value and the aforementioned moral meaning that positivism has attached to it. Consequently, madness has become inexorably linked with moral judgment; “what had been error would become fault, and everything in madness that designated the paradoxical manifestation of non-being would become the natural punishment of a moral evil.”<sup>137</sup> Melding these factors together, Foucault argues that “psychology was born—not as the truth of madness, but as a sign that madness was now

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 158. Foucault’s italics.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 158, 198.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 158.

detached from its truth which was unreason.”<sup>138</sup> This loss resulted in a bizarre hybridization of positivist study and moral judgment, particularly at the institutional level. Institutions of confinement came to emphasize morality in studying madness and correcting abnormal—now immoral—behavior. Psychology, therefore, silences madness by applying its own moral and pathological language to abnormal behavior, thus obscuring madness’s true language.

In a space so arranged, madness will never again be able to speak the language of unreason, with all that in it transcends the natural phenomena of disease. It will be entirely enclosed in 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 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>139</sup>

Foucault provides an example of moralized psychology in the ninth chapter of *Madness and Civilization*, “The Birth of the Asylum.” Here Foucault casts doubt onto the historical portrayal of Samuel Tuke and Philippe Pinel as philanthropic pioneers who liberated the insane from the dark confines of the conventional asylum and developed a scientific study of madness. “We know the images,” begins Foucault, “they are familiar in all the histories of psychiatry, where their function is to illustrate that happy age when madness was finally recognized and treated according to a truth to which we had long remained

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 196-197.

blind.”<sup>140</sup> Clearly, Foucault is skeptical of this glowing narrative, arguing that “the legends of Pinel and Tuke transmit mythical values, which nineteenth-century psychiatry would accept as obvious in nature.”<sup>141</sup>

A brief summary of this commonly-accepted history indicates that Tuke established the Retreat, an asylum located in York, Britain and a humanitarian alternative to the prison-like asylums commonly associated with the nineteenth century. Tuke’s asylum provided a restful environment in which patients could enjoy a familial relationship with practitioners and staff. A contemporary of Tuke’s, Pinel famously made “the decision to remove the chains from the prisoners in the dungeons” in 1793.<sup>142</sup> That is, he released mental patients from their physical constraints (though not from their “dungeons”) at the French hospital Bicêtre. Beyond their humanitarian efforts, Tuke and Pinel also established within their asylums an objective method of observing human behavior. Foucault describes his perception of Tuke and Pinel in the second half of *Mental Illness and Psychology*: “virtually every history of psychiatry and medicine has seen in these figures the symbols of a double advent: that of a humanism and that of a science that had at last achieved a positive status.” In this narrative, Tuke and Pinel’s accomplishments represent a progression toward an objective science and a humanitarian treatment of the mentally ill—yet Foucault maintains that early nineteenth-century psychologists “did not relax the

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 241. Foucault uses the term ‘images’ to emphasize the artificial nature of this history; that it plays into a Hegelian narrative regarding scientific progress, rather than being objective history.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 242.

old practices of internment; on the contrary, they tightened them around the madmen.”<sup>143</sup>

Tuke’s Retreat “would serve as an instrument of segregation: a moral and religious segregation which sought to reconstruct around madness a milieu as much as possible like that of the Community of Quakers.”<sup>144</sup> Tuke created this deeply religious environment owing to the fact that religion encompassed an inviolable and universal brand of reason that existed even in the darkest depths of madness: “In the dialect of insanity where reason hides without abolishing itself, religion constitutes the concrete form of what cannot go mad; it bears what is invincible in reason.” By placing reason in a transcendental position above madness, Tuke made reason-based constraint “more immediate”—or internal—to the madman, and allowed for the possibility of a cure for madness through reason. “At the Retreat, religion was part of the movement which indicated in spite of everything the presence of reason in madness, which led from insanity to health.”<sup>145</sup> Further, religion offers a moral causality driving madness: experiencing immoral acts results in anguish, which will in turn produce the various evils associated with madness. In Foucault’s words, “the sight of evil is for every sensitive soul the cause of suffering, the origin of all those strong and untoward passions such as horror, hate, and disgust which engender or perpetuate madness.”<sup>146</sup> In this way, religion inexorably links madness with

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<sup>143</sup> Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, 70.

<sup>144</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 243.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 244, 243.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.



immorality, casting abnormal behavior as an evil that must be vanquished through the adherence to religion's moral and rational principals. Tuke utilized these facets of religion in order to control behavior. According to Foucault, "the religious and moral milieu was imposed from without, in such a way that madness was controlled, not cured."<sup>147</sup>

Foucault has thus painted the Retreat as a religious enclave in which patients were segregated from the outside world, effectively trapped in an environment suffused with laws born of God-given reason and morality. By segregating patients in such a way, Tuke ensured that patients could only act, be judged, and even think in accordance with religious rules and teachings. Segregation therefore "does not attempt to preserve the sufferers from the profane presence of non-Quakers, but to place the insane individual with a moral element where he will be in debate with himself and his surroundings: to constitute for him a milieu where, far from being protected, he will be kept in a perpetual anxiety, ceaselessly threatened by Law and Transgression."<sup>148</sup> Here Foucault breaches what will become a critical subject in his 1975 analysis of the modern prison system: surveillance. In short, the close-knit familial structure of the Retreat ensured that staff and practitioners held patients under constant, non-reciprocal surveillance. For instance, patients and mental health staff engaged in social activities, such as tea parties, where the latter group had ample opportunity to observe the former. Foucault describes these activities:

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 244-245.

This rite is not one of intimacy, of dialogue of mutual acquaintance; it is the organization around the madman of a world where everything would be like and near him, but in which he himself would remain a stranger, the Stranger *par excellence* who is judged not only by appearances but by all that they may betray and reveal in spite of themselves. Incessantly cast in this empty role of unknown visitor, and challenged in everything that can be known about him, drawn to the surface of himself by a social personality silently imposed by observation, by form and mask, the madman is obliged to objectify himself in the eyes of reason as the perfect stranger, that is, as the man whose strangeness does not reveal itself. The city of reason welcomes him only with this qualification and at the price of this surrender to anonymity.<sup>149</sup>

As this passage indicates, surveillance influenced how patients perceived and—it follows—conducted themselves. Patients were aware of their being observed, and they responded to observation by monitoring their own thoughts and behavior, thus fostering a sense of chronic guilt. Indeed, Tuke's success in controlling behavior derived from his emphasis on guilt in madness. Toward this end, Tuke curtailed the practice of punishing madmen on the grounds that they were mad, or their behavior reflected unreason; "the madman, as a human being originally endowed with reason, is no longer guilty of being mad." Instead, Tuke shamed patients for deviating from the behaviors proscribed by the universal reason that even madmen possess. Hence, "the madman, as a madman, and in the interior of that disease of which he is no longer guilty, must feel morally responsible for everything within that may disturb morality and society, and must hold no one but himself responsible for the punishment he receives."<sup>150</sup> In contemporary terms, Tuke humanized madness by placing the burden of responsibility for actions entirely on the madman, rather than on that unknowable

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 249-250.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 246.

force driving the madman's condition—unreason. The purpose behind this shift is evident enough: "the madman became an object of punishment always vulnerable to himself and to the Other; and, from the acknowledgement of his status as object, from the awareness of his guilt, the madman was to return to his awareness of himself as a free and responsible subject, and consequently to reason."<sup>151</sup> Thus, continuous surveillance created feelings of guilt and self-monitoring among patients, which in turn resulted in the patients' self-objectification; that is, patients increasingly regarded themselves as objects whose thoughts and actions were conceived of and measured against reason, or the rational perspective promoted by practitioners.<sup>152</sup> Patients consequently internalized the institution's rules—again, a concept that Foucault would expand upon in his later works. Tuke encouraged this mindset so that patients would adopt obedient, self-monitoring personas that were dependent upon practitioners for guidance and approval.

Tuke's method of treatment, in short, was to use discard physical constraints and punishments—"the keeper intervenes, without weapons and without instruments of constraint"—by, instead, relying on "observation and

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>152</sup> Interestingly, this response to surveillance is comparable to Foucault's phenomenological account of anxiety in *Mental Illness and Psychology*. In both instances, patients are in a state of hyper-self-awareness (this encompasses both objectification and judgment). The difference between these accounts lies in the source of the phenomena that elicits this state; in the 1954 analysis, patients experience a heightened state of awareness as a result of social contradictions and anxiety; the response, however, ultimately hinges on the transcendental subject's interpretation. In the 1961 analysis, practitioners intentionally create an environment to bring about this response. Foucault's later works—particularly *Discipline and Punish*—shift the causality underlying surveillance (and its effects on individuals) away from both the subject and external intentionality and toward a more mechanistic model of behavior.

language only” in order to mold patients into self-monitoring, self-objectifying, guilty and dependent individuals.<sup>153</sup> Rather than implementing physical force or constraints to carry out this treatment, Tuke relied on the abstract distinction between madness and reason. Practitioners in the Retreat held madness to be an erroneous and infantile perspective, while reason was the mature, truthful perspective; “madness does not represent the absolute form of contradiction, but instead a minority status, an aspect of itself that does not have the right to autonomy, and can live only grafted onto the world of reason. Madness is childhood.”<sup>154</sup> In the Retreat’s familial structure, patients occupied the role of children, and were therefore subservient to their all-knowing parents, the practitioners. In this regard, the religious, moral and rational elements outlined above assert their influence by portraying the practitioner’s authority as intrinsic and preordained; “it is not as a concrete person that he confronts madness, but as a reasonable being, invested by that very fact, and before any combat takes place, with the authority that is his for not being mad.”<sup>155</sup> To Foucault, distinction between madness and reason is based on self-serving logic; the sane man occupies a position of perpetual infallibility due to the fact that society classifies him as sane, while society classifies the madman as not sane, and thus forever in error. As to the outcome of this confrontation between reason and unreason, “the combat was always decided beforehand, unreason’s defeat inscribed in

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<sup>153</sup> Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 251.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 251-252.

advance in the concrete situation where madman and man of reason meet.”<sup>156</sup>

Tuke’s authority over his patients derived from this inequality between madness and reason, which was made possible only through linguistic distinctions employed within an enclosed milieu.

However effective his methods may have been, Tuke’s overall influence was rather modest; the Retreat’s operation was limited to “religious segregation for purposes of moral purification.” Owing to its reliance on isolation, this model could not feasibly be applied to a general, religiously diverse population. Pinel, in contrast, developed a generalized method of controlling madness. His goal was “to effect moral synthesis, assuring an ethical continuity between the world of madness and the world of reason, but by practicing a social segregation that would guarantee bourgeois morality a universality of fact and permit it to be imposed as a law upon all forms of insanity.”<sup>157</sup> In practice, Pinel’s methodology did not vary greatly from Tuke’s, at least insofar as both practitioners subjected madmen to continuous surveillance and moral judgment in order to coerce patients into docility. Yet Pinel did not employ religion as a means of segregating patients. Indeed, he viewed religion as a “source of strong emotions and terrifying images which it arouses through fears of the Beyond, Catholicism frequently provokes madness.”<sup>158</sup> This being said, Pinel understood that religion’s moral teachings could be secularized and applied uniformly to patients.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 255.

Pinel, therefore, sought to “reduce the iconographic forms, not the moral content of religion. Once filtered, religion possesses a disalienating power that dissipates the images, calms the passions, and restores man to what is most immediate and essential: it can bring him closer to his moral truth.”<sup>159</sup> In other words, Pinel borrowed religious teachings, such as “the values of family and work,” and enforced these in a thoroughly judicial manner.<sup>160</sup> Religion’s moral truths are, for Pinel, analogous to value judgments that may affirm or denounce a behavior based on its adherence to commonly accepted social virtues. Foucault, therefore, calls Pinel’s asylum “a religious domain without religion, a domain of pure morality, of ethical uniformity.”<sup>161</sup>

The methods employed at the Bicêtre can be characterized as secularized, streamlined, and intensified variants of those seen at the Retreat. Accordingly, Pinel created in the Bicêtre a rigidly structured environment where madness itself was integrated into a judicial matrix of regulations and moral standards. In Foucault’s words, the Bicêtre was “a uniform domain of legislation, a site of moral syntheses where inanities born on the outer limits of society were eliminated. The entire life of the inmates, the entire conduct of their keepers and doctors, were organized by Pinel so that these moral syntheses would function.”<sup>162</sup> Pinel utilized three methods in an effort to achieve this regimented system of universal moral values: “Silence,” or the act of ignoring patients so as

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 260.

to encourage introspection in them, thus eliciting guilt; “Recognition by Mirror,” or forcing patients to acknowledge that their madness is an arrogant and juvenile perspective; and “Perpetual Judgment,” or instilling in patients an understanding that they are continuously judged and punished for transgressions.<sup>163</sup>

The similarities between these practices and Tuke’s are unmistakable. Both practitioners freed madmen from their physical restraints while simultaneously reducing madness to a meaningless object of continuous observation, thus denying madmen the transcendental introspective power of unreason; “the asylum ... placed the mirrors in such a way that the madman ... inevitably surprised himself, despite himself, *as a madman*. Freed from the chains that made it a purely observed object, madness lost, paradoxically, the essence of its liberty, which was solitary exaltation.” The combination of continual surveillance and a judicial environment once again resulted in the madman’s self-objectification, hence madness “became responsible for what it knew of its truth; it imprisoned itself in an infinitely self-referring observation; it was finally chained to the humiliation of being its own object.”<sup>164</sup> And, finally, Pinel’s method—perhaps more so than Tuke’s—involved the “almost arithmetical obviousness of punishment,” with the intention that patients would internalize the association between offense and penalty to such an extent that they would judge themselves without prompting, culminating in “the birth of remorse in the inmate’s mind: it is

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 260, 262, 265. Page numbers correspond with quoted section titles.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 264-265. Foucault’s italics.

only at this point that the judges agree to stop the punishment, certain that it will continue indefinitely in the inmate's conscience."<sup>165</sup>

Foucault does not dispute that Tuke and Pinel observed, diagnosed and even cured patients. Yet to him, their philanthropy masked their practices's coercive elements; these practitioners also sought to control and normalize patients's behavior using a system of moral judgments applied through the aforementioned techniques. Foucault summarizes Pinel's practice:

The asylum of the age of positivism, which it is Pinel's glory to have founded, is not a free realm of observation, diagnosis, and therapeutics; it is a juridical space where one is accused, judges, and condemned, and from which one is never released except by the version of this trial in psychological depth—that is, by remorse. Madness will be punished in the asylum, even if it is innocent outside of it. For a long time now, and until our own day at least, it is imprisoned in a moral world.<sup>166</sup>

Tuke and Pinel's relevance to modern psychiatry stems from the doctor's personage and the moral structuring of the asylum. Yet—and here Foucault demonstrates his typical analytic nuance—these are significant contributions *because* psychiatry no longer recognizes them as such. Modern psychiatry exists in its present form because it retains Tuke and Pinel's moral structuring of the asylum and their definition of the doctor's role while at the same time forgetting the ascientific nature of these factors.

In casting the doctor as an all-knowing patriarchal figure, Tuke and Pinel introduced into psychiatry “a personality, whose powers borrowed from science

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 269.



only their disguise, or at most their justification.”<sup>167</sup> The doctor did not wield authority over patients simply because he actually possessed a reservoir of positivistic knowledge, but because of the social status allotted to doctors. That is, doctors and patients had predefined social roles placing the former in a position of power over the latter—the doctor-patient relationship was, therefore, based on an abstract inequality in social standings. The doctor’s powers were “of a moral and social order; they took root in the madman’s minority status, in the insanity of his person, not of his mind.”<sup>168</sup> Moreover, Foucault conspiratorially argues that modern psychiatry utilizes positivism’s inherent concreteness to substantiate Tuke and Pinel’s doctor-patient relationship: “the doctor’s intervention is not made by virtue of a medical skill or power that he possesses in himself and that would be justified by a body of objective knowledge. It is not as a science that *homo medicus* has authority in the asylum, but as a wise man. If the medical profession is required, it is as a juridical and moral guarantee, not in the name of science.”<sup>169</sup>

As with the doctor’s authority, the asylum’s organization has social and moral origins. Tuke and Pinel’s asylums operated under “a structure that formed a kind of microcosm in which were symbolized the massive structures of bourgeoisie society and its values: Family-Child relations, centered on the theme of paternal authority; Transgression-Punishment relations, centered on the theme

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 271-272.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 270.

of immediate justice; Madness-Disorder relations, centered on the theme of social and moral order.”<sup>170</sup> In other words, the asylum was structured around borrowed social stratifications and moral values. As we have seen, the doctor’s “power to cure” derives from these structures.<sup>171</sup>

Tuke and Pinel acknowledged the moral and social nature of the doctor’s authority—there was “nothing extraordinary about it.”<sup>172</sup> By the early nineteenth century, however, this awareness gave way to the view that psychology was an empirical science. As Foucault states, “soon the meaning of this moral practice escaped the physician, to the very extent that he enclosed his knowledge in the norms of positivism ... the psychiatrist no longer quite knew what was the nature of the power he had inherited from the great reformers, and whose efficacy seemed so foreign to his idea of mental illness and to the practice of all other doctors.”<sup>173</sup> As this passage indicates, the modern psychiatrist is unaware of the specific historical origins behind his or her authority; positivism has displaced this history with its promise of a purely empirical study of human activity.

Foucault credits Sigmund Freud with integrating Tuke and Pinel’s contributions into psychiatric practice outside of the asylum. “To the doctor, Freud transferred all the structures Pinel and Tuke had set up within confinement. He did deliver the patient from the existence of the asylum within

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 274.

which his 'liberators' had alienated him."<sup>174</sup> However, what follows is not a cure for the liberation of the madman, but a more thorough and ingrained silencing of madness. Just as madness was silenced upon its separation from unreason and attachment to positivism, and just as asylum patients were silenced within a repressive moral environment (despite having been freed from physical restraints), modern patients must contend with the silence imposed by psychoanalysis, the language of mental illness. Although these points have been established in the second half of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, psychoanalysis' role requires elaboration.

Psychoanalysis comprises a self-referential language; it applies—through the doctor's mediation—its own meaning to the patient's words and actions. Foucault maintains that Freud "created the psychoanalytical situation where ... alienation becomes disalienating because, in the doctor, it becomes a subject."<sup>175</sup> That is, while the doctor differentiates the patient based on his or her abnormalities—thus alienating the patient—the self-referential nature of psychoanalysis entails that the patient's abnormalities will always correspond with a predetermined rational meaning. Hence, the patient is disalienated insofar as his or her abnormalities already exist within psychoanalytic discourse. The importance of Freud's work, therefore, lies in his encapsulating madness within reason. In this view, the rational meaning behind madness is not a new development, but the unearthing of an existent aspect of human nature: "there is

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 278.

more than the density of a *discovery*; there is the sovereign violence of a *return*.<sup>176</sup> In redefining madness according to this rational-positivist narrative, psychoanalysis undermines and overwrites other narratives. For example, while the Shakespearean view of madness is empirically older than the psychoanalytic narrative, Freud claims to have discovered in madness certain uniform traits that predate the former view.

Foucault's point is that Freud reorganized the language surrounding the experience of madness. Freud gave this experience a voice; according to Foucault, Freud "reconstituted one of the essential elements of an experience reduced to silence by positivism; ... he restored, in medical thought, the possibility of a dialogue with unreason."<sup>177</sup> Yet this dialogue consisted only of psychoanalysis's aforementioned self-referential language. Indeed, the fact that Freud attributes a rational basis to abnormal behavior means that psychoanalysis cannot perceive that which is intrinsically irrational—unreason: "psychoanalysis has not been able, will not be able, to hear the voices of unreason, not to decipher in themselves the signs of the madman."<sup>178</sup> Psychoanalysis can therefore only function as a language imposed upon madness; it is not an autonomous science of the mind. This brings us back to Foucault's lingering usage of the hermeneutics of suspicion, which is apparent in his argument that "it is not psychology that is involved in psychoanalysis: but precisely an experience

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 198. Foucault's italics. He is referring to Pierre Janet's work.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 278.

of unreason that it has been psychology's meaning, in the modern world, to mask."<sup>179</sup> In other words, psychology conceals the free, undefined view of madness with the psychoanalytic narrative. Foucault summarizes these concepts in his abridged preface:

In the serene world of mental illness, modern man no longer communicates with the madman: on one hand, the man of reason delegates the physician to madness, thereby authorizing a relation only through the abstract universality of disease; on the other, the man of madness communicates with society only by the intermediary of an equally abstract reason which is order, physical and moral constraint, the anonymous pressure of the group, the requirements of conformity.<sup>180</sup>

Taking all of the above into consideration, it is difficult to avoid the following conclusions regarding Foucault's arguments in *Madness and Civilization*: psychiatry conceals the experience of unreason and replaces it with the language of mental illness; psychiatry fabricates the positivistic basis of this language; and psychiatry has forgotten the history comprising the previous two points. Foucault elaborates on his conclusions, making the socially constructed nature of mental illness abundantly clear:

If we wanted to analyze the profound structures of objectivity in the knowledge and practice of nineteenth century psychiatry from Pinel to Freud, we should have to show in fact that such objectivity was from the start a reification of a magical nature, which could only be accomplished with the complicity of the patient himself, and beginning from a transparent and clear moral practice, gradually forgotten as positivism imposed its myths of scientific objectivity; a practice forgotten in its origins and its meaning, but always used and always present. What we call psychiatric practice is a certain moral tactic contemporary with the end of the eighteenth century, preserved in the rites of asylum life, and overlaid by the myths of positivism.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., x-xi.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 276. Dreyfus and Rabinow cite portions of this passage (10).

The question remains: where might one find unreason, if it has been so effectively silenced by this short yet convoluted history of madness? Foucault argues that unreason can still be seen in the art and works of particularly brilliant individuals: "Since the end of the eighteenth century, the life of unreason no longer manifests itself except in the lightning-flash of works such as those of Hölderlin, of Nerval, of Nietzsche, or of Artaud."<sup>182</sup> And herein lies the final argument in *Madness and Civilization*: although society attempts to study madness and justify its existence within a rational narrative, this narrative cannot explain the unreason that art (and other forms of transcendence) represents. This failure does not necessarily mean that the rational view of madness is wrong, but that the orderly society, which produces this view, does not have the internal capacity to prove its own validity either. Foucault argues as much in his conclusion: "the world that thought to measure and justify madness through psychology must justify itself before madness, since in its struggles and agonies it measures itself by the excess of works like those of Nietzsche, of Van Gogh, of Artaud. And nothing in itself, especially not what it can know of madness, assures the world that it is justified by such works of madness."<sup>183</sup> In a relativistic flourish, Foucault frames the object of his study as a power struggle between reason and unreason; this conflict manifests itself between ordered society and a free, unknowable chaos.

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 289. This chapter is titled "Conclusion" in *Madness and Civilization* and "The Anthropological Circle" in *History of Madness*.

In *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Foucault maintained a hermeneutic and phenomenological stance in arguing that societal practices alienate individuals, and that this alienation causes madness—a position that lends itself to definitive applications in conquering alienation through phenomenological understanding. It would not be completely accurate to claim that *Madness and Civilization* jettisons this argument, as Foucault still characterizes the madman as being alienated by society. Yet the experience comprising this alienation is no longer a knowable object of study. In the 1954 text, Foucault argued that understanding the experience of madness—that is, the madman’s phenomenological perspective—would liberate individuals from alienation. This argument implies that the mad perspective is something that can be studied and cured, but psychology fails to accomplish this. In contrast, *Madness and Civilization* recounts how madness was perceived and experienced at an institutional level—hence Miller’s argument that “the book is not really about mental illness at all—it is, rather, about the philosophical value accorded to the lives, utterances, and works of artists and thinkers conventionally deemed ‘mad.’”<sup>184</sup> As such, Foucault is not concerned with developing a systemic understanding (whether positivistic or phenomenological) of madness. His relativistic stance also precludes the possibility and necessity of identifying correct treatments and cures. In “Madness, The Absence of an Œuvre,” Foucault clarifies this point; “I am contesting

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<sup>184</sup> Miller, 103. Miller is agreeing with Georges Canguilhem’s (1904-1995) interpretation of Foucault’s work.

something that is ordinarily admitted: that medical progress might one day cause mental illness to disappear, like leprosy or tuberculosis.”<sup>185</sup>

From these difference it seems clear that Foucault has sacrificed the definitive (however flawed) position afforded to him by hermeneutics and phenomenology, and he partially embraced a relativistic objectivity without clearly discernable real-world applications. Yet Foucault still draws the aforementioned hermeneutic conclusion that social institutions conceal the true nature of madness. Moreover, the relationship between society and madness’s truth is unchanging and will, therefore, continue to exist even if the means of perceiving and giving meaning to this relationship should vanish. Thus, if psychology and psychiatry could cure mental illness, Foucault argues that madness would manifest itself as an origin-less depression. As Foucault argues in “Madness, The Absence of an Œuvre,” without mental illness:

... one thing will remain, which is the relationship between man and his fantasies, his impossible, his non-corporeal pain, his carcass of night; that once the pathological is nullified, the obscure belonging of man to madness will be the ageless memory of an ill whose form as sickness has been effaced, but which lives on obstinately as unhappiness. Truth be told, such an idea supposes that that which is most precarious, far more precarious than the constancies of the pathological, is in fact unalterable: the relationship of a culture to the very thing that it excludes, and more precisely the relationship between our own culture and that truth about itself which, distant and inverted, it uncovers and covers up in madness.<sup>186</sup>

Foucault does not reveal society’s concealed truth about itself, opting instead to let the relationship between madness and society remain ambiguous.

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<sup>185</sup> Foucault, “Madness, The Absence of an Œuvre,” 542.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 542-543.



Being unalterable, the relationship could reflect the absence of human nature, or the causality between societal practices and madness—both arguments that Foucault employed in *Mental Illness and Psychology* and which adhere to the hermeneutics of suspicion. It is also possible that madness is an inherent aspect of human nature, or the truth behind madness is necessarily unknowable, as to know its truth in the modern era would be tantamount to silencing madness completely under its new, positive language. Clearly, Foucault does not take the same conclusive position in *Madness and Civilization* as he did in his previous book; he vacillates, for the first and last time, between relativism and hermeneutic grounding.

### The Birth of the Clinic

Foucault's thesis in *The Birth of the Clinic* can be summarized as follows: modern medicine does not reflect objective truth so much as one of several possible "forms of visibility."<sup>187</sup> The term "visibility" here refers to how disease is perceived and conceptualized. Because modern medicine views disease as being inseparable from the body, doctors study the body an object. Accordingly, modern medicine conceptualizes disease as "a set of forms and deformations, figures, and accidents and of displaced, destroyed, or modified elements bound together in sequence according to a geography that can be followed step by

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 195.

step. It is no longer a pathological species inserting itself into the body wherever possible; it is the body itself that has become ill.”<sup>188</sup> Foucault argues that in reducing the body to the status of an object, modern medicine has, paradoxically, altered medical discourse in such a way as to favor a codified set of general observations over pure empiricism. These observations of the body collectively form a “corpus of knowledge” that can be applied to the individual.<sup>189</sup> Foucault describes this process in the following passage:

In assigning to disease silent paths in the enclosed world of bodies, pathological anatomy reduces the importance of clinical symptoms and substitutes for a methodology of the visible a more complex experience in which truth emerges from its inaccessible reserve only in the passage to the inert, to the violence of the dissected corpse, and hence to forms in which living significance withdraws in favor of a massive geometry.<sup>190</sup>

Rather than being a set of empirical observations, modern medicine instead encompasses a network of terminology—a “geometry” in the above passage, and a discursive formation in archaeological terms—that describes observations. Foucault refers to this network of terminology as the clinical gaze throughout *The Birth of the Clinic*. The clinical gaze adheres to linguistic rules in its descriptions, which leads Foucault to define the gaze as “a perceptual act sustained by a logic of operations.”<sup>191</sup> Thus, the clinical gaze consists of two complementary elements; empirical observation and codification. The clinical gaze objectively observes clinical studies; it “refrains from all possible

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 109.

intervention, and from all experimental decision.”<sup>192</sup> At the same time, the clinical gaze describes the results of experimental studies, and therefore codifies truth. And in response to this alleged truth, Foucault offers a curious paradox; the clinical gaze describes truth, yet in doing so simultaneously produces truth. The statement, “the gaze is not faithful to truth, nor subject to it, without asserting, at the same time, a supreme mastery,” highlights this reciprocal relationship between the clinical gaze and the truth it purports. Foucault concludes that the “logic of operations” governing medical discourse can, either through individual volition or independent of it, influence the language and thus the perspective presented by clinical studies. Hence, “the gaze that sees is a gaze that dominates; and although it also knows how to subject itself, it dominates its masters.”<sup>193</sup>

In order to grasp the depth of these arguments, it is necessary to elaborate on the process by which truth is produced. To begin, the clinical gaze must, if it is to be regarded as truth, consist of objective observations of events. It is for this reason that Foucault emphasizes the concept of genesis—or the initial result observed in an experiment—as a source of both objectivity and truth production. The initial result should remain uninfluenced by external factors, and the observation and description of this result should, therefore, only reflect objective truth. This is what Foucault means when he states that “the gaze will be fulfilled in its own truth and will have access to the truth of things if it rests on

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 39.

them in silence, if everything keeps silent around what it sees.” Yet this supposed objectivity does not account for the process by which the description of the initial result is made. The description—which comes into being simultaneously with the initial result and its observation—is a series of logical and syntactical machinations, or the discursive practices comprising the clinical gaze. Thus, discursive practices govern the language describing empirically observed events, meaning descriptions are subject to discursive rules outside of the empirical event. The language used to describe the first occurrence of an event may, therefore, influence how the event is perceived in the first and in each subsequent observation. Hence, “the clinical gaze has the paradoxical ability to *hear a language* as soon as it *perceives a spectacle*. In the clinic, what is manifested is originally what is spoken. The opposition between clinic and experiment overlays exactly the difference between the language we hear, and consequently recognize, and the question we pose, or, rather, impose.”<sup>194</sup>

The language used in the first observation becomes manifested as truth through replication. Foucault states: “Medical knowledge will gain in certainty only in relation to the number of cases examined. ... Medical certainty is based not on the *completely observed individuality* but on the *completely scanned multiplicity of individual facts*.”<sup>195</sup> That is, clinical study makes the claim to truth when numerous replications of the initial observation establish the result as being certain. Moreover, the initial result serves as a blueprint to be referenced in all

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 107-108.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 101. Foucault’s italics.

replications; experimenters adhere to the same steps and employ the same language as was used in the initial description. “The gaze ... must reproduce in its own operations what has been given in the very movement of composition.”<sup>196</sup> It is through this process that the aforementioned discursive formations influence replications, and the resultant uniformity of these replications reinforces the perception of the initial observation as being true. Foucault elaborates on this circularity: “By showing itself in a repetitive form, the truth indicates the way by which it may be acquired. It offers itself to knowledge by offering itself to recognition. ... The genesis of the manifestation of truth is also the genesis of the knowledge of truth.”<sup>197</sup>

Facilitating the production and perpetuation of truth is the dissociation between empirical observation and abstract knowledge. This dissociation appears alongside the notion that replications increase medicine’s certitude regarding the outcome of an experiment. Certainty, then, is based on a numeric abstraction; “it is a question of a calculus, which ... is valid within the domain of ideas, being both the principle of their analysis into constituent elements and a method of induction from frequencies; it is offered ... as a logical and arithmetical distortion of approximation.”<sup>198</sup> Once a significant number of replications render a result as certain, empirical observation becomes unnecessary: “As soon as medical knowledge is defined in terms of frequency, one no longer needs a

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 103.

natural environment.”<sup>199</sup> At this point, medical knowledge exists as a numeric abstraction that conveys the probability of an event’s future occurrence, rather than material truth. In order to fulfill this function as a probability while retaining its objective status, medical knowledge must be perceived as universally true. This is why Foucault emphasizes the uniformity of medical knowledge; medical data preexists the subject as “a body of neutralized knowledge.”<sup>200</sup> For example, regardless of whether the subject is learning or teaching medicine, the knowledge remains static: “In its structure and in its two aspects as manifestation and acquisition, medical experience now has a collective subject; ... it is made up, as one entity, of those who unmask and those before whom one unmasks. The statement is the same; the disease speaks the same language to both.”<sup>201</sup>

The issue with a corpus of objective medical knowledge, beyond those outlined above, is its relationship to the individual. Medical knowledge does not apply in individual circumstances; rather, knowledge of the individual creates objective medical knowledge. “Only individual illnesses exist: not because the individual reacts upon his own illness, but because the action of the illness rightly unfolds in the form of individuality.”<sup>202</sup> This individualization of disease is, paradoxically, a product of objective research; modern medicine’s ability to study corpses allowed for the cultivation of objective, empirical knowledge of the human body, or the individual. The novelty of individualized knowledge leads

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., x-xi.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 168-169.

Foucault to argue that the individual is, conceptually speaking, a recent development in modernity:

The individual is not the initial, most acute form in life which is presented. It was given at last to knowledge only at the end of a long movement of spatialization whose decisive instruments were a certain use of language and a difficult conceptualization of death. ... The old Aristotelian law, which prohibited the application of scientific discourse to the individual, was lifted when, in language, death found the locus of its concept: space then opened up to the gaze the differentiated form of the individual.<sup>203</sup>

In this passage, the term “death” refers to the body’s objectification when studied post-mortem and converted into abstract medical knowledge. The individual is incorporated into medical discourses as an object of study, and is therefore both subject and contributor to the aforementioned hidden external and subjective influences. Foucault states, “the gaze ... establishes the individual in his irreducible quality. And thus it becomes possible to organize a rational language around it. The *object* of discourse may equally well be a *subject*, without the figures of objectivity being in any way altered. It is this *formal* reorganization, in *depth* ... that made *clinical experience* possible.”<sup>204</sup> In other words, despite being reduced to an object of study, the individual influences his or her own corpus of knowledge via the discursive practices governing the discourses surrounding the human body.

In synthesizing this analysis of *The Birth of the Clinic*’s central arguments, it becomes clear that medical knowledge has dissociated itself from its object of

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 170. Foucault expands upon the subjects of man and individuality in *The Order of Things* and *Discipline and Punish*. In the former text, Foucault argues that the concept of man as fashioned by the social sciences is a recent historical development which is nearing its end. In the latter text, the individual is the product of multilayered power interests.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., *xiv*. Foucault’s italics.

study. Medical discourse reflects its own intricate formative processes, rather than disease itself. For this reason, Foucault describes the formation of medical language as “[a question] of opening words to a certain qualitative, ever more concrete, more individualized, more modeled refinement.”<sup>205</sup> The complexity of this discourse conceals the discursive practices that shape the language and processes by which empirical observations are made. Medical science, then, is one possible perspective, or form of visibility, insofar as it is constrained and formed by its own language. It follows that medical science is not universally true or objective. Foucault offers this summary:

The sign no longer speaks the natural language of disease; it assumes shape and value only within the questions posed by medical investigation. There is nothing, therefore, to prevent it being solicited and almost fabricated by medical investigation. It is no longer that which is spontaneously stated by the disease itself; it is the meeting point of the gestures of research and the sick organism.<sup>206</sup>

The arguments outlined above regarding medical science can also be applied to mental illness. Granted, mental illnesses do not have lesions. Because lesions serve as the empirical basis for organic medicine, the absence thereof should exclude mental illness from incorporation into the corpus of medical knowledge. Yet this is not the case. For instance, Foucault argues that in the nineteenth century nosologists classified lesion-less disease according to qualitative descriptions of symptoms. The lack of a lesion became yet another characteristic with which to describe disease: “Its species—and not its seat or its cause—determined the nature of a disease; and the very fact of having or not

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 162.



having a localizable site was prescribed by the prior forms of this determination. The lesion was not the disease, but merely the first of the manifestations by which this generic character appeared, which opposed it to the affections possessing no support.”<sup>207</sup>

Furthering this reclassification of lesion-less diseases was Pinel, to whom Foucault returns in *The Birth of the Clinic*. Pinel classified these diseases by observing symptoms, interpreting “essences,” and relying on pathological anatomy to confirm his nosology. Owing to Pinel’s use of preexisting medical structures, Foucault argues that the nineteenth-century doctor’s method “only secondarily requires the clinic or the anatomy of lesions; basically, it is the organization, in accordance with a real, but abstract, coherence, of the temporary structures by which the clinical gaze or the anatomo-pathological perception sought their support of momentary equilibrium in already existent nosology.”<sup>208</sup> Thus, medical language describes and produces mental illness (and other ailments with discernable symptoms, but without lesions) in the same way as physical illnesses. The conceptual separation of symptoms from the disease, coupled with this “syntactic reorganization,” allows for the abstraction of physical illness into an individualized corpus of knowledge. In the same way, this same separation and reorganization allows for the inclusion of mental illness, already abstract in nature, in these medical discourses. Hence Foucault’s remark: “At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, neuroses, and

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 177.

essential fevers were fairly generally regarded as diseases without organic lesion.<sup>209</sup>

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault treats mental illness as being the product of discourses that are mediated by discursive formations. This is in contrast to his earlier archaeology of mental illness, *Madness and Civilization*, where Foucault analyzed the experience of madness on an institutional level—though he regards mental illness as a social construct in both works. Also omitted is the hermeneutic of suspicion, which Foucault employed in his previous two works in an effort to structure his narratives around the pursuit of hidden meaning in social practices. In place of hermeneutics, Foucault attempts to establish an objective and autonomous method of discursive analysis in archaeology. Toward this end, the archaeological method brackets out all reference to truth and the subject. Yet archaeology, as previously established, is unstable insofar as it does not possess the positive grounding offered by structural rules or the transcendental support provided by the meaning-giving subject. Moreover, Foucault refrains from taking a definitive position with regard to the concrete status of mental illness and the study thereof in both *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic*. This relativistic approach is apparent from the following disclaimer in Foucault's preface to *The Birth of the Clinic*: "this book has not been written in favour of one kind of medicine as against another

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 178.

kind of medicine, or against medicine and in favour of an absence of medicine.”<sup>210</sup>

The three works we have just analyzed reflect Foucault’s continuing effort to dissect supposedly objective narratives. In the case of mental illness, Foucault demonstrates how other morals and arbitrary social factors influence discourse pertaining to normal and abnormal behavior. Foucault arrives at a similar conclusion with regard to medical science. The external factors that influence objective discourses represent the dominant social narrative. In modernity, this would be the rationalist, utilitarian and bourgeois narrative. Hence, Foucault’s first three texts offer a relativistic critique of this narrative.

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<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, *xix*.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PROMISE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

#### Structuralism versus Archaeology

Archaeology marks the midpoint of Foucault's intellectual development. Foucault has banished from his new method the experience-based and hermeneutic modes of analysis found in his 1954 and 1961 works. In their place, Foucault attempts to create an ordered analysis of discourses based on the material outcome of contextual relationships between statements.

Foucault's archaeological method shares certain characteristics with structuralism, a contemporary method to archaeology. *The Birth of the Clinic*, for instance, is "a structural study that sets out to disentangle the conditions of its history from the density of discourse."<sup>211</sup> In order to understand archaeology, we must first examine structuralism. When *The Birth of the Clinic* was published in 1963, Foucault had already been strongly influenced by structuralist thought. Miller states that "Foucault placed himself squarely within the intellectual movement, founded on Saussure's linguistics, then gathering steam in Paris."<sup>212</sup> Structuralism is a method of analysis premised on the assumption that certain interconnected components of human society obey laws that operate

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<sup>211</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, xix.

<sup>212</sup> Miller, 133. Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857-1913) theories in structural linguistics served as the foundation for the mid-twentieth century structuralism movement.

independently from interpretive meaning. Dreyfus and Rabinow define these rules as, collectively, “a structure which underlines the theories, discourse, practices, and sensibility of an age, insofar as they contribute to a ‘scientific’ understanding of what it is to be human.”<sup>213</sup> These rules should be autonomous insofar as they remain constant in any social and historical context. In this regard, structuralism seeks ahistorical and universal rules; it “attempts to dispense with both meaning and the subject by finding objective laws which govern all human activity.”<sup>214</sup>

Structuralists also adopt a holistic perspective. That is, structuralism treats the rules governing discourses as elements that determine the overall manifestation of the field of discourse to which they refer. As Dreyfus and Rabinow argue, structuralism “identifies and individuates elements in isolation and then asserts that the system determines which of the complete set of possible elements will be individuated as actual. In this case, one might say that the actual whole is less than the sum of its possible parts.”<sup>215</sup> Like its counterpart in the behavioral sciences—behaviorism—structural analysis treats discourses surrounding human activity as mere descriptions without internal signification. Structuralism is, therefore, opposed to hermeneutics and phenomenology; structuralists do not seek a constant thread of meaning linking societal practices; nor do they attribute any transcendental meaning-giving quality to the subject.

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<sup>213</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 12.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, *xix*.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Instead, structuralism approaches Kant's subject/object division by identifying constant rules governing scientific discourses. Dreyfus and Rabinow accurately describe structuralism as an "attempt to treat human activity scientifically by finding basic elements (concepts, actions, classes of words) and the rules or laws by which they are combined."<sup>216</sup>

In response to critics suggesting that he employed the structuralist method, Foucault argued the following in his foreword to *The Order of Things*: "I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis," while admitting "there may well be certain similarities between the works of structuralists and my own work."<sup>217</sup> Archaeology and structuralism share characteristics to such an extent that the aforementioned critics would be forgiven for mislabeling the archaeological method as an application of structuralist ideas. Indeed, both methods attempt to conceptually organize scientific discourses pertaining to human activity by uncovering rules that govern said discourses. In his methodological treatise, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault describes discourses as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak."<sup>218</sup> With regard to their mutual object of study, then, structuralism and archaeology both rely on Kant's transcendental idealism when describing the link between subjects and objects. Further, the two methods turn to linguistics in an effort to identify rules governing the relationship between

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., xix-xx.

<sup>217</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xiv.

<sup>218</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 49.

discursive elements. Toward the end of his archaeological phase—when he began to reassess the stability of this method in the early seventies—Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that Foucault acknowledged his work’s structuralist underpinnings: “[Foucault] will see that the method of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* was itself heavily influenced by the seeming success of structuralism in the human sciences.”<sup>219</sup>

Despite their structuralist underpinnings, *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The Order of Things* are not, strictly speaking, structuralist works. This distinction is due to the fact that structuralism and archaeology differ in terms of the role allotted to meaning and historical context. In contrast to structuralism, Foucault’s new methodology does not remove meaning from its analysis; rather, archaeology distances itself from meaning, yet subordinates discursive rules to meaning. This seemingly contradictory feat is accomplished by identifying statements—Dreyfus and Rabinow rechristen these as “serious speech acts” for purposes of clarity—that are held to be true in that statement’s specific social and historical context: “Any speech act can be serious if one sets up the necessary validation procedures, community of experts, and so on.”<sup>220</sup> The archaeologist isolates and ignores a statement’s meaning by taking an impartial stance as to a statement’s truth-value—or the statement’s seriousness—and by disregarding the notion that a statement’s meaning will remain constant or true in any context. “[The archaeologist] not only must remain neutral as to whether what a statement

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<sup>219</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 103.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

asserts as true is in fact true, he must remain neutral as to whether each specific truth claim even makes sense, and more generally, whether the notion of a context-free truth claim is coherent.”<sup>221</sup> This dual-distanciation (or “double reduction,” to use Dreyfus and Rabinow’s terminology) from truth and meaning allows the archaeologist to analyze the relationship between statements without recourse to meta-analysis or transcendental elements in discourse.<sup>222</sup> Foucault refers to these relationships as discursive formations, or “the general enunciative system that governs a group of verbal performances.”<sup>223</sup>

As previously established, structuralism does not consider historical context in its analysis of discursive rules. Dreyfus and Rabinow explain how this differentiates structuralism from archaeology: “While the structuralist claims to find cross-cultural, ahistorical, abstract laws defining the total space of possible permutations of meaningless elements, the archaeologist only claims to be able to find the local, changing rules which at a given period in a particular discursive formation define what counts as an identical meaningful statement.”<sup>224</sup> In other words, archaeology contextualizes its analysis in a historical narrative—the rules it uncovers reflect only the historical circumstances in which they were made. As Foucault consistently grounds his analyses using historical context, he obviously did not fully commit to structural analysis even in *The Birth of the Clinic*, which

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>223</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 116.

<sup>224</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 55.



Dreyfus and Rabinow describe as “Foucault’s extreme swing toward structuralism.”<sup>225</sup>

### Invisibly Ordered Discourse

Archaeologists organize discursive formations according to contextual meaning. It is based on this point that we can fully differentiate structuralism from archaeology, as the former method takes the opposite approach: structuralism subordinates discourses to the unchanging and context-independent rules of which they are comprised, and therefore utilizes bottom-up organization, while archaeology is organized in a semi-top-down fashion. That is, archaeology subordinates discursive elements to social, historical and meaning-based context. It follows that the context surrounding statements makes possible the identification of individual discursive formations. This conforms to Dreyfus and Rabinow’s interpretation: “*Archaeological holism* asserts that the whole determines what can count even as a possible element. The whole verbal context is more fundamental than its elements and thus is more than the sum of its parts. Indeed, there are no parts except within the field which identifies and individuates them.”<sup>226</sup> Archaeology identifies discursive formations based on shared context and meaning between statements based, that is, on whether the statements are perceived as true and have a constant meaning in specific

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 55. Dreyfus and Rabinow’s italics.

circumstances. At the same time, the objective meaning and validity behind a statement is not a subject of interest for the archaeologist. To clarify, I am paraphrasing and agreeing with Dreyfus and Rabinow's interpretation of archaeology:

The archaeologist finds that his elements (statements) are not only *individuated* by the whole system of statements, but that they can be *identified* as elements only in the specific system in which they make sense. ... whether or not two speech acts mean the same thing (that is, determine the same truth conditions) depends not merely upon the words that determine their information content but upon the context in which they appear.<sup>227</sup>

This approach enables archaeology to objectively study discourse while simultaneously accounting for discourse's internal context. Hence Dreyfus and Rabinow's argument that "what Foucault claims to have discovered is a new domain of serious statements which, although experienced as dependent on nondiscursive practices by those within them, can be described and explained by the archaeologist as an autonomous realm."<sup>228</sup>

The reciprocal influence between context and elements of discourse denies archaeology the objective basis afforded by structural analysis' universalized elements. Without an empirical or metaphysical foundation, context serves as a mere qualitative tool for formulating *a priori* descriptions linking discursive elements. This is why Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that archaeology, "having no grounding in lowest level isolable elements, is not an analysis, and

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 57. The term 'nondiscursive' refers to the context surrounding a statement.

having no highest principles of ordering, is not transcendental.”<sup>229</sup> Lacking these qualities, archaeology cannot make objective predictions and is, therefore, not an ampliative (or positive) method of analysis, but “a purely descriptive enterprise.”<sup>230</sup> They conclude that “following Kant, [archaeology] could ... be called an *analytic*, since it seeks to discover the a priori conditions that make possible the analysis practiced in each specific discipline including structuralism.”<sup>231</sup> These analytic properties are most apparent in Foucault’s early archaeological phase—that is, in *Madness and Civilization* and *The Birth of the Clinic*—when he adheres to the structuralist assumption that discourse merely describes its object of study. Early archaeology treats its objects (madness and medical science, respectively) as static and uninfluenced by discourses. Hence Dreyfus and Rabinow’s argument:

Just as Foucault thought, mistakenly, in *Madness and Civilization* that he could individuate a field of discourse by locating its fixed objects, so in preparing *The Birth of the Clinic* he at first thought that he could isolate fixed, homogeneous stages of medical science by discovering certain constant styles of statements, certain basic ways subjects spoke.<sup>232</sup>

In the interest of transforming archaeology from a clarificatory method into an autonomous, ampliative one, Foucault elaborates on the relationship between discourse and object in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Dreyfus and Rabinow list four contextual elements—or “descriptive categories”—that Foucault uses to identify commonalities between statements: “objects, subjects, concepts, and

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 56. Dreyfus and Rabinow’s italics.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 67.

strategies.”<sup>233</sup> Even with these new tools, however, it is not possible to objectively identify meaningful and serious statements. Statements can only be considered serious in their own subjective context—thus archaeology remains an analytic.

Dreyfus and Rabinow expound upon this argument:

Seen from the inside, statements seem to make serious sense only against a background of scientific and nonscientific practices, but seen from the outside, this shared background of practices turns out to play no essential role in determining which speech acts will, at any time, be taken to make serious sense. What gives speech acts seriousness and thus makes them statements is their place in the network of other serious speech acts and nothing more.<sup>234</sup>

Foucault reevaluates the passive role of discourses in his 1969 methodological treatise so as to avoid these issues. Discourses now influence the object they are describing. Archaeology no longer describes existent links between discourses, but discovers discourse’s effects. Dreyfus and Rabinow contrast this development with Foucault’s approach in *Madness and Civilization*: “by the time of the *Archaeology* he realizes that, far from being differentiated by their objects, discursive formations *produce* the object about which they speak. Madness was not, as he had earlier assumed, an object or limit experience outside of discourse which each age had attempted to capture in its own terms.”<sup>235</sup> Archaeology has therefore undergone an odd reversal of priorities; discourse now has priority over non-discursive—that is, contextual—factors. While context continues to be used by archaeologists to identify discursive formations, discursive rules influence which statements are perceived as true, or

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 61. Dreyfus and Rabinow’s italics.

serious, within their field of discourse. For this reason, Foucault has “restricted his analysis to the structure of discursive practices, and even more specifically, to the rules governing serious speech acts.”<sup>236</sup>

The rules governing discourse in the social and medical sciences are autonomous, and thus operate without conscious human input. By influencing humans at a subconscious level (or remaining “unknown to practitioners”), discursive formations determine what can be conceptualized in any given era.<sup>237</sup> As to how this determination occurs, Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that “discourse ‘uses’ the various social, medical, technical, institutional, and economic factors which determine medical practice by taking them up and giving them ‘unity.’ Thus, although what gets said depends on something other than itself, discourse, so to speak, dictates the terms of this dependence.”<sup>238</sup> Discourse’s influence is simultaneously autonomous and subordinate to its object, or non-discursive factors. It follows that discursive and non-discursive factors serve as subject and object to each other. Based on these postulates, the archaeologist seeks to discover the rules by which discursive formations influence non-discursive factors. These rules allow the archaeologist to predict which statements will be deemed serious and subsequently incorporated into discursive formations.

Taking the above points into account, it is clear that archaeology is an elaborate method for discovering the reciprocal influence between subject and

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 64.

object. We now turn to Foucault's 1966 analysis of the social sciences, *The Order of Things*, for further analysis of archaeological concepts. *The Order of Things* examines the subject/object division as it relates to the organization of representations posited by discourses within three nineteenth-century fields: linguistics, zoology, and economics. In the preface to this work, Foucault frames the subject/object interaction in the social sciences as taking place between two related regions of thought regarding human activity. The first region encompasses an "already 'encoded' eye," or laws whose influence over the subject are already established, even as the subject seeks to discover them.<sup>239</sup> These are "the fundamental codes of a culture—those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices—establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home."<sup>240</sup> The second region is a meta-analysis of the first; it encompasses a "reflexive knowledge" of the narrative constructed by the social sciences, or "the scientific theories or the philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists in general, what universal law it obeys, what principle can account for it, and why this particular order has been established and not some other."<sup>241</sup> In short, the first region encompasses the representation of objective phenomena, while the second region involves the description thereof. Between these two regions exists "a

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<sup>239</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xx.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

middle region.”<sup>242</sup> One imagines that Foucault employs the term “middle” in order to emphasize the ambiguous space this region of thought occupies; the middle region represents an unprocessed form of order to which the social sciences have not applied a formal narrative and which operates subconsciously. Hence, the middle region is the “experience of order in its pure primary state.”<sup>243</sup>

Discursive rules originate from this middle region of thought. For this reason, the middle region’s characteristics are analogous to those of discursive formations; the middle region is subordinate to context insofar as it varies “according to the culture and the age in question,” yet preexists the modes of order surrounding context.<sup>244</sup> This anteriority lies, as we have seen, in the rules that comprise discursive formations and which influence non-discursive factors. Discursive rules do not adhere to knowable systems of ordering. Thus—and not unlike Foucault’s account of classical madness—discursive rules are indefinable. Foucault describes the middle region as being “continuous and graduated or discontinuous and piecemeal, linked to space or constituted anew at each instant by the driving force of time, related to a series of variables or defined by separate systems of coherences, composed of resemblances which are either successive or corresponding, organized around increasing differences, etc.”<sup>245</sup> Despite its unordered nature, the middle region is significant in that it makes ordering possible. Foucault describes these concepts as follows:

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<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, *xx*.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, *xx*.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, *xxi*.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, *xxi*.

This middle region, then, in so far as it makes manifest the modes of being of order, can be posited as the most fundamental of all: anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures, which are then taken to be more or less exact, more or less happy, expressions of it (which is why this experience of order in its pure primary state always plays a critical role); more solid, more archaic, less dubious, always more 'true' than the theories that attempt to give those expressions explicit form, exhaustive application, or philosophical foundation.<sup>246</sup>

Foucault uses the term "episteme" in reference to the middle region of thought.<sup>247</sup> First introduced in *The Order of Things*, the episteme can be characterized as an amalgamation of established archaeological concepts and their material effects; it refers to the collection of rules governing discursive formations and to the cognitive limitations this governance creates. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault describes the episteme as "the total set of relations that unites, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems."<sup>248</sup> Foucault states that the episteme does not represent a system of objective knowledge that applies uniformly to subjects; rather, "it is the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities."<sup>249</sup> The episteme, therefore, comprises the relations between the discursive formations, which in turn form the rules governing discourse. Thus, the archaeologist pieces together the rules governing discursive formations in order to uncover an episteme, or the network of discursive rules with shared characteristics. While discourse serves as the

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., *xxi*.

<sup>247</sup> This term is spelled *épistémè* in French.

<sup>248</sup> Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 191. Dreyfus and Rabinow cite this passage (18).

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 191. Dreyfus and Rabinow cite this passage (18).



conceptual foundation for scientific knowledge, the episteme determines what form and direction discourses may take. In this way, the episteme reflects the *a priori* and contextual limits of knowledge. Foucault alludes to these points in his preface to *The Order of Things*:

What I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the *episteme* in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science.<sup>250</sup>

Here Foucault states that archaeology's aim is to discover the reciprocal influence between representations of objective phenomena and the analysis of those representations. This discovery—culminating in the episteme—serves an analytic purpose in demonstrating how, historically, the unconscious relationship between these two regions of thought establishes the prerequisite conditions (the conditions of possibility) under which knowledge is arranged. Archaeology should consequently produce a historical understanding of the formation of knowledge in the form of the episteme—hence Foucault's claim that he intends to uncover “a *positive unconscious* of knowledge.”<sup>251</sup> Thus, archaeology studies empirical discourse in order to determine the unconscious limits of what can and cannot be conceptualized in a given era.

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<sup>250</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxii. Foucault's italics.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, xi. Foucault's italics.

## The Death of Man and the Impasse of Humanism

Miller accurately summarizes the implications surrounding this conclusion in stating that Foucault posits a region of thought, “beneath the level of conscious meaning explored by Sartre and the phenomenologists” that is, “unconscious and unthought, anonymous and impersonal, that regulate[s] the play of meaning in advance. The human being is therefore not absolutely free (or absolutely responsible), as Sartre supposed, but always restrained, pinioned, snared in a web of language and practices beyond its control.”<sup>252</sup> In other words, Foucault subordinates the knowing subject to language and the unconscious formation thereof. In this regard, archaeology is unapologetically relativistic and deterministic, making it opposed to subject-centered humanistic narratives. Miller explains the significance of Foucault’s stance:

- Language alone makes possible order and reasoned knowledge of the world.
- At the same time, language makes thinkable the unreal and unreasonable.
- Language therefore calls into question the world and ultimately itself in a dizzying spiral of possibilities and impossibilities, realities and unrealities, that may well climax ... in a mad and lyrical embrace of the void, oblivion and death.<sup>253</sup>

Humans, then, are the product of their own language and representations.

This position leads to Foucault’s declaration that, conceptually speaking, man came into being during the modern era and is a product of the modern humanistic episteme. That is, man’s understanding of himself is constructed by the manner in which knowledge is arranged. Foucault advances this argument in

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<sup>252</sup> Miller, 150.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid, 133.

his conclusion to *The Order of Things*: “As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date.”<sup>254</sup> With this insight comes the notion that the knowledge comprising our present conceptualization of man will inevitably reorder itself over time. When this reordering occurs, the modern understanding of man will be replaced by a new episteme: “If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility—were to cause them to crumble ... then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”<sup>255</sup>

Foucault arrives at this conclusion based on his assessment of modern reflexive thought. Modern thought adheres to Kant’s transcendentalism idealism, or the notion that humans cannot possess objective knowledge. This limitation requires the subject to actively think about empirical observations, thus making cognition possible. According to Foucault, empirical knowledge “provides a foundation for the limited character of knowledge as their negative correlation; and, inversely, the limits of knowledge provide a positive foundation for the possibility of knowing, though in an experience that is always limited.”<sup>256</sup> As previously established, transcendental idealism places humans at the center of the subject/object division. Within the social sciences, humans act as both the observer and the observed: “man appears in his ambiguous position as an object

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<sup>254</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 317. Dreyfus and Rabinow cite this passage (30).

of knowledge and as a subject that knows: enslaved sovereign, observed spectator.”<sup>257</sup> In other words, humans simultaneously organize and seek to understand the empirical reality which surrounds and comprises them. Dreyfus and Rabinow offer this succinct explanation of modern thought: “Modernity begins with the incredible and ultimately unworkable idea of a being who is sovereign precisely by virtue of being enslaved, a being whose very finitude allows him to take the place of God.”<sup>258</sup>

While Foucault agrees with the Kantian proposal that humans function as both object and subject, he rejects the notion that man’s cognitive limitations grant him access to some form of endless cognitive freedom in representing objects. Foucault breaks with Kant by maintaining that man’s ability to represent himself as empirical knowledge renders the process of representation itself unrepresentable. What this entails is that man, as sovereign subject, observes and represents empirical truth regarding himself through discourses—the social sciences—yet he cannot know how the subject/object interaction created or influenced the circumstances which made the production of this knowledge possible. On these points, Dreyfus and Rabinow offer the elucidation that “man is totally involved with, and his understanding is obscured by, the very objects he seeks to know.”<sup>259</sup> Foucault holds that humanistic thought has yet to demonstrate how the cognitive limitations proposed by transcendental idealism allow for the

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>258</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 30.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 28.

possibility of knowledge. Without this foundation, humanistic thought cannot claim that man is able to accurately represent empirical reality. Foucault refers to this impasse as the analytic of finitude. Dreyfus and Rabinow summarize these points:

[Foucault] seeks to show that with man's attempt to fully affirm his finitude and at the same time to completely deny it, discourse sets up a space in which the analytic of finitude, doomed from the start, twists through a series of futile strategies. Each new attempt will have to claim an identity and a difference between finitude as limitation and finitude as source of all facts, between the positive and the fundamental.<sup>260</sup>

The analytic of finitude describes humanistic thought's unsuccessful efforts to make transcendental idealism workable as the modern conceptualization of man. Dreyfus and Rabinow explain these efforts as three strategies for "uniting the positive and the fundamental."<sup>261</sup> Foucault argues that the analytic of finitude demonstrates—through a sequence of epistemological dichotomies, or doubles—the irreconcilability between man's limited empirical knowledge and knowledge's conditions of possibility. Knowledge's conditions of possibility are the linguistic frameworks that determine what can be represented in a given era. The doubles describe strategies for representing empirical reality through language. Language attempts to represent the empirical by seeking its transcendental origins. This effort ultimately fails when language becomes caught in a self-referential impasse. As Dreyfus and Rabinow argue, the doubles arise "when language loses its transparency, and so loses touch with its

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 43.

beginnings.”<sup>262</sup> The doubles include: the empirical and the transcendental, the cogito and unthought, and the retreat and return of the origin.

As one might infer from its title, the empirical/transcendental double refers to the conflicting view of human nature as posited by the subject/object division. This and each subsequent double revolve around the following central paradox: that the idea of man as a transcendental subject (defined as such by his possession of free will that operates outside of the empirical laws that surround him) contradicts the idea of man as an object acting in accordance with those empirical laws. The first double, then, explores humanistic thought’s accounts of how man can have objective knowledge while existing in this unstable state. Foucault argues that these accounts are marred by circular reasoning. Man’s limited empirical knowledge functions as a prerequisite for the existence of knowledge in itself—hence Foucault’s description of man:

If man is indeed, in the world, the locus of an empirico-transcendental doublet, if he is that paradoxical figure in which the empirical contents of knowledge necessarily release, of themselves, the conditions that have made them possible, then man cannot posit himself in the immediate and sovereign transparency of a *cogito*; nor, on the other hand, can he inhabit the objective inertia of something that, by rights, does not and never can lead to self-consciousness.<sup>263</sup>

In Foucault’s narrative, humanistic thought has attempted to resolve the above contradiction by grounding knowledge in the objective truth in itself promised by transcendental and empirical viewpoints. Both of these reductionist positions suffer from epistemological limitations and consequently fail to bypass

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>263</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 322.

the empirical/transcendental double. Accordingly, humanistic thought searches for a “locus of a discourse,” or an objective, unified social theory “whose tension would keep separate the empirical and the transcendental, while being directed at both.”<sup>264</sup> This unified discourse must avoid subordinating the transcendental to the empirical or visa-versa. In Foucault’s words, a unified discourse would “make it possible to analyze man as a subject, that is, as a locus of knowledge which has been empirically acquired but referred back as closely as possible to what make it possible, as a pure form immediately present to those contents.”<sup>265</sup> Modern humanistic thought has not produced this unified discourse, thus the empirical/transcendental double remains unresolved.

The cogito/unthought double outlines the limitations of humanistic thought’s next strategy: reflexive knowledge. Reflexive knowledge—exemplified by Descartes’ *cogito*—holds that truth in itself and morality can be ascertained through empirical observation and reflection. The modern *cogito* (or reflexive knowledge) must account for the interaction between subject and object, however, meaning that it cannot yield truth in itself. It follows that under the modern *cogito*, explanations regarding human behavior and resultant systems of morality lack transcendental grounding. This is what Foucault means when he argues “the question is no longer: How can experience of nature give rise to necessary judgments?”<sup>266</sup> The modern *cogito* can only clarify the positive factors

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 321-322.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 323.

comprising man, which should yield some degree of truth regarding man's being. Foucault accordingly attributes a new question to the modern *cogito*: "How can man think what he does not think, inhabit as though by a mute occupation something that eludes him, animate with a kind of frozen movement that figure of himself that takes the form of a stubborn exteriority?"<sup>267</sup> That is, how can man reflect on an objective truth that determines him, yet he does not know?

As we have seen, the interaction between subject and object entails that man is continuously influencing reality through the possession of his knowledge thereof. The inverse is also true; reality influences and determines man. Foucault observes that thought "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."<sup>268</sup> The very act of knowing influences man and consequently the reality his knowledge represents: "Whatever [knowledge] touches it immediately causes to move."<sup>269</sup> This logic can be applied to the known and unknown—to conscious and unconscious thought. The modern *cogito's* task, therefore, involves clarifying unthought, or the empirical factors that determine man, yet remain unknown to him. In Foucault's words, the modern *cogito* seeks "a clear philosophical awareness of that whole realm of unaccounted-for experiences in which man does not recognize himself."<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 327.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 323.



The modern *cogito* attempts to salvage man's status as a transcendental, meaning-giving subject through the positive limitations associated with unthought. By representing the unconscious positive factors surrounding man, the unthought constitutes man's positive limitations—the same limitations posited by transcendental idealism. Because unthought is a limitation, it is also the object of empirical observation and resultant objective thought. Man operates as a subject by empirically observing himself as an object. Once observed and interpreted, unthought becomes objective knowledge. Unthought should reveal some liberating aspect of man's being that is transcendental in that it operates outside of the laws determining empirical reality. Thus, man's transcendental nature originates from unthought (as opposed to the truth in itself promised by the classical *cogito*). In this way, unthought makes thought and meaningful action possible. Yet Foucault argues that the modern *cogito* achieves the opposite: the modern *cogito* inadvertently denies the transcendental nature of man's thought and actions.

It seems obvious enough that, from the moment when man first constituted himself as a positive figure in the field of knowledge, the old privilege of reflexive knowledge, of thought thinking itself, could not but disappear; but that it became possible, by this very fact, an objective form of thought to investigate man in his entirety—at the risk of discovering what could never be reached by his reflection or even by his consciousness: dim mechanisms, faceless determinations, a whole landscape of shadow that has been termed, directly or indirectly, the unconscious.<sup>271</sup>

As this passage states, thought—in the context of the modern *cogito*—is dangerous. The act of thinking influences knowledge, thus thought will inevitably

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 326.

alter itself in unknown ways as it produces reflexive knowledge. In other words, thought constantly creates its own blind spot, or unthought, by revealing what man does not know about himself—the unconscious empirical factors that determine him as an object. This is what Foucault means when he claims that the modern *cogito* “is the constantly renewed interrogation as to how thought can reside elsewhere than here, and yet so very close to itself; how can it *be* in the forms of non-thinking. The modern *cogito* does not reduce the whole being of things to thought without ramifying the being of thought right down to the inert network of what does not think.”<sup>272</sup>

We are now in a position to describe the dilemma comprising the cogito/unthought double. Unthought determines man, thus contradicting his status as a sovereign subject. Clarifying the unconscious factors surrounding man would objectify all actions. To objectively know why one acts as one does—to know the positive machinations that drive an action—is tantamount to denying that the choices preceding one’s actions operate outside of empirical laws. Hence, the quest for self-understanding is fated to undermine itself when one discovers that one’s conscious choices are determined and therefore meaningless. This is to paraphrase Dreyfus and Rabinow’s astute interpretation: “As Sartre recognized, whoever achieves total clarity about himself and society would, indeed, be a sovereign chooser, but a sovereign that no longer had any reasons for his choice. According to the logic of this view we are either objects

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 324. Dreyfus and Rabinow cite this passage (35).

driven by unclear compulsions or lucid subjects who can only act arbitrarily.”<sup>273</sup> In order to avoid this nihilistic conclusion, man must further interpret the unthought surrounding himself in the hope of finding some form of transcendental liberation that has yet to be conceptualized. As we have seen, this effort will only reveal more unthought. Dreyfus and Rabinow accurately describe Foucault’s version of the modern *cogito* as “the Sisyphus-like task of clarifying the background as an infinite set of beliefs each of which itself only makes sense against a further background.”<sup>274</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Foucault rejects the modern *cogito* as a means to achieve self-understanding within the logic put forth by transcendental idealism. In Foucault’s words, if one accepts man’s being as it is described by the empirical/transcendental double, then “man cannot posit himself in the immediate and sovereign transparency of a *cogito*; nor, on the other hand, can he inhabit the objective inertia of something that, by rights, does not and never can lead to self-consciousness.”<sup>275</sup> Thus, the modern *cogito* cannot reconcile the transcendental with the empirical.

The retreat and return of the origin double involves the hermeneutic analysis of man’s history. Humanistic thought makes yet another attempt to merge the empirical with the transcendental by tracing the history of representations in order to uncover the origin of knowledge. Here (and in the

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<sup>273</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 37.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>275</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 322.

previous doubles) man's positive limitations manifest themselves in language. The retreat and return of the origin double describes humanistic thought's analysis of language through history. Foucault describes this strategy as follows: "to return to the origin was to place oneself once more as near as possible to the mere duplication of representation. Finally, the origin of knowledge was sought within this pure sequence of representations."<sup>276</sup> In other words, a historical study of language should reveal the origin of representations, or the point at which language most closely represents empirical reality.

As with the previous strategies, the historical study of language encounters a tautological impasse; namely, man constructs a historical narrative regarding himself, yet he is also a product of history. Man preexists his knowledge, but he can only seek the origin of his knowledge within the conceptual limits of his present knowledge. There is always a disconnect, then, between the origin that preexists man's knowledge thereof and the knowledge and social practices that determine man in any given era. In the context of language, the origin "must be sought for in that fold where man ... composes into sentences which have never before been spoken (even though generation after generation has repeated them) words that are older than all memory."<sup>277</sup> Clearly, this strategy is caught in its own circular reasoning: man must conceptualize his origin using knowledge determined by that origin. This is what Foucault means when he states: "It is always against a background of the already begun that man

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 330.

is able to reflect on what may serve for him as origin.”<sup>278</sup> Foucault argues that this circularity prevents man from having an identifiable origin:

Paradoxically, the original, in man, does not herald the time of his birth, or the most ancient kernel of his experience: it links him to that which does not have the same time as himself; it links him to that which does not have the same time as himself; and it sets free in him everything that is not contemporaneous with him; it indicates ceaselessly, and in an ever-renewed proliferation, that things began long before him, and that for this very reason, and since his experience is wholly constituted and limited by things, no one can ever assign him an origin.<sup>279</sup>

Man cannot conceptualize his origin without reference to present knowledge that is determined by that origin. At this juncture, the origin of knowledge must be found at an earlier point in time—one where the origin has not been influenced by man’s representations thereof. As we have seen, it is impossible to objectively identify the origin of knowledge. Foucault argues that this impossibility “signifies that the origin of things is always pushed further back, since it goes back to a calendar upon which man does not figure.”<sup>280</sup>

Efforts to find the source of knowledge in the future are similarly doomed. Man can conceptualize the future much in the same way as he conceptualizes the past, yet in both cases this act can only replicate man’s representations of a hypothetical point in time in which he does not empirically exist. Moreover, man is the source of knowledge (and, it follows, of time) but he must represent a temporal point where he has yet to formulate representations. Of this temporal instability, Foucault concludes “man is cut off from the origin that would make him

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 330. Drefus and Rabinow cite this passage (38).

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 331.

contemporaneous with his own existence: amid all the things that are born in time and no doubt die in time, he, cut off from all origin, is already there.”<sup>281</sup>

The three doubles outline modern thought’s empirical and linguistic limitations. These limitations result in an inability to situate man’s transcendental nature with his empirical knowledge of himself. In Foucault’s words: “All these contents that his knowledge reveals to him as exterior to himself, and older than his own birth, anticipate him, overhang him with all their solidity, and traverse him as though he were merely an object of nature. ... Man’s finitude is heralded—and imperiously so—in the positivity of knowledge.”<sup>282</sup> The archaeological method identifies and is intended to bypass the doubles. If successful, the archaeological method would uncover what the subject/object division obscures; the unconscious rules governing language and, consequently, knowledge’s conditions of possibility. As one might surmise from Foucault’s distancing himself from archaeology later in his career, the method is does not achieve this.

According to Dreyfus and Rabinow, to the archaeologist, “all serious discourse is subject to rules which determine the production of objects, subjects, and so forth—rules which archaeological discourse claims to discover and describe. The archeologist, indeed, aspires to contribute to a general theory of such production.” As previously mentioned, the archaeological method accomplishes this by distancing itself from truth and meaning. Both the subject and the object are, to the archaeologist, variables to be described only in

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid., 332. Dreyfus and Rabinow cite this passage (38).

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 313. Dreyfus and Rabinow cite this passage.

themselves and as positive existences—that is, archaeology does not attribute any external meaning to objects, nor does it assume its observations are true.

Dreyfus and Rabinow offer this elaboration:

By bracketing truth and seriousness the archeologist claims to operate on a level that is free of the influences of both the theories and practices he studies. Whatever intelligibility he finds, he finds among objects with which he is in no way involved. Unlike the theories he studies, his theory slips free of institutional, theoretical, and even epistemological bonds.<sup>283</sup>

Archaeology's objectivity also proves to be one of its weaknesses, however. As we have seen, the distancing from truth and meaning allows the archaeologist to assume an objective, detached position in examining discursive formations. Yet the archaeologist exists within and was produced by his or her own object of study: society. Archaeology, therefore, relies on the same circularity between subject and object as it identifies in the analytic of finitude. This obviously problematizes the method's ability to simultaneously remain objective and make claims to truth. For instance, in adhering to the archaeological method, Foucault must acknowledge that he is a product of the society to which discursive formations apply, and is therefore not exempt from their influence. Taking these issues into account, Dreyfus and Rabinow render this (doubtlessly accurate) final verdict:

It is no surprise that archaeology, by thus affirming and denying the finitude of its own discourse, turns out to be as unstable as its precursors. In this light the promised post-modern science of human beings, far from being free of the intrinsic instabilities of modern thought, shows itself to be a new variation on an old Kantian theme.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 102.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

The archaeological method is Foucault's attempt to provide an objective and relativistic method of analysis. However, this method fails to escape the circularity posed by Kant's subject/object division. Foucault's next method, genealogy, reflects his resigning himself to the fact that our present thought cannot escape this circularity. The subject/object division is, conceptually speaking, an unbreakable circle. Thus, Foucault develops genealogy to be a viable method of analysis that can operate within the subject/object division.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### GENEALOGY

#### Nietzsche and the Genealogical Method

Foucault concludes the first chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, titled “The Body of the Condemned,” with the claim that he is writing “a history of the present.”<sup>285</sup> This statement reflects Foucault’s intent to analyze elements of contemporary Western society by detailing their historical origins. It is also the purpose, however abridged, behind Foucault’s genealogical method. Like archaeology, genealogy is a method for analyzing human activity. Dreyfus and Rabinow accurately describe genealogy as “a method of diagnosing and grasping the significance of social practices from within them.”<sup>286</sup> Genealogy differentiates itself from archaeology by contextualizing its objects using a multilayered system of power relations, rather than through discursive rules. Further, genealogy analyzes the network of power relations that comprise the subject while by bracketing out the subject itself, as well as truth, objectivity and meaning. Above all, Foucault’s new method is a positivistic and unbridled form of historical relativism; for the genealogist, the only truth is the material outcome resulting from individuals and groups imposing their will on others. And even this

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<sup>285</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 31.

<sup>286</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 103.

does not reflect objective truth. Rather, it is a general assumption driving what the genealogist must acknowledge to be a narrative of his or her own production, and of which he or she is most certainly also a product.

Before defining genealogy itself, we must first examine this new method's relation to archaeology. Foucault has not replaced the archaeological method with genealogy; rather, as Dreyfus and Rabinow note, "Foucault straightforwardly reverses the priority of genealogy and archaeology. Genealogy now takes precedence over archaeology."<sup>287</sup> That is, Foucault retains aspects of the archaeological method alongside the genealogical. Hence Dreyfus and Rabinow's argument that, with regard to archaeology's presence within genealogy, "Foucault abandons only the attempt to work out a theory of rule-governed systems of discursive practices." Foucault discards archaeology's objective to construct a general theory of discourse-production. Instead, archaeology serves genealogy primarily as a "method of isolating discourse objects."<sup>288</sup> Both methods assume that the theories held by their common object of study, the social sciences, are meaningless in themselves. Yet genealogy seeks intelligibility for these theories not in a system of rules governing discursive practices—as was the case with archaeology—but in the context of "a larger set of organized and organizing practices in whose spread the human sciences play a crucial role."<sup>289</sup> There is little reason to doubt Dreyfus and Rabinow's

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<sup>287</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 105.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, xxv.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

interpretation—though it might be amended that rather than a matter of subordination, archaeology’s bracketing out meaning and truth has been carried over to genealogy.

For the genealogist, archaeology remains a means to distance subject from object—or “a relative degree of detachment from the practices and theories of the human sciences”—as Foucault continues to regard his object of study as having no intrinsic truth or meaning.<sup>290</sup> Taken to its logical conclusion, this archaeological distancing from truth and meaning leads to the assumption that history itself has no intelligibility. As Dreyfus and Rabinow argue, “the archaeologist no longer takes the teleology of history seriously, and thus no longer presupposes historical continuity.”<sup>291</sup> This opposition to traditional history resurfaces as a core assumption in the genealogical method, as evidenced by Foucault’s statement in the introduction to his essay, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”: “Genealogy does not oppose itself to history as the lofty and profound gaze of the philosopher might compare to the molelike perspective of the scholar; on the contrary, it rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for ‘origins.’”<sup>292</sup>

First published in 1971, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” contextualizes Foucault’s genealogical method alongside his reading of Friedrich Nietzsche’s works. It bears mention that Foucault was greatly influenced by Nietzsche, such

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>292</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. Cited in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 77.

that, as Dreyfus and Rabinow argue, “all of the seeds of Foucault’s work of the 1970s can be found in this discussion of Nietzsche.”<sup>293</sup> Furthermore, Miller refers to Nietzsche as “[Foucault’s] avowed model and precursor.”<sup>294</sup> Nietzsche’s sway over Foucault is apparent even in genealogy itself, as this method traces its origins back to Nietzsche’s iconic text, *On the Genealogy of Morals*: “[Foucault] uses Nietzsche’s genealogy as a starting point for developing a method that would allow him to thematize the relationship between truth, theory, and values and the social institutions and practices in which they emerge.”<sup>295</sup> In adopting the genealogical method, Foucault also borrows Nietzsche’s views on history and power relations.

Foucault and Nietzsche’s genealogy emphasizes contextual relationships between social elements in history. The method, therefore, requires a broad, flexible view of history in order to accommodate a multitude of contexts. It is for this reason that Foucault so fervently rejects the aforementioned traditional history, or the suprahistorical perspective. This perspective, in short, is what genealogy attempts to dismantle. In this regard, genealogy is anti-Hegelian, as the suprahistorical perspective is analogous to Absolute Idealism, a worldview developed by the German philosopher, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). The suprahistorical perspective assumes itself to be an objective view capable of identifying in history a logical progression of events whose alignment

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<sup>293</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 106.

<sup>294</sup> Miller, 15.

<sup>295</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, xxv.

renders the present as inevitable. In Foucault's words, the suprahistorical perspective is "a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development."<sup>296</sup> The complexity of this definition necessitates further elaboration.

To begin, the suprahistorical perspective relies on metaphysics—or causality—to justify its narrative; some unseen force must drive history forward toward a specific and presumably desirable conclusion. It follows that past, present and future events occur for the purpose of fulfilling this outcome. Traditional historians must, therefore, "confirm our belief that the present rests upon profound intentions and immutable necessities."<sup>297</sup> Thus, the suprahistorical perspective posits predetermined origins for all things, and it is the traditional historian's task to uncover these origins. Foucault criticizes this search for origins for its need for metaphysical backing. In this regard, the search for origins constitutes "an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession."<sup>298</sup> The term "immobile forms" refers to the unseen metaphysical

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<sup>296</sup> Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 86-87.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

force driving history. Hence, the search for origins involves uncovering absolute metaphysical truths in history. Taking Foucault's definition into account, the suprahistorical perspective is a narrow and inflexible view, and is therefore the methodological opposite of genealogy.

In its adherence to causal assumptions, the suprahistorical perspective makes a claim to truth. Here Foucault adheres to his tradition of doubting such claims, stating, "once the historical sense is mastered by a suprahistorical perspective, metaphysics can bend it to its own purpose, and, by aligning it to the demands of objective science, it can impose its own 'Egyptianism.'"<sup>299</sup> The term "Egyptianism" first appears in Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols* to denote the death and mummification of an ahistorical subject in philosophy. Nietzsche argues that to "de-historicize" a subject is not to view it objectively, but rather to make it into a "concept-mumm[y]," or a fragment of immortalized data that no longer represents the subject as it exists in reality. Foucault borrows this term in order to emphasize how, by virtue of its objectivism, its causal assumptions, and its pursuit of origins, the suprahistorical perspective comprises a predestined, inaccurate, and dead history. In this regard, Nietzsche's description of metaphysical analysis—"when these honorable idolators of concepts worship something, they kill it and stuff it"—is apt, as it conjures an image of a taxidermist's specimen, neatly displayed on a mantel.<sup>300</sup> In viewing this

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>300</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Cited in *The Portable Nietzsche*, eds. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 479.

specimen, one sees an animal posed in some life-like fashion, yet the scene reflects only the taxidermist's efforts and intentions; one cannot gain an understanding of how the animal lived from its preserved corpse. Likewise, Foucault argues that one cannot gain an understanding of history by adhering to the suprahistorical perspective, as this view presupposes a system of metaphysics that attributes a causal meaning to events. This meaning is neither timeless nor universal; rather, it comprises the values and biases of the historian and his or her society, yet the historian's claim to objectivity obscures this subjectivity. Thus, in the same way that the taxidermist positions and displays a specimen, and in the same way that medicine's discursive practices influence its supposedly objective discourses, the traditional historian imposes subjective meaning onto his object of study.

This explains why Foucault concludes his 1969 essay, "What Is an Author?" with the bold question: "What difference does it make who is speaking?"<sup>301</sup> While Foucault's interpretation of the suprahistorical perspective can be considered a critique of the notion of pure objectivity, Foucault's genealogical method is also a critique of the subject. In "What Is an Author?" Foucault argues that the knowing subject and producer of knowledge (as exemplified by the author) becomes nothing in itself after producing knowledge. That is, society quietly displaces the meaning and intent embodied by the subject with its own meaning and intent: "it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its

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<sup>301</sup> Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" trans. Josué V. Harari. Cited from *The Foucault Reader*, 120.

substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse.”<sup>302</sup> In this way, society produces its own subject.

This artificial subject varies according to a multitude of contextual factors. The genealogist brackets out—or does not consider—the original subject from its analysis so as to examine these factors that make up the artificial subject.

Continuing with the taxidermy metaphor, the original subject is a corpse.

Foucault describes the subject’s role in genealogy in the interview, “Truth and Power”:

One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, that’s to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history.<sup>303</sup>

As previously mentioned, subjective analysis emerges, strangely enough, from the traditional historian’s attempts to remain objective. In this effort “[the historian] is divided against himself: forced to silence his preferences and overcome his distaste, to blur his own perspective and replace it with the fiction of a universal geometry, to mimic death in order to enter the kingdom of the dead, to adopt a faceless anonymity.”<sup>304</sup> That is, adopting an objective perspective and ignoring one’s own biases is tantamount to restating a common

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<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>303</sup> Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” from *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. Interview conducted by Alessandro Fontana and Pasquala Pasquino. Cited from *The Foucault Reader*, 59.

<sup>304</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 91.



consensus, or citing information from a historical corpus of knowledge. However, and for reasons outlined above, this corpus of knowledge is subjective. This subjectivity can be attributed to the fact that a multitude of inconstant factors—Foucault cites “eating habits or moral law” as examples—form and influence the historian’s biases, rendering an objective viewpoint unattainable.<sup>305</sup> Thus, subjective factors lead the historian to venerate and vilify individuals or countries, and to locate in their origins a narrative that reinforces the historian’s biases. This masked subjectivity serves one purpose: to establish historically rooted, predetermined identities for the historian and his or her readers. The motivation behind the suprahistorical perspective, then, is the desire for the self to be grounded in inevitability: “The historian offers this confused and anonymous European, who no longer knows himself or what name he should adopt, the possibility of alternate identities, more individualized and substantial than his own.”<sup>306</sup> In contrast, the genealogist seeks to confront these subjective motivations and avoid the grounding offered by traditional history.

The reasons Foucault gives for rejecting the suprahistorical perspective can be viewed as foundations for constructing an explanation of Foucault’s genealogical method. As a genealogist, Foucault writes effective history, or *wirkliche Historie*. Effective history is the genealogical method’s alternative to traditional history. Where traditional history presents a static, romanticized narrative that depicts the present and the self as necessities, effective history

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 93.

“deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending.”<sup>307</sup> Effective history therefore discards the comforting teleological notion that history is an intricate progression toward some desirable end. Indeed, Foucault tasks the effective historian with actively destroying the beliefs surrounding traditional history: “The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled.”<sup>308</sup> Thus, the genealogist writes the history of “disparity,” rather than continuity.<sup>309</sup> Events are not connected by the fulfillment of meaning or values, and they do not reflect a progression toward some end that can be uncovered through interpretation. Dreyfus and Rabinow make the compelling point that Foucault’s distrust of interpretation derives from the endless circularity and constructed nature of the act: “The more one interprets the more one finds not the fixed meaning of a text, or of the world, but only other interpretations. These interpretations have been created and imposed by other people, not by the nature of things. In this discovery of groundlessness the inherent arbitrariness of interpretation is revealed.”<sup>310</sup> Foucault’s reason for distrusting interpretations is analogous to his critique of hermeneutics.

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>310</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 107.

Yet genealogy is not hostile toward interpretation. On the contrary, the genealogist operates under the assumption that all claims are interpretations. This is due to the fact that genealogy rejects claims to transcendental truth, meaning, and their supporting metaphysical frameworks. Foucault writes: “if the genealogist refuses to extend his faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is ... not a timeless and essential secret [behind things], but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms.”<sup>311</sup> The genealogist, therefore, regards history as a series of accidents. Consequently, Foucault argues that the genealogist’s task is as follows:

To follow the complex course of descent is to maintain passing events in their proper dispersion; it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations—or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.<sup>312</sup>

Thus, the effective historian searches for meaningless disparities, and must therefore acknowledge “the singular randomness of events.”<sup>313</sup> In referring to events as random, Foucault does not mean that history progresses as it does due to chance or probability; rather, events occur in the context of conflicting wills: “Chance is not simply the drawing of lots, but raising the stakes in every attempt to master chance through the will to power, and giving rise to the risk of an even greater chance. The world we know is ... a profusion of entangled

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<sup>311</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 78.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

events.”<sup>314</sup> Here Foucault portrays the randomness of events as the amalgamation of interconnected wills, each trying to subjugate others. Thus, while effective history is “without constants,” it assumes that events are the manifestations of the human desire for domination.<sup>315</sup> To clarify, this desire is not an abstract force, but an observable phenomenon. Foucault offers this description of power relations in history:

This relationship of domination is no more a “relationship” than the place where it occurs is a place; and, precisely for this reason, it is fixed, throughout its history, in rituals, in meticulous procedures that impose rights and obligations. It establishes marks of its power and engraves memories on things and even bodies. It makes itself accountable for debts and gives rise to the universe of rules, which is by no means designed to temper violence, but rather to satisfy it.<sup>316</sup>

Herein lies the broad flexibility of the genealogical method: it regards all human activity as a haphazard sequence of disparate power struggles, thus freeing the effective historian from the endless task of finding a common thread of meaning in events—indeed, the meaning behind laws is power. For instance, the rules governing human society owe their existence to this struggle for domination. Echoing Nietzsche’s thesis in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Foucault argues that rules—however righteous their stated intentions may be—do not possess any intrinsic value; rules are only power struggles acted upon in a legal context. Rules and laws are the result of powerful groups imposing their will upon weaker groups: “The successes of history belong to those who are capable of seizing these rules, to replace those who had used them, to disguise themselves

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 85.

so as to pervert them, invert their meaning, and redirect them against those who had initially imposed them.”<sup>317</sup> While power struggles play a primary role in driving historical events, the genealogist refuses to attribute value to these events. Moreover, genealogy avoids any claims to truth. Owing to this relativist element, Dreyfus and Rabinow argue against the seriousness of genealogy, stating: “It finds recurrences and play where others found progress and seriousness. ... genealogy avoids the search for depth. Instead, it seeks the surfaces of events, small details, minor shifts, and subtle contours.”<sup>318</sup> This playful distancing from truth allows the genealogist to avoid the archaeological method’s impasse of claiming to be objective while simultaneously being produced by one’s object of study: “Foucault’s account of his own position with regard to the human sciences also undergoes a radical transformation. The investigator is no longer the detached spectator of mute-discourse monuments. Foucault realizes and thematizes the fact that he himself—like any other investigator—is involved in, and to a large extent produced by, the social practices he is studying.”<sup>319</sup> In this regard, the genealogist admits to being both subject and object in his or her analysis.

While this interaction between subject and object could be construed as a regression to subjectivism, Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that Foucault is “writing the genealogy of the modern subject.”<sup>320</sup> That is, the genealogical method

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>318</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 106.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 120.

focuses on power's influence over the modern individual, even in the context of a historical analysis—hence Foucault's assertion that he is writing the history of the present. Dreyfus and Rabinow offer this cogent explanation of genealogy's historiography as it pertains to the present:

[Genealogy] explicitly and self-reflectively begins with a diagnosis of the current situation. There is an unequivocal and unabashed contemporary orientation. The historian locates the acute manifestations of a particular "meticulous ritual of power" or "political technologies of the body" to see where it arose, took shape, gained importance, and so on. ... [The historian] is isolating the central components of political technology today and tracing them back in time.<sup>321</sup>

To summarize, the genealogical method revolves around searching for the positive manifestations of conceptual shifts in history. In Foucault's words: "The role of genealogy is to record ... the history of morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts, the history of the concept of liberty or of the ascetic life; as they stand for the emergence of different interpretations, they must be made to appear as events on the stage of historical process."<sup>322</sup> The genealogist avoids claims to truth and does not assume there to be an underlying meaning behind concepts beyond their manifestations through events. During his archaeological phase, Foucault attempted to overcome Kant's subject/object division by objectively analyzing discursive rules. As we have seen, this method was built on internal contradictions. Foucault no longer pursues objectivity in his analysis; the analyst is simply another component in the cycle between object and subject in the

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 119. Dreyfus and Rabinow are describing genealogy as it is used in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*.

<sup>322</sup> Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 86.

production of truth. While genealogy analyzes power's relationship to the modern subject, it discards all claims to truth and validity.

### Power and the Soul

In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Foucault explores European and American penal reforms and their societal consequences from the mid-eighteenth century through the present. He finds that, over time, the reforms supplanted chaotic public displays of torture and executions with a regimented system of incarceration. Although *Discipline and Punish* presents itself as a history of the modern prison system, it also encompasses an analysis of power relations between society and the individual. Furthermore, Foucault provides a genealogical analysis of the individualization of knowledge. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault develops many of the concepts introduced in his earlier works. It is not surprising that the 1975 text is widely considered—even by Foucault himself—to be his seminal work. As Miller argues, “in the author’s own eyes, it was the capstone of his career.”<sup>323</sup>

To summarize the key theories put forth in *Discipline and Punish*: the term disciplinary power refers to the strategies and technologies employed by power in order to mold humans into useful, obedient and docile individuals. In spite of the negative connotations surrounding the terms discipline and power, Foucault

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<sup>323</sup> Miller, 209.

maintains that power does not exist solely to constrain the individual. Similarly, discipline is not simply the implied threat and implementation of punishment. Rather, power produces the individual through discipline. Toward this end, disciplinary power functions by regimenting individuals' lives through normalizing judgment, examination, and hierarchical observation. These disciplinary technologies collect data on populations for purposes of individuating all instances of deviancy, thus creating a corpus of knowledge surrounding the individual and, consequently, creating the individual. Moreover, power develops new technologies in order to ensure the development of docile bodies based on this corpus of knowledge. In this regard, power simultaneously produces and is controlled by knowledge of the individual—the two forces share a reciprocal relationship. Foucault concludes that this individualized knowledge forms the modern individual's soul, or the visible effect of power's influence on individuals as manifested through their behavior. Thus, power is exercised over the soul, rather than the body.

Foucault outlines his definition of power and its relationship to the individual in his introductory chapter, "The Body of the Condemned." Power, to Foucault, should be conceptualized "not as a property, but as a strategy." That is, power is not a commodity that can be harnessed and whose focal point is easily identifiable; rather, power is a product of human agency. Power is, therefore, an abstract operation that "is exercised rather than possessed." To rephrase these points: power is nothing in itself—it has no nature or essence which one might



understand or harness—yet power is real insofar as it is the positive consequence of power struggles. Hence Foucault’s statement: “[power] is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions.”<sup>324</sup>

Power’s influence can be defined as the cumulative effect of disparate, multidirectional, and acephalous operations in society. Given this definition, it is hardly surprising that one sees in Foucault’s analysis of power an unapologetically genealogical perspective—a view that posits an unstable network of conflict-based relationships as its only constant. Foucault elaborates: “[Power’s] effects of domination are attributed not to ‘appropriation’, but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess.”<sup>325</sup> Accordingly, in his 1976 examination of sexuality, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Foucault argues that power should be analyzed, “as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization.”<sup>326</sup> Thus, an analysis of power entails the cataloguing of unequal force relations in a society. Further, power has no centralized point of operation. In contrast with his earlier works, Foucault now de-emphasizes the importance of state and social institutions in exerting power’s influence, opting instead to examine power

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<sup>324</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>326</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 92.

without recourse to localization or levels of society. Foucault argues that, “power cannot be localized in a particular type of institution or state apparatus.”

Certainly, states and institutions may wield or apply power, yet “in its mechanisms and its effects, [power] is situated at a quite different level.”<sup>327</sup>

Foucault argues for the “omnipresence of power” in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, “not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere.” In this view, power, being an effect of force relations, is produced in every instance of conflict in a society. Given the genealogical emphasis on power struggles as the driving factor behind events, it follows that power is continually produced at, interconnected with, and inseparable from every level of a given society. “Power, insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities.”<sup>328</sup> Although power relations between groups are by definition unequal, power does not operate exclusively in a top-down fashion; groups with limited influence still wield power over groups with greater influence. Thus, power is multidirectional in its operations: “there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as

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<sup>327</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.

<sup>328</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 93.

a general matrix—no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body.”<sup>329</sup>

A final point on Foucault’s view of power: while power results from human action and deliberation, it is not a cohesive strategy with a singular driving will or goal, and its consequences are not always intentional. That is, power is headless, yet, when dissected into the numerous interconnected force relations of which it is composed, reveals an equal number of disparate objectives.

Foucault provides this elaboration:

Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective. If in fact they are intelligible, this is not because they are the effect of one instance that “explains” them, but rather because they are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject; let us not look for the headquarters that presides over its rationality. ... the rationality of power is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed ... tactics which, becoming connected to one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems: the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet it is often the case that no one is there to have invented them.<sup>330</sup>

Perplexingly, Foucault credits this decentralized amalgamation of conflicting power relations with the formation of the modern subject. More accurately, power, operating through social institutions and scientific discourses, constructs a corpus of individualized knowledge that defines the individual. Foucault has already provided an archaeological account of individualized knowledge in the context of medicine in *The Birth of the Clinic. Discipline and*

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

*Punish*'s version of individualized knowledge expands upon its predecessor's in exploring the material relationship between knowledge and power. Toward this end, Foucault invokes eighteenth-century French philosopher Gabriel Bonnot de Mably's use of the term soul. Mably's soul is not an ethereal and eternal essence inherent in an individual's being, nor is it "an ideological effect."<sup>331</sup> Moreover, Foucault insists that this soul is "real," yet "non-corporal."<sup>332</sup> In order to deconstruct this apparent contradiction, gravity provides a suitable analogy. Gravity is a corporeal abstraction; it has no physical form, yet its effects can be observed and quantified. Similarly, the soul is an abstraction with physical consequences. Foucault argues that the soul "has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished—and, in a more general way, on those one supervises, trains and corrects, over madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, over those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives."<sup>333</sup> The soul is real insofar as it is the observable effect of power's influence. Power creates the soul through "methods of punishment, supervision and constraint."<sup>334</sup> The soul can be considered an identity that power constructs through its machinations, codifies in a corpus of knowledge, and imposes upon individuals. The effect of the soul, then, manifests in the behavior of individuals who internalize this identity. Foucault describes the soul as follows:

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<sup>331</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 29.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

[The soul] 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 power. On this reality-reference, 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>335</sup>

Foucault regards the soul as being the product of matrices of power. As the name implies, matrices of power constitute power's multidirectional pull and influence over the individual—not unlike interlocking and tangled strands of a spider's web all leading to and exerting pressure on a central point. Power inscribes, through these matrices, a corpus of knowledge that defines the soul. Thus defined, the soul assumes the aforementioned role of an identity—or a subjective perspective: a self. Power, therefore, creates the modern subject by imposing a perspective upon the individual. In this regard, the knowledge of the subject precedes the individual to whom it is applied. That is, power produces, rather than constrains, the truth surrounding the individual, and thus the individual itself: “[Power] produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production.”<sup>336</sup> It bears mention that for the inverse of this proposal to be true—that is, for the individual to precede power and all subsequent constraints—the individual must have an origin (or a pure, essential element) for power to act upon. In keeping with the genealogical method's avoidance of claims to truth and meaning, however, Foucault does not assume the individual

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 194.

to possess a hidden origin or transcendental essence for power's artificial soul to constrain, displace or obscure. Foucault concludes that power produces the individual, as to argue otherwise would necessitate a claim to truth. From this it follows that there is no "real man," or a transcendental subject, that the analyst might free from power's grasp.<sup>337</sup> Foucault puts forth this argument in the following passage:

It is not that a real man, the object of knowledge, philosophical reflection of technical 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 himself the effect of a subjugation much more profound than himself. A 'soul' inhabits him and brings him to existence, which 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>338</sup>

As a point of clarification, it should be noted that Foucault does not regard the individual—or its positive manifestations, which Foucault refers to as the "body" in the above passage—as an exclusively passive agent. That is, human behavior cannot be reduced to a causal reaction to external influences. Foucault's argument that power produces the individual, however, implies a degree of behavioristic determinism with regard to power's influence over the body. "Foucault remains illusive about how malleable the human body really is," concede Dreyfus and Rabinow, stating that while Foucault seems to prioritize power's influence over the body—which precludes Sartre's view regarding the primacy of free will—he also "rejects the naturalistic view that the body has a

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 30.

fixed structure and fixed needs.”<sup>339</sup> Thus, Foucault affirms neither the behaviorist position nor any view promoting a transcendental will, presumably owing to the fact that these positions assume the body possesses a constant element—which constitutes a claim to truth. Having ruled out these two epistemological extremes, Foucault instead argues that a multitude of inconstant factors form and influence the body. Foucault expresses this view in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”: “The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes ... Nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men.”<sup>340</sup> In adhering to this view, Foucault limits his analysis to a pragmatic examination of the strategies and mechanisms which power employs to form and influence the individual.

### The Power/Knowledge Interaction

The relationship between power and the soul coincides with their respective definitions. In short, power forms the soul through knowledge of the body’s functioning, and by exercising numerous disjointed pressures upon the body based on this knowledge. Given Foucault’s definition of power, we should not regard its influence over the soul as a conspiracy or conscious act of repression. Instead, we should view the interaction between knowledge and power through a genealogical lens. That is, the soul is the product of a head-less

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<sup>339</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 111.

<sup>340</sup> Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” 87-88.

yet interconnected network of conflicting strategies. Foucault elaborates on these points in this passage from *Discipline and Punish*:

This knowledge and this mastery constitute what might be called the political technology of the body. Of course, this technology is diffuse, rarely formulated in continuous, systematic discourse; it is often made up of bits and pieces; it implements a disparate set of tools or methods. In spite of the coherence of its results, it is generally no more than a multiform instrumentation.<sup>341</sup>

Foucault is not dismissing the modern subject as the product of a random sequence of power relations. Rather, the historical construction of the subject is driven by the fields of discourse seeking to gain an objective understanding of the individual. “The individual is the effect and object of a certain crossing of power and knowledge,” argue Dreyfus and Rabinow, “his is the product of the complex strategic developments in the field of power and the multiple developments in the human sciences.”<sup>342</sup> Moreover, the mutually generative relationship between power and knowledge makes the construction of the individual possible. Foucault articulates these points as follows:

Power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.<sup>343</sup>

The relationship between knowledge and power raises the logical implication that science, being a source of knowledge, must concordantly share a reciprocal connection with power. According to Dreyfus and Rabinow’s

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<sup>341</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 26.

<sup>342</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 159-160.

<sup>343</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.



interpretation of Foucault, Nietzsche and Heidegger, science's enmeshment in power relations means that "at any given time cultural practices determine what will count as an object for serious investigation." In all likelihood, Foucault would argue that no branch of science is able to exist outside of power's influence. Yet Foucault tends to neglect the empirical sciences in his analyses, presumably due to the fact that these are concerned with "relatively stable practices and objects," and are able to distance themselves, to an extent, from power interests.<sup>344</sup> In contrast, the social sciences—or their subject-oriented fields, at any rate—study "unstable" objects, and consequently "have in fact remained intimately involved with the micropractices of power."<sup>345</sup> It is for this reason that Foucault persistently centers his analyses on the social sciences—which Dreyfus and Rabinow refer to as "those doubtful sciences."<sup>346</sup> Foucault argues that the social sciences "have their technical matrix in the petty, malicious minutiae of the disciplines and their investigations."<sup>347</sup> In other words, the social sciences fashion their methodologies based on the interests of disciplinary practices. Moreover, Foucault remains skeptical as to the social sciences' ability to develop a systemic and objective methodology, as these sciences have not removed themselves from the influence of disciplinary practices. Foucault explains the rationale underlying his argument:

What Great Observer will produce the methodology of examination for the human sciences? Unless, of course, such a thing is not possible. For ...

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<sup>344</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 116.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., 182, 177.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>347</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 226.

the examination has remained extremely close to the disciplinary power that shaped it. It has always been and still is an intrinsic element of the disciplines. Of course it seems to have undergone a speculative purification by integrating itself with such sciences as psychology and psychiatry. And, in effect, its appearance in the form of tests, interviews, interrogations and consultations is apparently in order to rectify the mechanisms of discipline: educational psychology is supposed to correct the rigours of the school, just as the medical or psychiatry interview is supposed to rectify the effects of the discipline of work. But we must not be misled; these techniques merely refer individuals from one disciplinary authority to another, and they reproduce, in a concentrated or formalized form, the schema of power-knowledge proper to each discipline. ... the examination ... is still caught up in disciplinary technology.<sup>348</sup>

Here Foucault also raises the critical point that the social sciences perpetuate via self-reference the operations established in the relationship between power and knowledge. In this regard, the social sciences illustrate the self-replicating nature of power. Summarizing the abovementioned points, the relationship between power and knowledge is self-perpetuating and without a centralized strategy. Both power (in the form of discipline) and knowledge (compiled by the social sciences) produce and are influenced by their own corpus of knowledge, which is not an autonomous accumulation of objective data, nor is it directly influence by the subject; rather, it is the product of power relations. Foucault states, "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>349</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 226-227. Foucault refers to the empirical sciences as 'the investigation' in place of 'the social sciences' in order to emphasize social sciences' historical origins and inquisitorial methodology. He claims that, unlike the social sciences, empirical science has detached itself from its historical roots in the "politico-juridical model." (227)

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 28.

social sciences' claim to objectivity masks the subjective processes ingrained in their methodology—an almost identical conclusion to the one presented in *The Birth of the Clinic*, sans structural underpinnings.

Despite the subjective and decentralized nature of power, Foucault proposes that disciplinary power is an essential development of power and knowledge. “The categorizing and individualizing of prisoners was an essential component for the operation of this field of power,” Dreyfus and Rabinow argue; “this disciplinary technology could not have taken the form it had, achieved the spread it did, or produced delinquents in the way it did, if power and knowledge were merely external to one another.”<sup>350</sup>

In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault pinpoints the hermetics of suspicion, or the search for a deep truth, as the unifying force behind this essentiality. With regard to the study of sexuality, Foucault argues that researchers “constructed around and apropos of sex an immense apparatus for producing truth, even if this truth was to be masked at the last moment.”<sup>351</sup> That is, the scientific study of sex assumed that sex held some truth to be uncovered. The search for objective truth pertaining to the individual results in the uniform development of discourses, which facilitates the correlation between knowledge and power. In Dreyfus and Rabinow's words:

Part of the power of these interpretive [social and behavioral] sciences is that they claim to be able to reveal the truth about our psyches, our culture, our society—truths that can only be understood by expert interpreters. ... As long as the interpretive sciences continue to search for

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<sup>350</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 203.

<sup>351</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, 56.

a deep truth, that is, to practice a hermeneutics of suspicion, as long as they proceed on the assumption that it is the Great Interpreter who has privileged access to meaning, while insisting that the truths they uncover lie outside the sphere of power, these sciences seem fated to contribute to the strategies of power. They claim a privileged externality, but they actually are part of the deployment of power.<sup>352</sup>

## Discipline and Punish

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault applies the abovementioned theories regarding power and knowledge in order to examine the concrete “mechanism of technology through which power is actually articulated on the body.”<sup>353</sup>

Disciplinary power is one such mechanism. Foucault defines disciplinary power as “a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of institutions, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a ‘physics’ or an ‘anatomy’ of power, a technology.”<sup>354</sup> Rephrased slightly, discipline power is a set of strategies, or applications of power. As discipline is a type of power, the concepts that Foucault associates with power can also be applied to discipline. For instance, “‘discipline’ may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus.”<sup>355</sup> It follows that disciplinary power is also multidirectional, self-perpetuating, and without a strategist.

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 180-181.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 113

<sup>354</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 215.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 215.

In its operations, disciplinary power produces “subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies.”<sup>356</sup> It should be noted that given the relationship between discipline and power, it would be reasonable to assume that the production of docile bodies is not a specific objective on the part of disciplinary power, but an effect of its operations. However, the individual methods that comprise disciplinary power, or disciplines, adhere to their own objectives. In this regard, discipline is purposeful and employs multiple strategies. Disciplinary power can be considered the apparatus through which power grafts the soul onto the body; the docile body, then, is the type of soul that discipline produces. Docile bodies are malleable, obedient, and possess skills that are beneficial to society. Moreover, Foucault argues that, historically, discipline has separated the body’s abilities from its authority, thus ensuring that as the body’s utility increases, its political influence decreases. In Foucault’s words:

A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. ... Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it disassociates 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 energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. If economic exploitation separates the force and the product of labour, let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 138.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the disciplines began to subject the body to “a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it.”<sup>358</sup> This “machinery of power” encompassed three methods, or disciplines, which resulted in the production of docile bodies. These disciplines employed a novel micro-managerial approach to controlling the body. For instance, one discipline altered “the scale of control,” which Foucault describes as “exercising upon [the body] a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself—movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power of the active body.”<sup>359</sup> Further, the disciplines redirected their “object of control,” away from “the signifying elements of behaviour or the language of the body,” and toward “[the body’s] economy, the efficiency of movements, their internal organization”—that is, discipline’s emphasis shifted from determining the body’s truth to constructing a truth about the body that served power’s purpose.<sup>360</sup> A third disciplinary method altered its modality in an effort to create “an uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement.”<sup>361</sup> These three disciplines served as the conceptual basis for producing docile bodies during the classical age.

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>361</sup> Ibid., 137.

Foucault also outlines three corresponding institutional applications for these disciplines, the first being “the art of distributions.”<sup>362</sup> This method involved controlling the body by spatially partitioning the body’s functions, or controlling the body’s location based on the body’s skills, the location’s designated function, and the hierarchical ranking of other bodies in that location. In its most basic form, this method entailed confining the body to specific places—indeed, Foucault argues that this was the rationale behind the Great Confinement. “In organizing ‘cells,’ ‘places’ and ‘ranks,’” Foucault writes, “the disciplines create complex spaces that are at once architectural, functional and hierarchical. It is spaces that provide fixed positions and permit circulation; they carve out individual segments and establish operational links; they mark places and indicate values; they guarantee the obedience of individuals, but also a better economy of time and gesture.”<sup>363</sup> In short, this method served to maximize the body’s utility through efficient spatial organization.

Complementing this spatial emphasis was the second method’s interest in “the control of activity.”<sup>364</sup> In order to cultivate docile bodies, the second method emphasized controlling the body’s utility, or productive behavior, over understanding the significance of that behavior. This method involved deconstructing and regimenting the body’s activities. For instance, disciplinary institutions regulated the body’s activities using the strict timetables, and dictated

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 149.

the body's actions at the level of individual body parts, as well as the manner in which the body may interact with objects. In keeping with the goal of maximizing the body's utility while minimizing its influence, this method served the dual purpose of subjecting the body to "specified operations" while determining through these operations the body's innate limits and functions; "the body is offered up to new forms of knowledge. It is ... a body of useful training and not of rational mechanics, but one in which, by virtue of that very fact, a number of natural requirements and functional constraints are beginning to emerge."<sup>365</sup> In this incarnation, disciplinary power did not constrain the body according to an established set of societal rules or physiological limitations; rather, discipline produced and synthesized the body's activities; it functioned "as of coercive link with the apparatus of production."<sup>366</sup>

Foucault identifies a third discipline as "the organization of geneses."<sup>367</sup> Building off the previous two methods, this organization involved controlling time, or "the 'seriation' of successive activities." Specifically, institutions divided time into cumulative segments according to the body's proficiency; upon completing a task or after a set duration, one would advance to a the next task. Discipline structured the body's activities according to "a linear time whose moments are integrated, one upon another, and which is orientated towards a terminal, stable point; in short, an 'evolutive' time," as well as "a social time of a serial, orientated,

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 156.



cumulative type: the discovery of an evolution in terms of ‘progress.’”<sup>368</sup> In this way, discipline placed the body inside a perpetual hierarchy of timetables, each with its own beginning and ending, and within which power could measure, intervene and invest. Institutions such as monasteries, schools, asylums, prisons and militaries combined these methods in order to regulate every aspect of individuals’ lives.

In the modern age, power has, in a haphazard yet discernable manner, refined the disciplines.<sup>369</sup> The disciplines are now more than techniques intended to constrain and ensure obedience; they are autonomous mechanisms that organize and observe their object of control in order to expand and replicate power’s influence over the body; they are the apparatus that connects power to the body, thus producing the individual. Foucault elaborates on discipline’s function:

The chief function of the disciplinary power is to ‘train’, rather than to select and levy; or, no doubt, to train in order to levy and select all the more. It does not link forces together in order to reduce them; it seeks to bind them together in such a way as to multiply and use them. It ‘trains’ the moving, confused multitudes of bodies and forces into a multiplicity of individual elements—small, separate cells, organics autonomies, generic identities and continuities, combinatory segments. Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals as both objects and as instruments of its exercise.<sup>370</sup>

Foucault identifies discipline’s refinements as hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. Hierarchical observation is the

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>369</sup> In Foucault’s chronology, the modern age begins during the second half of the eighteenth century.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 170.

continual observation of low-ranking members of a hierarchy by higher members. In an institutional setting, this observation is intended to regulate behavior through the implied threat of punishment for behavioral transgressions. Foucault cites the military camp as an example of hierarchical observation during the classical age. In order to refine the surveillance of soldiers, the military camp employed the aforementioned methods of training docile bodies, such as spatially partitioning officers' tents according to rank. This practice ensured that higher-ranked officers continually observed lower-ranked officers simply through their respective positioning: "The geometry of the paths, the number and distribution of files and ranks were exactly defined; the network of gazes that supervised one another was laid down."<sup>371</sup>

Other institutions—such as hospitals, schools, prisons and factories—implemented this model with various refinements. Among these refinements was the further division of observation. For instance, Jacques Batencour, a seventeenth century French pedagogue, required his "best pupils" to observe other students and report behavioral transgressions, establishing a network of "reciprocal, hierarchized observation."<sup>372</sup> This pyramidal form of supervision served to automate and expand the range of observation discipline might have by increasing its relay points and ensuring that peers and instructors continually supervised students. Foucault therefore argues that hierarchical observation, both in this instance and in general, "has to be broken down into smaller

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 175, 176.

elements, but in order to increase its productive function: specify the surveillance and make it functional.”<sup>373</sup> Further, hierarchical observation functioned alongside and reinforced other pedagogical activities, establishing an “uninterrupted network” of observation whose function was intertwined with other disciplinary mechanisms.<sup>374</sup> Foucault elaborates: “By means of such surveillance, disciplinary power became an ‘integrated’ system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised.”<sup>375</sup>

Hierarchical observation, in short, demonstrates the multidirectional, acephalous and self-perpetuating nature of power; it is “a multiple, automatic and anonymous power.”<sup>376</sup> These characteristics allow discipline to subjugate the body “without recourse, in principle at least, to excess, force or violence. It is a power that seems all the less ‘corporal’ in that it is more subtly ‘physical’.”<sup>377</sup> As Foucault argues in the following summary, hierarchical observation is discipline’s application of the Foucauldian microphysics of power:

Although surveillance rests upon individual, its functioning is that of a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network ‘holds’ the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised. The power in the hierarchized surveillance of the disciplines is not possessed as a thing, or transferred as a property; it functions like a piece of machinery. And, although it is true that its pyramidal organization gives it a ‘head’, it is the apparatus as a whole that produces ‘power’ and distributes individuals in this permanent and continuous field. This enables the disciplinary power to be both absolutely indiscreet, since it is everywhere and always on alert, since by its very principles it leaves no zone of shade and

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 177.

constantly supervises the very individuals who are entrusted with the task of supervising; and absolutely 'discreet', for it functions permanently and largely in silence. Discipline makes possible the operation of a relational power that sustains itself by its own mechanism and which, for the spectacle of public events, substitutes the uninterrupted play of calculated gazes.<sup>378</sup>

Complementing hierarchical observation was normalizing judgment, a system of corrective punishments and rewards intended to normalize behavior. During the classical age, institutions employed normalizing judgment by implementing internal sets of rules in addition to those formally employed at the state and local levels. Thus, normalizing judgment "enjoys a kind of judicial privilege with its own laws, its specific offences, its particular forms of judgment. The disciplines established an 'infra-penalty'; ... they defined and repressed a mass of behaviour that the relative indifference of the great systems of punishments had allowed to escape."<sup>379</sup> The aim of these rules was to differentiate, measure and reduce differences between individuals within an institution. "Disciplinary punishment has the function of reducing gaps. It must therefore be essentially *corrective*."<sup>380</sup>

To support this argument, Foucault returns to the example of the military and schools. In both instances, discipline weighed the individual's actions and abilities against the discipline's established norm. Discipline punished non-conformity and rewarded conformity: "the soldier commits an 'offence' whenever he does not reach the level required; a pupil's 'offence' is not only a minor

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 176-177.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 179.

infraction, but also the inability to carry out his tasks.”<sup>381</sup> However, Foucault also emphasizes the arbitrary nature of punishment, stating: “if necessary, everything might serve to punish the slightest thing; each subject finds himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality.”<sup>382</sup> And as to the punitive methods themselves, discipline consistently attributed positive and negative values to quantifiable elements—such as rank or academic performance—that could be modified as rewards or punishments. This valuation, or “micro-economy,” also “operates a differentiation ... of individuals themselves, of their nature, their potentialities, their level or their value. By assessing acts with precision, discipline judges individuals ‘in truth’; the penalty that it implements is integrated into the cycle of knowledge of individuals.”<sup>383</sup> Hence, the power to punish coincided with the power to assign a measurable value to the individual’s traits and abilities and to place aspects of the individual within a hierarchy.

The normalizing aspect of normalizing judgment derived from its comparisons and the corresponding threat of punishment for deviations. Foucault uses *École Militaire* as an example of this phenomenon. *École Militaire* punished students through the demotion of rank to the extent that the lowest-ranking students were ostracized by their peers and denied privileges granted to higher-ranking students. In order to avoid this loss of status, students inevitably normalized their behavior in accordance with the academy’s standards: “This

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<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

hierarchizing penalty ... exercised over [students] a constant pressure to conform to the same model ... So that they might all be like one another.”<sup>384</sup> Further, the quantification and valuation of the individual established a finite hierarchy of normal and abnormal statuses. For instance, École Militaire clearly differentiated the statuses of each ranking from all others, with the lowest being the most individuated and therefore abnormal. Hence, “[normalizing judgment] traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal.”<sup>385</sup> Foucault offers this summary of normalizing judgment:

The power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences.<sup>386</sup>

The examination was discipline’s culminating technique, as it “combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them.”<sup>387</sup> Discipline used the examination to assess individuals. The examination was not, however, a simple technique for

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 184.

gathering data; rather, it was the driving mechanism by which the social sciences produced, and continues to produce knowledge, the soul, and the individual.

As previously mentioned, Foucault maintains that scientific discourses construct the conceptual boundaries that define the soul. The examination was the foundation of these discourses, as it was based on the objectification of the individual as a source of knowledge. This process of objectification began with awareness of observation. In order for the examination to be an effective disciplinary technique, the individual must be aware of the possibility that he or she is being observed: “It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able to always be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. And the examination is the technique by which power, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification.”<sup>388</sup> The observation of the individual and the individual’s awareness of their being observed were corresponding elements in the same mechanism—the mechanism by which knowledge produces and was produced by the object.

To contextualize, Foucault argues that the objectification of the individual can be seen in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century European penal reforms. These reforms classified the criminal as “the enemy of all,” who “disqualifies himself as a citizen and emerges, bearing within him as it were, a fragment of nature; he appears as a villain, a monster, a madman, perhaps sick and, before long, ‘abnormal’ individual. It is such that, one day, he will belong to a

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 187.

scientific objectification and to the ‘treatment’ that is correlative to it.”<sup>389</sup> In short, criminality became an erroneous and immoral state comparable to madness during the same time period, as Foucault argued in *Madness and Civilization*. And, as with the madman, the criminal was reduced to an abstract and quantifiable object of study: “The classical age discovered the body as object and target of power.”<sup>390</sup>

In observing, measuring and differentiating deviant and normal behavior, the examination established a corpus of knowledge that individualizes deviancy. This corpus of knowledge objectified individuals by using biographical accounts, or cases: “[A case] is the individual as he may be described, judged, measured, compared with others, in his very individuality; and it is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded, etc.”<sup>391</sup> The social sciences—which, as previously established, remain entrenched with disciplinary power—served as the objective methodology for creating these accounts. Biographical accounts allowed the examination to catalogue deviant behavior, establishing this corpus of knowledge. In Foucault’s words, the examination regarded “the individual as a describable, analyzable object ... in order to maintain him in his individual features, in his particular evolution, in his own aptitudes or abilities, under the gaze of a permanent corpus of

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 136. *Discipline and Punish* can be regarded as a genealogical analysis of the disciplinary techniques outlined in *Madness and Civilization*.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 191.



knowledge.”<sup>392</sup> Foucault argues that the social sciences’ role in the examination, “(from psychiatry to pedagogy, from the diagnosis of disease to the hiring of labor)” gathers, produces and spreads knowledge “not simply at the level of consciousness, of representations and in what one thinks one knows, but at the level of what makes possible the knowledge that is transformed into political investment.”<sup>393</sup> That is, the examination operates on a subconscious level, creating the docile body and soul by defining the boundaries of the individual’s knowledge of itself.

To Foucault, the individual is a collection of data—an amalgamation of case studies in the social sciences. The individual, in Foucault’s view, is a social construct: “The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline.’”<sup>394</sup> For this reason, individuality exists on a spectrum of deviancy and normalcy. Bodies on the normal end of this spectrum are of less interest to objective study and, therefore, remain less differentiated, less measured, and less individualized than deviant bodies. Deviant bodies, in contrast, are both the object and product of objective study, and are therefore more individualized. Foucault clearly holds a negative view of the individual insofar as disciplinary power differentiates people in order to identify and correct deviant characteristics. Hence, the most distinct individual

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 194.

is also the most watched and corrected. This is what Foucault is arguing in the following passage:

In a system of discipline, the child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man, the madman and the delinquent more than the normal and the non-delinquent. In each case, it is towards the first of these pairs that all the individualizing mechanisms are turned in our civilization; and when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and law-abiding adult, it is always by asking him how much of the child he has in him, what secret madness lies within him, what fundamental crime he has dreamt of committing.<sup>395</sup>

If Foucault stopped here, one might assume that disciplinary power exists only in institutionalized settings. This is not, of course, what Foucault is arguing. As previously established, Foucault regards power (and its expression in the form of discipline) as having a pervasive influence at every level of society. In order to explain how disciplinary power's influence permeates throughout society, Foucault provides his famous example of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. The Panopticon was a prison structure that exemplified all of the qualities attributable to disciplinary power. Bentham designed the Panopticon in such a way as to allow prison guards to see into every cell while simultaneously blocking the guards from each prisoner's view. This design ensured that prisoners were always aware that they could be observed, yet never knew when the observation was actually taking place. Clearly, this is an implementation of hierarchical observation and the examination. The Panopticon employed disciplinary techniques in order to maximize power's influence and minimize its need for physical implementation.

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 193.

While the Panopticon was never built, Foucault argues that it represents how disciplinary power functions in modern Western society. “The Panopticon ... must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men,” argues Foucault. “It is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance of friction, must be represented as a pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use.”<sup>396</sup> In other words, the Panopticon’s application of disciplinary techniques can be viewed as a microcosm of how power operates in society at large. Foucault refers to this generalized application of the Panopticon’s functions as panopticism. Panopticism disperses power’s influence by connecting multiple disciplinary functions together: “[The panoptic schema] arranges things in such a way that the exercise of power is not added from the outside, like a rigid, heavy constraint, to the functions it invests, but is so subtly present in them as to increase their efficiency by itself increasing its own points of contact.”<sup>397</sup> Rather than producing power, panopticism augments and directs it in accordance with contextual factors.

Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that panopticism emerged when disciplinary power “gradually overflowed its institutional bounds” during the modern era.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>398</sup> Dreyfus and Rabinow, 193.

“The techniques of the Panopticon were applied, in admittedly less fully articulated form, in numerous kinds of institutions, and these institutions in turn kept close surveillance not only on the individuals within their walls but on those outside as well.”<sup>399</sup> Panopticism is essentially the dilution of disciplinary techniques throughout society. This dilution produces docile bodies on an individual scale through the aforementioned disciplinary methods: “The technology of discipline linked the production of useful and docile individuals with the production of controlled and efficient populations.”<sup>400</sup> Foucault summarizes panopticism as follows:

One can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social ‘quarantine’, to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of ‘panopticism’. Not because the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all the others; but because it has infiltrated the others, sometimes undermining them, but serving as an intermediary between them, linking them together, extending them and above all making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements. It assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations.<sup>401</sup>

In short, panopticism represents the dilution of disciplinary power at every level of society. Although disciplinary power is comprised of strategies, it adheres to Foucault’s model of power as an acephalous, autonomous and multidirectional force that constructs and observes individuals. This genealogical view posits a form of generalized coercion that is at once strategic and without a strategist; a society that observes, judges, and normalizes its population through the micro-physics of its disciplinary functions, which are integrated into and interconnected

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>401</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 216.

with all other functions. Hence, all individuals in a society play a role in the perpetuation of power. This conclusion is apparent in Foucault's the following passage from the final chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, titled "The Carcel."

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the 'social worker'-judge; it is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gesture, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements. The carceral network, in its compact or disseminated forms, with its systems of insertion, distribution, surveillance, observation, has been the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power.<sup>402</sup>

The normalized, docile bodies that power produces inevitably subscribe to a self-concept that favors a dominant social narrative. In the modern era, the dominant social narrative coincides with bourgeois morals and interests. Hence, Foucault's theories in *Discipline and Punish* can still be considered a critique of bourgeois society.

Foucault's genealogical embraces the circularity between object and subject, and therefore cannot make claims to objective truth. While he inadvertently encountered this issue during his archaeological phase, Foucault now intentionally fashions genealogy as an analytic. Foucault, as a subject, produces theories regarding his object—power and society—yet this object produces Foucault. Consequently, any genealogical analysis is a narrative produced within the context of another narrative. Despite this lack of objectivity, genealogy is a viable method of analysis in that it allows us to conceptualize complex social phenomena by breaking them down into a binary sequence of

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 304.

interconnected power relations. The validity of these power relations lies in the fact that they reflect a material outcome, and therefore have an empirical basis.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Conclusion

My purpose in this study has been to determine whether or not Foucault provides a viable critical social theory of bourgeois society. I maintain that Foucault provides a viable para-Marxist critical social theory in the form of the genealogical method. I support this conclusion by outlining how Foucault's theories are consistently critical of the power inequalities associated with bourgeois society. Foucault's early methodologies constitute a critique of the narrative upon which bourgeois society is based. In *Mental Illness and Psychology* and *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault demonstrates how this narrative has historically defined normal and abnormal behavior in accordance with its interests. *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The Order of Things* similarly deconstruct how contextual factors (which, in the case of modernity, are analogous to the bourgeois narrative) subtly influence medical and social discourses through language. Moreover, Foucault weaves together a compelling account of the how the bourgeois narrative is autonomously enforced in *Discipline and Punish*. While Foucault's portrayal of the bourgeois narrative varies according to his subject matter and methodology—the narrative appears in the form of state authority, discursive formations, and the power/knowledge interaction in the aforementioned texts—what remains constant is the analysis of

how the bourgeois narrative creates power inequalities. Foucault does not expressly oppose the bourgeois narrative, yet his theories can still be considered a critique of bourgeois society insofar as he seeks to show how power inequalities manifest themselves as a result of the narrative.

Foucault attempts to overcome Kant's subject/object division during his pre-archaeological and archaeological stages. As we have seen, Foucault employs an unstable combination of hermeneutics and phenomenology in his pre-archaeological stage. Foucault rejects hermeneutics and phenomenology on the grounds that these methods fail to offer a coherent resolution to the subject/object division. Archaeology attempts to overcome the subject/object division by establishing a relative yet objective method for analyzing discourses. This method ultimately falls into an epistemological impasse and consequently suffers from internal contradictions. Foucault's attempts to resolve the subject/object division are significant when viewed as a continual effort to provide an objective method for analyzing the societal forces that hold a privileged status in producing knowledge. In other words, Foucault's early methodologies were intended to function as critiques of bourgeois society.

While genealogy abandons the attempt to overcome the subject/object division, it still functions as a critique of bourgeois society. Genealogy functions in this way by examining the material outcomes of the interaction between power and knowledge. In doing so, genealogy facilitates the analysis of the social inequalities that emerge as a result of power and knowledge's interaction. The



power/knowledge interaction involves the autonomous implementation of disciplinary power, which is an expression of the bourgeois narrative. While genealogy is not an objective method of analysis, it provides a means of conceptualizing how the reciprocal relationship between knowledge and power manifests itself through the individual. Consequently, genealogy is a viable method for analyzing power inequalities in bourgeois society.

Foucault assumes a relativistic perspective during his archaeological and genealogical stages. Despite this neutral position, his theories consistently expose how the narrative put forth by bourgeois society perpetuates social inequalities. Foucault acknowledges that, at present, man cannot reconcile his understanding of himself with objective truth, meaning that we are trapped in an intellectual impasse and cannot conceive of a society where man is not an object of power's influence. Yet Foucault maintains that man can test the limits of his conceptualization of himself, thus allowing for the possibility of meaningful social change within the narrative of man's own construction. Based on these findings, I conclude that Foucault is a para-Marxist.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dreyfus, Hubert L. and Paul Rabinow. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

*Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* is a secondary source that analyzes the progression of Foucault's thought. Dreyfus and Rabinow argue that Foucault's archaeological method suffered from internal instabilities, while genealogy remains a viable method of analysis. I utilize this text by building upon Dreyfus and Rabinow's thesis in order to supplement my longitudinal analysis of Foucault's theories.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge & The Discourse on Language*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

Foucault's fourth major work, *Archaeology* is a methodological treatise—or explanation of his archaeological method. First published in 1969, *Archaeology* is also the last work in which Foucault uses archaeology as his primary methodology. I reference *Archaeology* briefly for purposes of clarification, but it is mostly omitted from this study.

Foucault, Michel. *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

Foucault's second major historical work after *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic* explores the transformation that occurred in European medicine with the emergence of the empirical sciences during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Foucault's purpose in writing *The Birth of the Clinic* is to demonstrate how the reorganization of knowledge during this time—or science's sudden emphasis on objectivity, rationalism and humanistic values—resulted in the accrual by modern medicine of a corpus of objective knowledge of the human body. This knowledge applies to all human bodies, but not to the subjective individuals to whom said bodies belong. Modern medicine in this way objectifies the human body, as it separates individuals' bodies from their identities. Foucault argues that societal power structures influence knowledge of the body, thus knowledge of the body is inseparable from power interests, rather than objective scientific evidence and humanistic values. First published in 1963, *The Birth of the Clinic* represents Foucault's extreme shift away from hermeneutics and toward structuralism. In terms of methodology, *The Birth of the Clinic* is considered part of Foucault's archaeological phase. The book is used in the analysis as a primary source detailing Foucault's views on the socially constructed nature of medicine.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

Completed in 1975, *Discipline and Punish* was Foucault's fifth major historical work after *The Archeology of Knowledge*. In this book, Foucault examines the changes that occurred in the European and American penal systems from the end of the Classical Age up through modernity. *Discipline and Punish* is a "history of the present" (31), or an analysis of contemporary western society using historical genealogy. Western society reformed its system of punishment during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Prior to these reforms, punishments were characterized by violent, public displays of torture, whereas afterward punishments were characterized by incarceration. Foucault's purpose in writing *Discipline and Punish* is to determine why this change took place. Rather than being the result of humanistic values, Foucault argues that penal reforms took place in order to expand and streamline states' disciplinary control over populations. The human sciences supplement this control by creating the individual as an object of study for purposes of normalization. Moreover, Foucault suggests that post-reform normalizing disciplinary methods—observation, regimented lifestyle, etc.—are present in all levels of society. *Discipline and Punish* is characterized by the combination of genealogical and archeological thought that pervaded Foucault's later work. I use the book as a primary source in the analysis for its theories regarding institutional power structures in society.

Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

*The Foucault Reader* is a collection of Foucault's writings. In addition to an introduction by Paul Rabinow, the book contains twenty-three excerpts from Foucault's work, including chapters from *Madness and Civilization*, *Discipline and Punish*, and *The History of Sexuality, volumes I and II*. Rabinow's introduction serves as a secondary source interpretation of Foucault's thought and legacy, while Foucault's essays and interviews "What Is Enlightenment?," "Truth and Power," "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," "What Is an Author," and "Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault" are used as primary sources.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Foucault published the first volume *The History of Sexuality* in 1976. It is his sixth major work, and the second to employ the genealogical method.

In this volume, Foucault refines his theories regarding power. Foucault argues that while western intellectuals claim that society represses sexuality, this is clearly not the case; society is saturated in sexuality. Sexuality is the object of constant analysis. It is based on this observation that Foucault introduces the repressive hypothesis. The repressive hypothesis argues that narratives positing that the truth is actively being repressed by some malevolent entity are, in positing a concealed yet objectively true perspective, contributing to power's autonomous machinations. Foucault's views on power are largely analogous in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. I reference the latter in order to supplement my reading of the former. I use *The History of Sexuality* as a primary source for Foucault's lucid explanation of his theory of power.

Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1988.

*Madness and Civilization* was Foucault's first major work, (not counting his first book, *Mental Illness and Psychology*). This 1964 work is an abridged edition of *History of Madness*, which was first published in 1961. As the original title implies, Foucault wrote *Madness and Civilization* in order to examine the social history of madness in western society from the Middle Ages up through modernity. Foucault argues that madness is a social construct originating from social, political and economic interests, rather than physiology. This argument coincides with his critique of objectivity and humanistic ideals as obscuring the constructed nature of truth—a recurring theme in Foucault's work. *Madness and Civilization* marks the beginning of Foucault's shift away from hermeneutics (and to an extent structuralism), and toward post-modernism. This book is used in the analysis as a primary source on Foucault's early thought and his views regarding mental illness.

Foucault, Michel. *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Translated by Alan Sheridan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Foucault had *Mental Illness and Psychology* published in 1954. *Mental Illness and Psychology* consists of two sections; the first attempts to answer the question, "Under what conditions can one speak of mental illness in the psychological domain" (1). Foucault concludes that psychology cannot provide an objective scientific framework with which to describe mental illness. The second section was originally intended to answer the question, "What relations can one define between the facts of mental pathology and those of organic pathology" (1). In the 1962 edition of *Mental Illness and Psychology*, Foucault replaced the original second

section, titled “The Actual Conditions of Illness,” with a new section, “Madness and Culture.” As this section is a summary of his next work, *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault appropriately concludes that the positive characteristics of mental illness can only be known through historical analysis, though this method detaches mental illness from both hermeneutic and biological explanations. *Mental Illness and Psychology* was Foucault’s first book, yet Foucault was dissatisfied with this work even after the 1962 revisions. Hubert Dreyfus, who wrote the introduction for the California edition of *Mental Illness and Psychiatry*, suggests that Foucault’s dissatisfaction may have stemmed from his acceptance of Heidegger’s hermeneutics of suspicion, as well as Marxist and Freudian concepts. Foucault explores several theories that become prominent in his later works, thus *Mental Illness and Psychology* serves as a primary source for early Foucauldian thought.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Translator is not specified. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

*The Order of Things* is Foucault’s third major work. It was first published in 1966. One of Foucault’s best-selling works, *The Order of Things* is an archaeological study of three fields within the social sciences: economics, linguistics, and zoology. Foucault concludes that the social sciences construct man’s self-concept through discursive formations, or a hidden interaction between subject and object within scientific discourses. This interaction leads Foucault to his famous declaration of the death of man. That is, man’s self-concept is gradually changing according to contextual factors, and this self-concept will eventually be unrecognizable to contemporary analysis. I reference *The Order of Things* as a primary source mainly for the analytic of finitude. The analytic of finitude is a series of epistemological dichotomies that Foucault argues have led modern humanistic thought—or man’s current self-concept within the social sciences—to an impasse.

Foucault, Michel. *Psychiatric Power, Lectures at the Collège de France, 1973-74*. Edited by Jacques Langrange. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

*Psychiatric Power, Lectures at the Collège de France* is a collection of lectures Foucault gave on psychiatric power. This text reflects a transitional period in Foucault’s thought in which he shifts away from archaeology (he references discursive formations throughout the lectures) and toward genealogy—as his emphasis on power implies. I reference this work only to explore how Foucault views his three analyses of psychiatric institutions.

Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by J. M. D. Meiklejohn. Cited from "The Great Books of the Western World" compilation, *The Critique of Pure Reason; The Critique of Practical Reason and Other Ethical Treatises; The Critique of Judgment*. Edited by Robert Maynard Hutchins, Executors of the translator Thomas Kingsmill Abott. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1990.

*The Critique of Pure Reason* was first published in 1781. Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant remains one of the most influential intellectuals in the Western world. In 1787, Kant included a new preface in the second edition of *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Both prefaces are included in the Encyclopædia Britannica edition. I use *The Critique of Pure Reason* as a primary source in order to reference transcendental idealism, or Kant's revolutionary view that the knowing subject influences the perceived object. This notion of a reciprocal interaction between object and subject calls the validity of empirical knowledge into question. Foucault consistently uses the subject/object division to deconstruct claims to objective truth.

Miller, James. *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.

First published in 1993, James Miller wrote *The Passion of Michel Foucault* not as a biography on Foucault, but rather as a cohesive account of Foucault's desire to "become what one is" (5). Miller weaves an almost teleological narrative of Foucault's life and death, emphasizing the purposefulness of Foucault's actions and ideas. According to Miller, Foucault became "what one is" through self-destruction. Foucault's theories and lifestyle both involved the pursuit of dangerous limit-experiences, which resulted in Foucault's failure to produce a critical social theory and his contracting AIDS. Miller skillfully relates Foucault's intellectual development with the events that occurred throughout his life, thus *The Passion of Michel Foucault* serves as a secondary source interpretation of Foucault's life and works.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Twilight of the Idols*. Cited in *The Portable Nietzsche*. Edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.

Friedrich Nietzsche was a prominent German philosopher during the nineteenth century. His theories on power relations had a substantial impact on Foucault. One of Nietzsche's later works, *Twilight of the Idols* was first published in 1888. Nietzsche wrote *Twilight of the Idols* in order to introduce readers to his philosophy. The text can be considered a

summary of later Nietzschean thought. While *The Portable Nietzsche* is a compilation of Nietzsche's major works (including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) I only reference *Twilight of the Idols* in order to briefly compare Foucault and Nietzsche's views regarding subjectivity in objective analysis.

