

## A Critical Analysis of Michel Foucault's Historical Analysis of Power: Can he avoid the goods of freedom and truth?

Review Article

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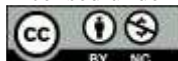
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**Abstract:** Michel Foucault argues that no notions of truth lie outside of systems of power. The methodology of the study is restricted to philosophical analysis and reflection based on two of Foucault's major works, *Discipline and Punish*, and *History of Sexuality, Vol. I*. For Foucault, modern power is a pervasive and ubiquitous phenomenon that cannot be avoided by rational agents. He thinks that the modern power operates, unlike the old system of power which manifests itself through the physical infliction of pain on a subject, in a more insidious way through discourses which again operates under the guise of science. In other words, there is no truth that can be defended against systems of power. But, we shall argue that Foucault cannot consistently defend this position. And the significance of the study is to show that there are implicit notions of the good and truth in Foucault's historical analysis and thus he commits a performative contradiction. The results and discussions of the study merely focused on articulating the relevance of philosophy to our everyday life and we shall conclude that such goal cannot be achieved without the presupposition of truth.

**Keywords:** Discourse; Freedom; Systems of power; Truth

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## 1. Introduction

The objective of this paper is to argue against Michel Foucault's claim that there is no truth that can be defended against systems of domination/power. We shall argue based on his historical analysis discussed in his *Discipline and Punish and the History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, some notions of the good are implicit in his theory. More specifically, I shall argue, following Taylor, that the goods of freedom and truth are implicit in Foucault's analysis although he is not willing to accept this.

Foucault argues that any notions of truth cannot be separated from the operation of power. For him, power is a pervasive and ubiquitous phenomenon that is co-extensive with human beings (Foucault, 1998). He thinks power operates through hegemonic forms of discourses that could be social, political or economic (Rabinow, 1991). This partly means that there cannot be epistemic certainty on any issue because, according to this line of thought, there is no system of knowledge that is free from system of control/domination. The question is, can Foucault ignore the notion of a culture-independent truth given the fact that he is offering a kind of critique against systems of control? But, Foucault insists that he is not offering critique in the sense mentioned here.

On the other hand, Taylor persuasively argues that Foucault's historical analysis can be taken as a kind of critique of the repressive forms of discourses at different ages. This seems to be convincing because the latter thinks that there are marginalized discourses and there are also marginalized people such as the mad and the homosexual. His analysis of power indicates that he feels more sympathetic towards certain group of people whom he thinks are marginalized by the dominant discourse. The question therefore is; can one argue against system of control without appealing to some notion of the truth?

He thinks that critique, in this sense, is based on some given fact about us, but he clearly denies that there is such a fact. This can be inferred from his use of the word "truth":

Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true (Foucault, 1980a: 38).

Taylor argues, rightly in my view that unless one understands Foucault's historical analysis as a kind of critique against the dominant discourses of different ages and as a defense of the repressed voices in history, it will be a self-defeating project. For Taylor, one cannot offer a critique without presupposing some notions of the good (Taylor, 1984). He thinks that a critique based on historical analysis amounts to accepting the idea of "some notion of a good unrealized or repressed in history" (Taylor, 1984: 152). If we manage to find evaluative languages in his analysis, they suggest that he is affirming some notions of the good although he denies that this is the case.

For Foucault, the notion of "goods repressed in history" relies on the interpretation of history as having a purpose and as going along a linear path. Here, to distinguish his idea from that of the dominant view of history, he stresses that what exist in history are discontinuous events that have no causal connections whatsoever. As such, genealogy questions the notions of overarching meanings and open-ended goals and purposes in historical analysis. It rejects the pursuit of finding the ultimate foundations or origins (Foucault, 1979). It is not possible, according to this line of thought, to compare one "regime of truth" with another "regime of truth" for the simple reason that they have no common unit to measure them by. This, among others, means that it is not possible to compare between the modes of punishment that were acceptable in the classical age, and that are acceptable today. However, it can be legitimately asked about what purpose Foucault's historical analysis serves if it does not allow comparison between two "regimes of truth"?

Regarding the question of domination/power, Foucault makes a distinction between the old system of power and the new one. For him, the old system of power is less insidious than the new one, which operates under the guise of scientific knowledge. Thus, as Taylor says, Foucault's work can be taken as that of "an unmasking" (Taylor, 1984: 152). Nevertheless, as Taylor argues, one can invoke the notions of mask, false pretense and disguise only against some acceptable standard. But such

understanding of critique again leads us to the conclusion that freedom and truth are the two goods that are implicitly presupposed in Foucault's philosophical analysis.

## 2. Research Methods

The method employed in the study is mere philosophical analysis and reflection. Since philosophy can question and challenge the dominant research methods of the social sciences and humanities, the researchers intend to ground their research on the result of philosophical reflections with students and colleagues through long years of research and teaching and on the analysis of various literature sources such as books, articles and book chapters. By critically analyzing these sources, the researchers have tried to make philosophy relevant for life in general.

## 3. Results

The result of the study indicated that the notion of truth is not something that one can consistently deny. If we take Foucault's claim seriously, it means that the oft taken-for-granted assumptions that we are beings capable of an autonomous will and the claim that truth exists can be questioned and rejected. The study showed that our cherished notions of freedom and truth are not something that we can consistently deny. It also implied that Foucault's assertion that there cannot be independent and impartial systems of knowledge which exist outside the realms of knowledge-power relationships is untenable.

## 4. Discussions

The purpose of the study was to investigate and question Foucault's claim that there is no truth that can be defended against systems of power. But, it is found out that systems of power cannot explain everything. But this does not necessarily mean that there is no truth on Foucault's analysis of power. For example, with regards to surveillance in today's world, one can explore the effects of different kinds of surveillance mechanisms on one's exercise of freedom. Here, one can ask: Is it possible to meaningfully exercise one's freedom given that we are being watched through different surveillance mechanisms? But does this necessarily mean that the notion of freedom and the corresponding notions of truth cannot be philosophically defended? These issues are taken care of in the investigation that follows.

### 4.1. Foucault on Power-Knowledge Nexus: A comparison between the Old and New Modes of Punishment

For Foucault, although the history of mankind is co-extensive with systems of domination, he sees some differences between the old systems of power which involved the use of physical power in public places, and the new one aided by modern science and its bureaucratic machinery, where power becomes ubiquitous and pervasive.

#### The old mode of punishment

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault draws our attention to the details of the executions that criminals had to endure in the 17<sup>th</sup> century France. More specifically, he starts out by describing the execution of a parricide. For example, with regards to the punishment that the assassin of William of Orange had to endure, he says the following. First, the arm with which he had committed the crime had to be submerged in a boiling water, only to be cut off later with a sword. Then, he was forced to kick the hand which fell off on the ground several times. Eventually, after he was forced to beg for his speedy execution several times, he was hanged by the neck in the public places (Foucault, 1979).

There are also several instances of horrible and appalling modes of punishment that he discusses. Foucault argued that all the traditional forms of punishment involved cruelty, physical suffering, and were inflicted on an offender's body in a public setting. According to Foucault, the old form of

punishment operated under and presupposed a magical and meaningful cosmic world from which meaning is sought. Since law was seen as representing “the will of the sovereign”, it is the dignity of the sovereign and the political order he represents that comes under attack when someone violates a law (Foucault, 1979). He writes, “in this liturgy of punishment, there must be an emphatic affirmation of power and its intrinsic superiority” (Foucault, 1977: 49). Since any offense represents the disruption of a cosmic order, the restoral of the order requires a severe punishment. For the modern, the old mode of punishment represented an “atrociousness” (Foucault, 1979).

Foucault also discusses the cruelty involved in the punishment of Damiens the regicide on the first of March 1757. He says that the regicide was forced “to make the amende honorable before the main door of the Church of Paris” (Foucault, 1979: 54). While at the church gate, he was “taken and conveyed in a cart, wearing nothing but a shirt” and was taken:

to the place de Greve, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thigh and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds (Foucault, 1979: 54).

Foucault’s point in drawing our attention to the details of the execution of parricide is to indicate the reasons behind the cruelty. He says that it partly aims to show “the unrestrained presence of the king.” It is to teach criminals that they cannot get away with their crimes, and to make them think that they are constantly being watched by the “omni-present” king. In other words, it is an affirmation of power. Part of the reason for his drawing our attention to the public display of torture is to indicate its disappearance today. There is today a universal adoption of the jury system which stresses the rights of people and attempts to justify the severity of the penalty on its deterrence effect. One might take the new mode of punishment or what can be called “the Enlightenment-inspired notions of punishment” as representing a “gain” vis-à-vis the old mode of punishment. But for Foucault there is no gain; we are simply transferred from one “regime of truth” to the other. But there are compelling reasons for taking the new mode of punishments as representing ethical “gain” vis-à-vis the old mode of punishment. There is a general understanding today that human beings have fundamental “rights” that should not be violated. It is believed that the punishment for a given crime should be proportional to the weight of the crime committed. If we see the cruelty of the old age today, we will be appalled and express our condemnation in various ways. Foucault, as mentioned earlier on, does not deny that the modern will be appalled by the old form of punishment and will insist that criminals have to be treated as “humanly” as possible. In Ethiopia, during the reign of Haile Selassie, criminals had to undergo through an appalling kind of punishment such as hanging them by the neck in public places such as markets. Today, if such kinds of punishment have continued, we would be appalled by them and take them as relics of an old age. This means that we believe that we have morally and ethically progressed vis-à-vis our ancestors.

But Foucault thinks that we have not ethically progressed because we have transferred from one system of power to other more insidious systems of power. But this again is questionable. Let us see his account of the new system of power.

#### **4.2. The New Mode of Punishment**

Since the Enlightenment has introduced humanist notions such as dignity, freedom, humanity and so forth, one might naturally think that the new modes of punishment that go in line with such concepts represent a “gain” vis-à-vis the ancient’s mode of punishment which permits the inflicting of pain on the body of the criminal. But Foucault refuses to see the changes in this way. He thinks that the new system represents a more insidious mechanism of control than the old mechanism of control and therefore thinks that it does not represent a gain in relation to the old mode of control.

He says that the twentieth century is known for the growth of disciplinary society. This is the society in which various disciplines have developed in armies, hospitals, prisons, factories, etc. It is

also a society where the new social sciences such as psychiatry and psychology played a significant role in the construction of discourse. Here, power is exercised through the mechanism of surveillance, normalization, and classification. He thinks that such mechanisms in turn construct subjectivity (Foucault, 1980b). He argues that since power is a pervasive and ubiquitous phenomenon, there is no subject that lies beyond systems of control (Foucault, 1980a). For Foucault, it is power that constitutes subjectivity and autonomy (Hinkle, 1987: 49). He writes,

In fact, it is already the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals...The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle (Foucault, 1980b: 98).

He thinks that the modern system of control operated, among others, through the confinement of the criminal and the mad and the repression of sexuality. It, according to Foucault, makes use of the new social sciences and the new disciplines so as to create what he calls "docile bodies" (1977: 136). The central organizing principle of modern power, according to Foucault, is that of discipline (Foucault, 1980a). The primary focus of the modern power is the bodies' docility and utility, their conformity and obedience (Foucault, 1979). Thus, one might be tempted to conclude that the mechanisms of surveillance and the medicalization of sexuality and insanity, among others, furthered the cause of normalization and helped create the modern subject (Hinkle, 1987). Here, Foucault is clearly condemning the creation of "docile" bodies through the modern disciplines. There is an evaluative language built into such an assertion. There is a clear logical contradiction in such kind of reasoning. On the one hand, he clearly takes the notions of dignity, freedom, humanity and so forth as the product of the discourse which is again dictated by a given system of power. Under such line of reasoning, one cannot define human beings in terms of dignified animal, or as beings capable of an autonomous will on the ground that there is no truth that is free from system of control. On the other hand, he uses an implicit evaluative language when he, for example, talks about the creation of "docile" bodies and normalization. One cannot use such evaluative language without appealing to the Kantian notion of the dignity of human beings and the modern notion of "rights".

For Foucault, while in the old model power appears to manifest itself in public places, in the new system power appears to be hidden. Despite this, it manifests itself through various mechanisms such as the practice of the "universal surveillance". To illustrate the point that we are under constant control, he takes Bentham's Panopticon as a paradigm example that can reveal the operation of the modern system of control. The Panopticon refers to a complex building with a single vantage point that allows the continuous surveillance and scrutiny of the prisoners, who cannot see their watcher and are separated from each other. The idea is that even though their watcher is not available at any given time, they would continue to think that they are being watched (Foucault, 1979).

For Foucault, the new forms of knowledge are mechanisms of furthering control. This is because the system permits the measuring, classification and objectification of people (Foucault, 1979). Such process again leads to what he calls the process of normalization. In other words, the process of measuring, assessing and diagnosing individuals tend to create individuals who participate in their own subjugation. With regards to sexuality, he discusses what is known as the pathologization of homosexuality, where homosexuals are told by the so-called experts that they are in deep trouble. Then the experts start analyzing "the problem" in question, categorizing different cases of homosexuality, objectifying and re-analyzing them. In the process, the individuals in question are made to think that (1) there is sexual nature, and (2) they cannot authentically express it without the help of the experts. It is in this sense that Foucault takes sexuality as a social construct. He thinks that the statement that we have sexual nature is one of those statements that are produced through discourses (Foucault, 1976). As Foucault sees it, undoubtedly, the efficacy of disciplinary power can be attributed to the use of simple instruments: hierarchical surveillance, the imposition of norms, and their integration into a distinct referred to as, the examination. (Rabinow, 1984).

The invocation of Bentham's Panopticon is also aimed to show that power cannot be located at a specific place. Here, power is no longer possessed; it is merely exercised (Foucault, 1980b). The other point that he makes is that domination/power does not require a clearly known agent who exercises it. Here, it is important to compare Foucault's claim that power does not need a clearly defined perpetrator with Karl Marx's claim that "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (Marx and Engels, 1978: 172). Here, one clearly sees some similarity between the two thoughts because in both cases at every age in human history there is a system of domination/power. For Marx, the dominant class of any society dominates both the material wealth and the process of knowledge production. Factory owners are able to disseminate their views without constraints, and more easily than their workers. Because of their control over the intellectual production, the ideology that they feed into the system tends to sustain their dominance over their subjects. This shows that power requires in the Marxian case not only a clearly known victim but also a clearly demarcated perpetrator.

Here, one may argue that Foucault's claim that individuals participate in the making of docile bodies have evaluative languages built into it. It appears as though individuals have choice to escape from their own domination. If one believes that s/he has such a sexual nature, s/he will seek to discover it in case it is repressed. But this will force him to seek the council and help of experts such as the psychoanalysts and health workers. So, when we find ourselves in the receiving end of help so as to find our real sexual nature, we have already become accomplices in our own objectification and normalization. In this regards, for Foucault, Modern disciplines further the cause of control by presenting us as cases to be studied and classified.

But again, the "knowledge" that the experts make use of in "serving" their customers is nothing but a system of control/domination. It is a system of control partly because it puts us under the mercy of experts. Hence, according to him, the production of knowledge is closely connected with the exercise of power. Power and knowledge are inextricably linked, and they mutually rest on each other. Power relations necessarily presuppose the existence of a knowledge framework (Foucault, 1979). To understand Foucault's point on the construction of sexuality, one may think of the prohibitions associated with sexuality. In Christianity, certain sexual practices are prohibited as abnormal and unnatural and the faithful are required to practice those behaviors judged as normal. Thus, when one obeys the prohibitions, s/he is exercising his/her freedom. However, according to Foucault, this is not an exercise of freedom. On the contrary, s/he is being dominated by a certain kind of imposed self-understanding, namely, that one cannot live an authentic life without a healthy sexual practice (Foucault, 1976).

The other important characteristic of the modern systems of control, according to Foucault, is that they work under the guise of science and humanity. For him, the introduction of "reforms" in the legislative system represents a more insidious mechanism of control. Here, he is not denying the changes in the legislative system today vis-à-vis the old mode of punishment. There is today consensus that individuals are bearers of fundamental rights, and that even a perpetrator of a gruesome crime deserve some fundamental rights. Criminals are no longer hanged by the neck in public places, and we are also not observing other forms of public display of torture. There are talks about freedom and equality today, and one can take this as significant changes vis-à-vis the ancients. However, Foucault thinks that the "change" is nothing but a reflection of new systems of domination. He writes, "The justice that is supposed to be "equal", a legal machinery that is supposed to be "autonomous" contains all the asymmetries of disciplinary subjection" (Foucault, 1979: 234). Here, he is taking power as a fundamental and inherent aspect of human affairs that cannot be removed. It is not something that can be identified as it is subtly intertwined in everyday life (Brocklesby and Cummings, 1996).

### 4.3. A Critical Analysis of Foucault's Historical Analysis: Are there not Good Implicit in his Analysis?

Foucault, in each of his historical analysis, says that he is adopting a neutral stance towards the old and the new systems of power. In other words, he is saying that his analysis allows no evaluations. But the fact remains that he is deconstructing the dominant ideology that sustains the domination (Taylor, 1984). For Foucault, the modern system of control operates in inducing in us a certain identity. For example, regarding homosexuality, he says that the medicalization of homosexuality tends to make the homosexual think that s/he has a sexual nature. Although homosexuality is co-extensive with the history of humanity, according to Foucault, the new disciplines have re-defined and re-interpreted it so as to induce in the targeted people a certain self-image. He writes,

It is possible that the West has not been capable of inventing any new pleasures, and it has doubtless not discovered any original vices. But it has defined new rules for the game of powers and pleasures. The froze countenance of the perversions is a fixture of this game (Foucault, 1978: 48).

It is in this sense, one might conclude, that Foucault is taking the notion of homosexuality as a construction. There is also another textual evidence for this assertion: "The nineteenth-century homosexuals became a personage, a past, a case with history, and a childhood, in addition to a type of life, a life form, and a morphology with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (Foucault, 1978: 43). If sexuality is a social construction and the product of system of control as he says, is this not a critique in its own right? Foucault thinks that he is not offering a value based critique on the ground that there is no standard against which it can be made. He says that he is merely describing the operation of power. But it is possible to argue that he is arguing for the liberation of the subjugated and the normalized through articulating their domination by a certain hegemonic discourse.

Since the very ideology that we have sexual nature, for Foucault, represents a new technology of control, one might argue that he is arguing for "liberation" from hegemonic discourse and it is aided by truth (Taylor, 1984). Here, Foucault might respond this sense of liberation does not agree with his rejection of totalizing grand narratives and his rejection of objective standards to differentiate truth from falsehood. For example, with regards to sexuality, he writes: "It (sexuality) is the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors and social relations by a certain deployment deriving from a complex political technology" (Foucault, 1978: 127).

As he acknowledges, during the classical period, suspects also had to be tortured in order to confess their crimes. But he says, the end of the eighteenth century saw the beginning of the end of torture as a means of forcing criminals to confess their crimes. He writes, "torture was denounced as a survival of the barbarity of another age" (Foucault, 1979: 39). However, he does not want to express the reactions of the moderns towards the cruelty of the people of the old age in terms of moral progress. For him, there is no escaping from a system of power. He refuses to use an evaluative language to compare the reactions of the moderns and the ancients towards their respective modes of punishment. However, as mentioned earlier, there are implicit evaluative languages in his analysis; otherwise, the talk of people becoming accomplices in their objectification would be pointless.

For Foucault, taking the changes in the modern understanding of crime and punishment as a gain is based on a profound illusion. He says that it is based on the cumulative and linear conception of history. But he denies that this is the case. But the claim that historical events are discontinuous seems to be questionable. In my view, at least some of the historical events seem to have developed based on earlier developments. As Taylor argues, the changes in the understanding of ourselves, crimes and punishment can be taken as response to the mystification of the past. In the classical age, human beings were seen as being set against both a cosmic and political order. Accordingly, any offense will not be taken merely as the violation of the rights of the victim, but as the violation of the rights of the sovereign and the cosmic order that he represents. But such mystification does not have a place in the modern period (Taylor, 1984). One might argue that since the cruelty of punishment was justified on mystic grounds, and since we are now in a disenchanting world where meaning is no longer sought

from a surrounding cosmic order, but from a self-determining individual, the old system of punishment cannot be acceptably viewed from the moderns' angle. Thus, it can be argued that the modern understanding of crime has developed as a reaction to the notion of the magical world of the past and hence can be taken as being continuous with the past.

But there is also another reason to question Foucault's analysis. He rejects "modern humanitarianism" on the ground that it reproduces the form of domination embedded in the structures it attempts to oppose. But this is, as Taylor argues, nothing but an attempt to understand modern humanitarianism exclusively in terms of systems of control. For Taylor, the conception of "humanitarianism exclusively in terms of the new technologies of control", fails to give an independent weight to what he calls "the new ethics of life" (Taylor, 1984: 156). By this, he is referring to what is called an affirmation of ordinary life. By "the affirmation of ordinary life", he is referring to the culture that developed in Europe after the Reformation which affirmed love, family, relationship, marriage, etc. In other words, the new culture allows the taking of these things as ends in themselves. Taylor thinks that people attach significance to ordinary life. There is today a general understanding that life itself is hallowed and there is no need to override ordinary lives in the name of sustaining the cosmic order (Taylor, 1984). He thinks that "the new ethics of life" are nothing but responses to the mystification of the old age. For Taylor, we are in the disenchanted world where meaning and values are no longer sought from the surrounding cosmic order, but are sought from the self-determining agent. I think Taylor's suggestion to take "the new ethics of life" as given is not problematic. This is because most of us do not take love, family, marriage etc., as the sphere where Foucauldian power relation operates. On the contrary, we take them as ends in themselves. Seen from this perspective, Foucault's suggestion to see modern humanitarianism exclusively in terms of modern technology of control is problematic.

The other problem with seeing the discipline exclusively in terms of domination is that it fails to see the contradictions involved in the new forms of disciplines (Taylor, 1984). Taylor acknowledges that the new disciplines objectify and categorize human beings. But this, he insists, is not the whole story. This is because they also represent forms of "genuine self-discipline that have made possible new kinds of collective action characterized by more egalitarian forms of participation" (Taylor, 1984: 164). Such disciplines help create the enabling conditions, he thinks, for the exercise of democracy—one of the cherished values of the modern world. Because of the collective actions that the new disciplines help realize, he thinks, individuals have now public identity that is indispensable for the well-functioning of democracy. As Taylor writes, "The point is that collective disciplines can function in both ways—as structures of domination and as bases for equal collective action" (Taylor, 1984: 164). Foucault, according to Taylor, fails to take into account the fact that collective disciplines can provide the mechanism for controlling despotism. Citizens freely bestow power on the leader which the leader otherwise coerces from them. This, for Taylor, is a gain vis-a-vis the ancients' system of governance in which the despots used to coerce power out of the subjects. However, Foucault rejects any evaluative language on genealogical grounds.

#### **4.4. Foucault's Genealogical Method**

Nietzsche had a tremendous influence on Foucault's understanding of genealogy. As Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) remark, "all the seeds of Foucault's work of the 1970s can be found in his discussion of Nietzsche." Genealogy is premised on the assumption that "everything is interpretation all the way down" (Fraser, 1981: 274).

It holds that since cultural practices are arbitrary and contingent, they are discontinuous with other contingent practices. Since the historically situated cultural practices are contingent, according to Foucault, it is not possible to compare the past events with those of the present. Genealogy, therefore, seeks to document historical events in their specificity without relying on the notion of final goal or end. Its major task, according to Foucault (1979: 140), is to show the specific contexts of historical events and isolate their "different roles". He writes that historical events:



Have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. Examining the history of reason, he [the genealogist] learns that it was born in an altogether 'reasonable' fashion-from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition-the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapon of reason. Further, genealogical analysis shows that the concept of liberty is an invention of the ruling classes' and not fundamental to men's nature or at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity (Foucault, 1979: 142).

According to this line of thought, historical events cannot be described as true. Genealogy, like history, also deals with the issue of the origin of events. But the origin it deals with differs from the dominant historical account of origin in that it does not seek to discover "the unfolding of essences on a predetermined path" (Hinkle, 1987: 41). On the contrary, it assumes that things have several origins and it attempts to make a differentiation between them. In order to further differentiate genealogy from history, Foucault relies on Nietzsche's notion of effective history. This differs from history by the fact that it "rejects the necessity of the continuity of events and thus repudiates theological and rationalistic tradition of history" (Hinkle, 1987: 43). Effective history attempts to deal with historical events by taking their specificity and arbitrariness as they are, without attempting to establish causal connection. Since each genealogist deals with events that are unique to their time and place, knowledge is assumed to be a perspective that one adapts regarding a certain event. Accordingly, the task of genealogy is to "record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality" (Foucault, 1980b: 139). Seen from the perspective of genealogy, the alleged "discontinuity" between the moderns and ancients understanding of crime, punishment and the self seems to be convincing. But as mentioned earlier, there are compelling grounds to question such an assumption.

#### **4.5. Taylor's Rejection of the Notion of Subject-less Power**

Foucault (1980) thinks that it is possible to entertain the notion of power without the notion of subjectivity. He says this on the ground that power can exist without a corresponding victim. However, as Taylor contends, this does not mean that it is not related with some form of agency. For Foucault, this assertion is based on the unwarranted assumption that power resides in an objectifiable location (Brocklesby and Cummings, 1996). However, for him, power is exercised not possessed and locatable. In fact, for Foucault, the subject is constituted through discourse, and it is not something pre-given. This does not necessarily mean that Foucault does not return to the subject when he takes it as a being that is capable of maintaining a theoretical distance from its inherited statuses. But such a "return", in his case, is not that of a return to metaphysical self, but to an ontological historicity" (Strozier, 2002). But this seems to suggest that power can be conceived as "some notion of constraint imposed on someone by a process in some way related to human agency. Otherwise the term loses all meaning" (Taylor, 1984: 172). To this extent, Foucault agrees.

For Foucault, power involves some forms of imposition against an agent. Viewed from the semantic point of view, an act cannot be said to be imposed on a victim unless the agent's desires and interests are frustrated by some forces exterior to him. It, in other words, involves the affirmation of a given ontology of the humans. Again, the notion of imposition suggests the desires and interests that remain unfulfilled are some significant ones.

However, this seems to be an understanding of power from the semantic point of view. But a Foucauldian might respond that, our ordinary language is full of assumptions that are questionable from the philosophical points of views. As a theorist who is opposed to the notions of grand narratives, Foucault cannot be expected to endorse the assumptions embedded in our natural languages (Brocklesby and Cummings, 1996). But Foucault cannot deny the fact that power involves a certain kind of imposition on a human agent. Again, the notion of imposition cannot be separated from the idea of resistance against the restraints on our desires. But this is nothing but a modern notion of freedom (Taylor, 1984). But does this necessarily mean that reflecting on the issue of power is a futile exercise? One might argue that Foucault is giving voice to the dominated by highlighting

the insidious nature of modern systems of oppression, thus providing them with the necessary insight to articulate their situation and devise counter-strategies. (Brocklesby and Cummings, 1996).

Unlike the Habermasian strand that “seeks progress towards a vision of absolute or universal emancipation” (Brocklesby and Cummings, 1996: 751), the Foucauldian strand is focused merely on exposing the general operation of power at the global level, suggesting that progress requires understanding local circumstances which cannot be known through a universal emancipatory method. Here, Foucault’s rejection of the notion of universal emancipation goes in line with his rejection of overarching meta narratives (Bunting, 1992). True, Foucault’s attempt to bring to light the way power operates in our everyday life. But he does not see it as a means to an end in contrast to the Habermasian strand of thinking which sees the un-masking as a means to his emancipatory goal. But again, this does not mean that Foucauldian line of thinking does not have an emancipatory element for one might think that the rejection of comprehensive master narratives can go in line with Foucault’s intent of providing tools that people can make use of in their local situations to emancipate themselves (Brocklesby and Cummings, 1996).

Thus, it might be argued that Taylor’s assumption that the Foucauldian conception of power cannot be understood without a corresponding notion of freedom does not take into account Foucault’s rejection of the totalizing grand narratives. Thus, one might contend that power operates through masks and disguises, but this does not necessarily rest on the presupposition of some repressed nature and truth (Brocklesby and Cummings, 1996). For Taylor, on the other hand, unless it is seen against the background of some repressed nature, the invocation of false pretences and masks does not make sense. As Taylor writes,

Mask, falsehood makes no sense without a corresponding notion of truth. The truth here is subversive of power: It is on the side of the lifting of impositions, of what we have just called liberation. The Foucaultian notion of power not only requires for its sense the correlative notions of truth and liberation, but even the standard link between them, which makes truth the condition of liberation” (Taylor, 1984: 174).

However, for Foucault, this assertion is based on the contentious claims that there are essence, freedom and truth. He stresses that there are underlying discourses behind our truth claims, and the discourses are again made through a power-knowledge nexus. This means that the traditionally ascribed status which among others, includes the definition “humans are beings that are capable of an autonomous will” is simply a product of a discourse. Truth in this sense is nothing but “a field of discourse that enables the emergence of a specific kind of subjectivity or allows the elaboration of a particular rationality” (Iverson, 1997: 31).

If power is conceived in terms of imposition upon human agents, it inevitably acquires a negative value. Power is that which sets limits to self-realization of the subject. It is therefore antithetical to freedom. Foucault’s theoretical anti-humanism, by contrast, consists in the refusal to privilege any such a priori conception of the subject. He refuses to endorse any idea of human nature. Instead, in later writings, he advocates an open-ended ethics of self-creation. He writes, “From the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of an art” (Foucault, 1980: 13).

If resistance is inherently connected with power as Foucault acknowledges, then this is an admission that the victim is a being capable of an autonomous will and is with the capacity to choose from alternative course of actions (Patten, 1989). Thus, power cannot make sense except seen against the background of human agency in both sides, in the side of the victim and that of the holder. On the other hand, if the subject is wholly constituted through discourse, it can be argued that Foucault’s theory of discourse does not allow resistance at the level of the subject, in addition to the social and political levels (Bovè, 1986). All these critiques presuppose the existence of the subject, but Foucault wants to get beyond the subject so understood. For him, there is no standpoint that lies above and beyond discourse and power-knowledge nexus (Strozier, 2002).

This again means that an evaluative language is implicit in his analysis. Here, one might argue that Foucault offers a critique, among others, against the disciplinary society’s technique of exercising

power to create docile body. But the question is, why is it wrong to create docile body? There has to be an independent reason to substantiate this claim. It appears that the claim that humans command each other's respect is taken for granted in Foucault's analysis. Nothing else explains the question why human beings should not be objectified than the Kantian notion that humans are beings with dignity, freedom and rationality. But Foucault attempts to deny "any foundational assumptions about our nature, and rejects the speculative theme of history as the self-realization of humanity" (Rajchman, 1985: 78-79). But it is not clear how such claim can be reconciled with his clear stance against the creation of docile body, objectification and normalization.

On the other hand, since Foucault thinks that the modern systems of control operates by inducing in us a false belief that we have a nature that requires an authentic expression, he must be assuming a value-based reason to reject the mechanism of modern systems of control. As Taylor writes,

In short, it [the liberation] would be something that had certain parallels to the Romantic-originating notion. We would achieve a liberation from a system of control that operates in us largely through masks, disguises, and false pretenses. It operates by inducing in us a certain self- understanding, an identity. We can help to throw it off partly by unmasking this identity and the manner of its implantation, and thus cease to be accomplices in its control and shaping of ourselves (Taylor, 1984: 163).

Although he denies the possibility of liberation through truth, he continues to make a universal claim about human beings, in addition to denouncing forms of domination. By taking truth as something constructed through a mechanism of power and as a pervasive phenomenon from which there is no escaping, Foucault in effect is making an absolutist and universal claim about humans. He is saying that all human beings, past, present and future, were (are or will be) within a system of power. It can be argued that if one makes a truth claim in an absolutist sense that amounts to saying that s/he has a transcendental insight about the issue in question. What is in question is precisely the absoluteness of the claim. Here, by claiming that there is no escape for subjects from the operation of power, he is making an a priori claim about the future generation. In other words, he is saying that the future generation is going to live under a certain form of domination or mechanisms of power. But at this point, I cannot help asking: what is the point of diagnosing and describing the operation of power if in the end nobody is going to escape it? Thus, as his critics such as Fraser (1981) notes, his theory of discourse leads to an unacceptable conclusion from the normative viewpoint.

However, to say that there is no escape from system of domination leads one to Nietzschean nihilism for one may ask: why discuss systems of domination if there is no escape from it in the end? His project seems to have an emancipatory intent for he takes a great pain to show us how we are dominated in one way or another. Here, Foucault claims that universal truth claims in dominant discourses such as science and law tend to marginalize and silence some disadvantaged groups (Smart, 1989). The question precisely then is; what purpose does knowing this fact serve if it is not going to set us free from the domination we are in? Either he should assert that knowing this fact leads one to his liberation or it does not. Here, Foucault cannot opt for the second horn of the dilemma because that would put him in a performative contradiction. This is because if he really did believe this, he would not have dwelt too much in showing us the mechanism of the operation of power. But on the other hand, if he opts for the first horn of the dilemma, he is in effect affirming the existence of some repressed nature that is going to be liberated through knowledge. But this is not the conclusion he wants to arrive at since for him normativity amounts to "normalization" which he clearly rejects. However, despite his denial, this is what can be inferred from his project. But for Foucault, the notion of liberation I employed leads to a transcendental notion of truth. He writes,

I have always been somewhat suspicious of the notion of liberation because if it is not treated with precautions and within certain limits, one runs the risk of falling back on the idea that there exists a human nature or base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression. According to this hypothesis, all that is required is to break the repressive deadlocks and man will be reconciled with himself, rediscover his nature or regain contact with his origin, and reestablish a full and positive relationship with himself. I think this idea should not be accepted without scrutiny (Foucault, 1994: 282-3).

However, Foucault's project should be an emancipatory one in order to make sense. Otherwise, how can we make sense of his stress of the marginalized groups? Although he claims that nobody can escape power, and everybody is living under some form of domination, his emphasis on the marginalized groups such as the mad and the homosexual makes his claim about the pervasiveness of power questionable.

One can say that Foucault's analysis of power is very important to examine the subjugation of the colonized people of Africa. Although he does not discuss its cross-cultural implications, it can be argued that Foucault's discussion of system of power can help us understand the subjugation of the colonized people of Africa. As Mudimbe said, there were discourses that facilitated the colonization of Africa by the former colonial masters. The discourses would have us believe that the Europeans are at the highest stage of human civilizations and it is their burden to civilize the "uncivilized races". In other words, the colonization of Africa was facilitated through what Mudimbe (1988) calls "the colonizing structure". He writes,

Because of the colonizing structure, a dichotomizing system has emerged, and with it a great number of current paradigmatic oppositions have developed: traditional versus modern; oral versus written and printed; agrarian and customary communities versus urban and industrialized civilization; subsistence economies versus highly productive economies (Mudimbe, 1988: 4).

That Foucault's account of the power-knowledge nexus is of crucial importance to understand the subjugation of people. But can one still hold that there is no evaluative language while talking about the physical and psychological trauma that the subjugated people had undergone. If Foucault still holds that it is possible to articulate a problematic without using evaluative or moral language, I do not think that he has got the point of articulation. Is it articulating for the sake of articulating, with no emancipatory goal whatsoever? If it has no emancipatory goal, it leads to Nietzschean nihilism where nothing matters and everything is arbitrarily determined. But we are beings to whom things always already matter. And it is not under this underlying assumption that he is writing on the concept of power. The very fact that he diagnosed the operation of power and wrote books about it suggests that he takes an emancipatory approach towards power. While the Foucauldian line of thinking can help us discover the dominant hegemony, it does very little by way of developing a counter-hegemony (Hunt, 1990).

Nevertheless, on the other hand, Foucault's understanding of knowledge exclusively in terms of power cannot help the emancipatory project. Since, according to him, there is no knowledge that can be separated from the operation of power, it means that there is no an independent knowledge that can help realize the emancipatory goal. Since he rejects the enlightenment notion of subjectivity and instead maintains that the subject is constituted through discourse, it can be argued that his theory does not have an emancipatory intent since this requires identifying the victim and the perpetrator. But, this as I have indicated earlier, is a self-defeating project. It does not even explain why he is writing books on the issue of power.

## 5. Conclusions

Foucault's claim that there is no truth that can be defended against systems of power cannot be consistently defended. But as I have indicated, he cannot consistently defend this claim. This is because although he claims to have completely avoided evaluative languages, there are implicit evaluative languages in his discussion of the mad, the homosexual and the normalized. It appears therefore that he is arguing again the forms of domination rampant in the world. Otherwise, knowing the fact alone does not serve any particular purpose. On the other hand, he cannot offer critique against the prevailing system of domination without relying on the notion of truth and freedom.

Although he claims that he can get away without the notions of truth and freedom, these things are implicitly affirmed in Foucault's historical analysis. For when he talks about the objectification and normalization and categorization of individuals, he is clearly arguing against such systems of control. Thus, one can say that although he denies that no evaluative language has been used in his analysis,

the very invocation of such concepts can be taken as evaluative language. But as indicated earlier, one cannot invoke such concepts without the corresponding notions of truth. In other words, he must assume that there is truth that goes above and beyond Foucauldian system of control that can situate our evaluative languages.

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